Barren Luna 361

Chapter 361

Talia's POV

The Alphas moved in on Solon with their weapons raised, and my wolf jumped between them and him.

'Get away from him,' I growled through the mind link. 'Don't touch him.'

"It's... okay... it's okay, Talia," Solon managed to say as he fought the infection.

The Alphas continued closing in, weapons at the ready, their eyes fixed on Solon as though he were already a monster. They had watched bitten warriors turn into mindless beasts all night, and now the Alpha King was changing before their very eyes. Every instinct told them to put him down before it was too late.

But my wolf had only one instinct.

Protect Solon, no matter what.

“Talia,” Nolan's voice broke through, rough and tense. He pushed through the crowd, still covered in Kargon's blood. “The toxin's in him. His eyes are turning red. Any second now, he'll lose control, and you'll be the first he goes after. Step back. Solon wouldn't want this. Please."

'No,' I growled through the bond. 'There has to be something we can do. We killed the Rogue King. We have his blood now.'

"There isn't enough time, Talia," Nolan said, and I could hear the pain in his voice. Solon was my brother, but he was family to Nolan too. "I promised your father and Solon I'd protect you. Don't make me force you, Talia."

Every Alpha watched me anxiously, weapons still raised. Behind me, I could hear Solon writhing in agony, fighting a battle he was slowly losing. But I couldn't... I just couldn't leave him to die.

The standoff stretched on, neither side willing to give way.

"There is a way," Camilla said, stepping past the Alphas with her hands glowing. Solon's head jerked toward me, and I could see my brother was gone behind those red eyes. He lunged at me then, jaws open, aiming for my throat.

Camilla lowered her hands to cast a spell, and Solon hit the ground hard. For a moment, I thought she had killed him, but then I saw he was still breathing, just barely.

"He's unconscious. You have an hour, maybe less, before the spell fades. Tie him up with whatever will hold him. Then get the healer to make the antidote. Once the spell is gone, there won't be another chance for him," Camilla said.

"Derek, tie him up now," Nolan immediately ordered.

Derek was already moving with another Silverfang warrior. They quickly tied Solon's wrists and ankles and strapped his chest. Their faces were grim and silent. Then they dragged his limp body into an iron cage, locked it, and stepped back, not sure if the bars would hold him.

'No one goes near him until I say so. Do you understand?' I said through the mind link. The Alphas agreed, though they didn't like it. I knew why they hesitated, but I wasn't giving up on Solon. I couldn't save my father, but I can save Solon.

Nolan hurried across the yard, looking around, and started giving orders. The Alphas turned from Solon to him as he took charge. "Colin, Henry, deal with the remaining rogues. The rest of you, stand guard until it's finished."

"What about our men? If there's an antidote..." one Alpha started.

"If you can restrain them, do so, but do not risk a bite," Nolan said. "We can not have a mad Alpha. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Alpha Nolan!"

Nolan grabbed the empty flask from Henry. He walked back to Kargon's corpse and filled it with the Rogue King's blood. "We need to get this to Leslie now."

'Get on my back,' I said through the mate bond, crouching down. 'I'll get you there faster.'

Nolan didn't argue. He climbed onto my back, holding the flask close. I ran across the yard toward the hospital wing, dodging the wreckage.

I carried him straight to the doors. He jumped off and rushed inside before I even stopped. My wolf ran after him, my legs shaking with exhaustion.

Leslie was on her feet the moment we came through. "What happened? Where's Solon?" she demanded.

"He's bitten. We've got him chained, but Camilla's spell is only keeping him unconscious. This is the Rogue King's blood. You have everything you need to make the cure now."

Leslie froze. The color drained from her face, but she quickly composed herself and took the flask from Nolan.

"How much time do I have?" she asked, her voice tight.

"One hour," Nolan replied grimly. "Less now."

Leslie ran to her lab without saying anything else. I changed back to my human form and stood in the hallway with Nolan, even though my legs were shaking. All we could do was wait and count the minutes.

I've waited in a lot of hallways before, but this was the worst. Every minute that passed took more of Solon's life. We should be celebrating our victory, but now we're just waiting to see if we can save Solon. I wish I could kill Morgana and Kargon again.

'Try to stay calm. Leslie can save him,' my wolf told me.

I half expected Nolan to say something to calm me, but he stayed quiet. Nolan was as anxious as I was. He just stood next to me, his arm around my waist, letting me lean on him.

Thirty minutes had passed when I heard Colin's voice in my head. 'Talia, Solon's moving. He's still asleep, but he's pulling at the chains. Whatever Camilla did to him is wearing off. You don't have much time!'

'Let me know the moment his eyes open,' I replied. 'And keep everyone away from the cage!'

"We need to let Leslie know he's waking up," I told Nolan. I turned to the lab door, about to knock and ask her to hurry even though I knew it wouldn't help, when the door opened under my hand.

Leslie stood there, eyes red as if she'd been crying for hours, a loaded syringe already in her grip.

"It's ready," she said. "Take me to him. Now."

Chapter 362

Talia's POV

We ran out of the hospital.

Through the doors, across the yard, and there was the cage. Solon was twitching as he was waking up. He instinctively was straining against the chains and snarling in his sleep. We had made it just in time.

Warriors were posted around the cage in a tight ring. The Alphas stood back from it with their weapons half-raised, as if Solon might break free at any moment and tear through us all. If the cure failed, we would lose him for good.

Leslie frowned at the scene, then forced herself to steady before stepping toward

the cage.

"Be careful, Leslie. He could wake up at any moment," Colin warned.

Leslie's hand trembled as she slid the syringe through the bars, her breath caught somewhere between fear and hope. She managed to get the needle into Solon's arm and pressed the plunger, willing her hand steady. Suddenly, his eyes flew open, and before she could react, his free hand closed like a vise around her wrist.

“Leslie, pull back now. He's going to break free,” Nolan warned.

"No, not until every last bit of it is in him," Leslie said, refusing to let go despite Solon's crushing hold on her wrist. Nolan went to pull Leslie away, but I grabbed Nolan's wrist to stop him.

"Not yet," I told him. "He's still restrained."

Leslie pressed the plunger all the way, determined to finish. Pain flickered across her face, but she ignored it and kept going. As soon as the syringe was empty, she jerked her hand back, stepped away, and clutched her sore wrist against her chest.

"Leslie, your wrist," I said, noticing the bruise forming.

"Don't worry about me. I'm okay," Leslie stated.

For a long moment, nothing happened. Solon still thrashed against the chains, snarling like a feral animal. My stomach dropped. It wasn't working. Was I going to watch him be killed like our father? I could feel the tension building around me as the Alphas were becoming anxious.

"Look, child," Camilla said, pointing at Solon. "His eyes."

The red in Solon's eyes slowly faded, bit by bit, until it was gone. He stopped snarling, and his whole body relaxed. Solon blinked, looking confused and tired, like he was waking up from a deep sleep. He glanced at the bars, and finally, his eyes found Leslie.

"Leslie," he said, his voice rough. He only said her name, like it was the first thing he remembered after coming back.

I finally let out the breath I'd been holding, and it shook as it left me. "Open the cage," I ordered. "Get him out!"

"No." Camilla's hand landed on my arm. "Not yet. A cure has never been made before tonight, and the first of anything can fail. He stays where he is, watched, for three hours at the least, before anyone opens that door."

"She's right," one of the Alphas said. "If it doesn't last, I want him behind bars and not roaming free to slaughter us."

"That is my mate in there, your Alpha King, awake and himself, and you want to leave him chained in a cage like a rogue?!" Leslie exclaimed furiously. Her Luna command slammed into everyone. The weight of her words pressed down on us, impossible to ignore. It wasn't simply the Luna command. It was the Alpha Queen command. It compelled obedience from all wolves in the pack, even the strongest of Alphas.

"Leslie, calm down," Solon said. "It's all right. Let them be careful. I'd rather sit in here for days than have anyone get hurt because we rushed this."

I understood him, and I had to admit he was right—it was important to ease the Alphas' panic, even if I didn't like it.

"You've all done enough today, and I won't forget it," I said, turning to address the Alphas and the remaining warriors. "We'll watch Solon for three hours. Go and rest. Have your wounded seen to. Mourn your fallen."

They exchanged uncertain glances, then slowly dispersed.

Those three hours stretched on forever. Solon remained calm the entire time. Leslie sat cross-legged in front of the cage, refusing to budge as Solon told her about the battle. Now and then, Solon would urge her to get some rest, and she'd hush him, their exchange turning into a kind of ritual that marked the slow passage of time. Nolan and I kept watch behind her, silent, because there was nothing left to say except to wait and hope.

"It's over," I finally said as I sat down in the grass next to Nolan. "We actually did it." "Did you think we wouldn't?" Nolan asked.

“No, I just...we can actually relax now," I replied. “After three hours, we can have peace."

When the three hours were up, Solon's eyes were clear all the way through, no red left at the edges. There was no toxin that seemed to exist in his body.

"Open it," I ordered, and this time no one argued.

The warriors freed Solon from the cage and removed his chains. Leslie flung herself at him the moment his arms were released.

"You idiot! You scared me. Why did you get yourself hurt? What would I have done if I lost you?" she cried.

Solon hugged her tightly while she sobbed against his chest, his hand steady on her back and the other cradling her head. He blinked away tears of his own as he held her.

"I kept my promise," he murmured into her hair. "I told you I'd come back to you.

Both of you. I'm here. I'm not going anywhere."

Nolan and I approached once Leslie released him.

"Solon, how could you be so reckless?" I said, my voice breaking. "I thought I'd lost you."

"Thanks for not giving up on me, Talia," Solon said with a weak smile.

The tears I'd been holding back all night finally came, and I couldn't stop them, and I didn't try.

Solon reached for me, and I ran into his hug.

"I've got you," Solon said, and his free hand came to the back of my head the way our father's used to when I was small, and the world had frightened me. "I'm back. It's over. I'm back, Talia."

Chapter 363

Talia's POV

Leslie spent two hours examining Solon after we got him to the hospital. She drew

his blood, ran tests, then did it all again, and once more, staying quiet until she was certain. Solon never complained, which told me he was still scared, even if he looked calm.

When she finally stood up, she pulled off her gloves and looked at him, then at me. "The toxin is gone. There's not a trace left. I checked three times," Leslie finally said. "Thank the Moon Goddess," I sighed in relief.

"But that hour with it in his body did some damage," Leslie continued, and the relief I felt vanished. Leslie noticed. "Don't look like that, Talia. Solon will recover. It will take weeks, maybe a month if he doesn't rest properly."

"Weeks?" Solon repeated.

"Yep, weeks. You'll have to take it slow. I'll be right here making sure you don't try to overdo it."

After everything that happened today, slowing down felt like a relief.

"Then, can I actually get into the bed instead of the stretcher?" Solon asked with a dry laugh.

Once Solon was settled in bed, he started asking questions. "How are the other Alphas? How many did we lose? We need to..."

"Solon, stop," Nolan said. "You need to focus on yourself."

"But as the Alpha King, I..."

"We've got everything else covered," I said, interrupting him. "Even the Alpha King deserves some rest. Let us worry about the other Alphas and Silverfang. Just work on getting better."

"I have no idea how to just sit around," Solon said.

"Looks like you'll have to learn," I shrugged, which caused Solon to chuckle.

"Seriously, thank you. Both of you. I mean it."

"You don't have to thank your family," I told him.

Nolan hadn't said much, and when I looked over, he was staring at the floor, not really looking at Solon.

"Really, I should be thanking you," he finally said. "That rogue came at me while I was about to finish off Kargon. You took the bite for me. It should have been me chained up and in this bed."

Solon gave a tired little smile. "That's what we do for family," he said, like that explained everything. "You'd have done the same for me without blinking. No thank you needed."

"Aww, look at you two becoming best friends," I teased. It made me think about whether this is how our fathers used to be with each other before Nolan's father died.

"Don't say that. They're going to be insufferable," Leslie groaned. That's when I noticed Leslie looked exhausted. She was swaying on her feet.

"Leslie, go lie down. You're at risk of hurting yourself and my niece or nephew. Go rest," I said.

"You're scolding me, and I told you not to push yourself. Go, Leslie. I'll be okay," Solon said.

"Not happening," Leslie shot back. "You almost turned into a mad rogue in front of me; you don't get to send me away. I'm staying with my mate. So, you might as well get another bed pulled in here." She smirked. "This baby's going to know this hospital better than the packhouse anyway. Might as well get used to it now."

She reached up and touched the necklace at her throat, a deep red stone on a simple gold chain.

"And you all remember this, right? The Lonefur Ember Alpha Landon gave me. I've worn it ever since I found out I was pregnant. So don't worry, it'll protect my pup," Leslie said.

"I still can't believe Landon gave that away as a gift," I laughed. "And he showed more courage than stupidity today. He didn't flinch when the mad rogues came at him. He kept all his warriors safe and some of the other Alphas."

"He wasn't even reckless this time. He listened to orders," Nolan said, with a dry laugh. "For Landon, that's growth since he had no common sense almost a month ago with the bear."

That made all of us laugh.

"He literally stood right in front of a charging mad bear," Nolan said, grinning at everyone, "even after Talia told him twice to back up. He just had to prove a point."

"All he proved was that he was an idiot," Leslie scoffed.

"The thing took a chunk out of his shoulder," I said. "You spent half the night trying to keep him from turning, and even use your blood."

"Yeah, because there was no antidote back then. He nearly got himself killed just to show me how powerful that toxin was," Leslie said. "Honestly, it meant I didn't have to guess later. And this gift really did protect my pup through all of this, so... thanks, Landon, I guess."

"That's one way to look at it," Solon said, then started laughing until it pulled at his wound and he winced.

"Stop it," Leslie said, immediately hovering over him, hand on his chest. "You've got wounds all over you. No laughing allowed yet."

"You're the one cracking jokes," he said.

"Hush or I'll tape your mouth closed," Leslie warned.

We all laughed while Leslie scolded and Solon tried not to move. Nolan caught my eye over the bed and nodded toward the door.

"Alright, we're heading out," I said. "I'll be back first thing tomorrow. Listen to your mate, okay?"

"Since when have I ever done that?" Solon said, and Leslie smacked his uninjured

arm.

I bent down and kissed my brother's forehead. Nolan squeezed his good shoulder, and we left the two of them alone together.

Outside the ward, more people were waiting than I expected. Derek, Henry, and Colin stood up front, with Camilla just behind them.

Down the hall, the surviving Alphas huddled together, faces tired and streaked with blood. Some rubbed their eyes, others leaned on each other for support. The way their shoulders slumped showed how long the night had been, and the worry on their faces was plain to see.

As soon as the door closed behind us, every head turned, hope and fear clear on their faces.

Henry was the first to reach me, voice tight. "How is he? Is Alpha King going to be okay?"

Chapter 364

Nolan's POV

"Solon's out of danger," Talia said. "The toxin is gone from his body. He just needs rest, but he'll be okay."

Everyone looked relieved. People sat up straighter, and the room filled with quiet, grateful voices. Henry hugged Talia. Derek patted me on the back, Colin let out a shaky laugh, and Camilla managed a small, tired smile.

"Thank you, everyone," Talia said after Henry let her go. "You didn't have to come. Many packs stayed home, and no one would have blamed you if you had too."

"Go rest now. Mourn those you've lost, and take care of your wounded. Send word to every wolf you can reach that the Rogue King Kargon is gone. Morgana is gone. The war is finally over," I said loudly so everyone could hear.

"To the Alpha King Solon!"

"To Silverfang!"

The Alphas cheered, and the warriors in their rooms joined in.

Derek looked at me, then at Talia. "You did well tonight, Talia. I knew you would. Your father would be proud." Talia wiped her tears and nodded. Derek hugged her and turned to me.

"You too, Alpha Nolan. You have come a long way. Your father and Rudolf would be proud of the man you've become," Derek said and I didn't know what to say. He smiled, gave me a curt nod, and left.

Colin came over and said, "If you need anything..."

"I know you'll always be there to lend a helping hand," Talia said. "Thank you for being here, Colin."

Colin smiled. "Always, Talia. Take care."

One by one, the Alphas headed to their guest rooms to finally get some rest, their shoulders relaxing at the good news. Before long, only Camilla remained in the hallway.

"I'll be leaving now, child," she said with a weary smile.

Talia's face fell. "Stay a little longer. Even just a few days. You deserve to rest as much as anyone here."

"Thank you, but Hattie and Dalila have already sent me two messages urging me to come home," Camilla said with a smile. "With Morgana gone, the coven is eagerly waiting for me to tell them they're finally free to leave the Lost Woods, which kept them hidden from the outside world for so many years. They can't wait to see the world again."

I nodded, exchanging a glance with Talia.

"Yeah. I can imagine how excited Hattie and Dalila must be," Talia said.

"I'll arrange an escort for you. It's still not safe, and I want to make sure you get home," I said. She was still tired from the battle and might not be able to protect herself if she encountered danger on the way back.

Camilla nodded, then surprised Talia with a hug. "Don't look so sad, child. This isn't goodbye. We're allies, remember? You'll see me again."

"Right. Allies," Talia said with a nod.

After seeing Camilla off, we walked together through the halls, passing tired nurses and wounded warriors. When we reached our room, Talia rested her head on my shoulder. For the first time in a long time, we both felt at peace.

"You know," I teased, catching a whiff of rogue and blood on her, "you smell awful." She snorted. "Please. You smell just as bad."

I smiled and moved behind her, wrapping my arms around her waist. "We're not getting into bed smelling like this."

"I'm tired," she pouted.

"We need to shower."

She turned in my arms and looked up at me. "I'll go if you carry me to the shower, and wash me yourself."

I arched an eyebrow, but my hands were already unbuttoning her shirt. "And if I say no?"

"Then you won't find out the special bonus I learned by mastering Moonfire," Talia teased.

That was all it took. I picked her up and carried her to the bathroom. I turned on the shower and quickly undressed her.

When we stepped into the shower, steam rose around us, making the air humid and hot. I pulled her to me, and kissed her. The water didn't matter compared to the feeling of her body on mine.

She gave me a gentle, teasing shove. "Soap first," she said.

I grabbed the soap and lathered up quickly, happy to touch her. I started at her shoulders, rubbing slow circles to ease the tension, then moved down her back. Her skin was slick and warm, and I didn't want to stop touching her. She arched toward me, and I slid my hands up her sides, then over her breasts. As my hand reached between her thighs, Talia pulled back.

"My turn," Talia said in a low, playful voice.

"I'm not done," I growled.

Talia smirked. “I guess you don't want your surprise.”

"Nevermind," I said and she laughed.

Talia soaped my chest. Her warm hands moved over my body, tracing my muscles

and scars, leaving a trail of heat wherever they touched.

Even as the water washed away the soap, her caress lingered. Her hands slid lower, and I was already trembling beneath her. Then she wrapped her hand around my hardened length.

"Talia," I groaned, as my hips moved with her. Each stroke sent pleasure throughout me, building fast, almost too fast. The climax hit me hard and quick, my whole body shivering, breath coming in rough gasps.

"Did you like the surprise?" she asked, kissing me before I could answer.

Within seconds, I was already hard again.

"There should be a warning about that Moonfire. It's too powerful, my love," I said as I picked her up and walked out of the shower. Her legs wrapped around my waist, teasing me as she clung to me. "Keep doing that and we won't make it to the bed."

"Yeah? Show me what you've got," I muttered, kissing her.

She giggled against my neck as I carried her to the bed. I lowered her onto the bed and, following her down, pressed her into the mattress, not caring about getting the bed wet.

Talia smiled. "This is just the beginning."

Chapter 365

Talia's POV

"Are you tired?" Nolan asked. "Because you look tired."

I laughed. "You're the one who looks exhausted."

He smirked, tracing circles on my arm. "That's because you're cheating with Moonfire."

"I am ready. I want to show you everything I can do. Or maybe you need a break?" I

teased, arching up so he could slide against me.

"You're insatiable."

I kissed his collarbone, then murmured, "If it gets to be too much, say so."

"That sounds like something I would say," Nolan laughed.

"I'm serious," I said. "This is my first time using it like this."

Nolan kissed me before he pressed his forehead against mine. "Don't hold back. I want all of you."

With a quick movement, I took control, and he was below me. He looked at me like he couldn't get enough. I called on Moonfire again. It filled me until I could barely tell where I ended and the magic began.

"Your eyes," Nolan said. "They're glowing."

I kissed him, letting Moonfire pour into him."Goddess, what is that?" he moaned into my mouth, the sound half delight and half shock. Nolan bucked upward, nearly sheathing himself in me.

I laughed into his mouth, grabbing his biceps and pinning him to the bed as I teased him while sliding up and down his length, but not allowing him to enter me. "Just me," I whispered.

"Talia, if you keep teasing me like that, I'm....."

Nolan's voice trailed off as I guided him into me. Each inch sent up sparks. Nolan's head fell backward, claws tearing the sheets as he fought to take control and thrust into me. I sighed as my hips met his.

I started to ride him slowly at first, enjoying the feel of him sliding in and out,

touching all the sensitive spots that made me see stars. Nolan clutched my hips and murmured curses at my slow pace.

"You want me to go faster?" I teased.

"Yes," Nolan moaned. I began slamming down on him with a force that made the bed frame hit the wall.

"Talia, you feel amazing. Don't stop," Nolan moaned. He thrust harder to match my rhythm, pushing me closer to climax. The orgasm hit fast and hard, and I screamed. My body convulsed, squeezing him so tightly that Nolan sat up. He slid deeper into me as he released his seed.

I slumped forward, both of us shaking.

Nolan rolled me beneath him without withdrawing. He kissed me, lips hungry and soft, and let his hands wander down my sides.

"You almost gave me a heart attack," he whispered, grinning.

"You asked for it," I teased, breathless.

"I am going to pay you back," Nolan said as he reached down to lift my legs so my ankles rested on his shoulders. He thrusted deep into me. At this angle, I could already feel the heat building in my core.

Moonfire thrummed beneath my skin. I pulled his face to mine and kissed him hard. I let the Moonfire loose, not just at my fingertips this time, but everywhere. The glow passed from me into him through every point of contact. Nolan gasped as the magic shot up his cock.

"Oh my goddess," he breathed, and he stilled for a second before he regained control.

I dug my nails into his back, making faint marks as the pressure built. "Don't stop," I pleaded. "Whatever you do, don't stop."

The Moonfire surged, drawing from both of us. The energy fed back and forth, amplifying everything.

He leaned down, his lips hovering just above my ear. "I want to see you come again," he whispered.

I let the pleasure crest, flowing over me in waves. This time when I came, Nolan didn't let up. He kept thrusting like a wild beast. I bit into his neck, marking him again. Nolan placed a hand at the base of my spine, lifting me up so he could thrust deeper.

Nolan braced himself above me, arms trembling, and I realized he was holding back, trying to fight the effects. "Let it happen," I told him breathlessly. "Don't hold back." Then I marked him again, and he lost all control.

Nolan's thrusts became erratic. I squeezed around him, coaxing him. Then he threw his head back and roared as he came hard. I felt him release inside of me, pushing me into another orgasm.

We stayed tangled together. Nolan buried his face in my neck, breath coming in uneven bursts. I stroked his back, feeling the sweat and tension in his muscles.

"Not done with you yet," Nolan growled, already hard again.

For hours, we made love passionately. I lost all sense of time as Moonfire coursed through us until our bodies just couldn't keep up anymore.

Panting, we collapsed next to each other.

“I think we need another shower,” Nolan said. “New sheets and probably a new wall."

I chuckled and said, "When I can feel my legs again."

Nolan leaned over, sweeping a strand of hair from my face, his eyes fixed on mine with raw intensity. "I love you."

"I love you too."

"That was, without question, the best night of my entire fucking life."

I let out a soft laugh and nestled against him with my head resting on his chest. His skin was warm, the heartbeat steady and reassuring. I let myself listen to it, letting the sound lull me, refusing to let go of the moment.

Chapter 366

Talia's POV

I woke up slowly, feeling warm and heavy, with Nolan's arm still around me and his

breath gently moving my hair.

"Morning," he said, kissing my cheek.

"Morning." I burrowed in closer, in no hurry to move.

"Talia, it's noon actually."

I opened my eyes, then shut them again. The light coming through the curtains wasn't a gentle sunrise. It was the bright midday sun.

"So, it is," I murmured.

Neither of us tried to move. Nolan traced shapes on my shoulder without thinking. For once, there was no crisis, no one calling for help, nothing pulling us away. I wanted to hold onto that feeling as long as I could. We stayed together until my stomach growled loudly, making him laugh.

"Fine, I'll get up," I whined.

Once we were ready, we went downstairs for lunch. As soon as we walked in, it was clear the chef had outdone themselves. The table was packed with food, almost like a week's worth of meals all at once. Everything was fresh, hot, and made with care. I didn't think it was just for us; it felt like the kitchen was celebrating the end of the war and the pack's survival, putting all that relief into the meal.

I couldn't remember the last time I was this hungry. I ate my meal quickly, as if I was making up for lost time. By the time I finished, I had gone through three plates, and Nolan was clearly amused.

"I've seen warriors put away less food after a raid," he joked. "That Moonfire must really wipe you out."

I felt myself blush when I remembered last night. I threw my napkin at him, and Nolan caught it, laughing.

"Shut up." I stood before he could say anything worse. "Come on. We're supposed to go see Solon."

"As you wish, my Luna."

We heard their voices before we reached the door. Solon's laughter mixed with Leslie's as they joked about something I couldn't quite catch. That sound was the best thing I'd heard in a long time, so I paused to listen before finally knocking and going in.

Solon was propped up in the bed, still pale, but himself, all the way himself. He grinned when he saw us.

"There she is. Come to check I haven't died on you?"

"Something like that," I said. "You're still really pale. Are you feeling okay?"

"I feel fantastic, thank you. The doctor says I can go home tomorrow." He sounded a

little too pleased, as if he had convinced them to let him leave early.

"If," Leslie cut in from the chair beside him, "he actually takes the medication he's supposed to take, on the schedule he's supposed to take it, instead of deciding he's fine and skipping doses. Which he will try to do."

"I would never."

"Of course you would." She gave him a playful eye-roll.

"You believe me, right, sis?" Solon asked.

"Not at all," I said, and Solon's smile faded, making Leslie laugh. She reached into the folder on her lap and pulled out a glossy photo. "You two have good timing. Here."

Leslie passed me the photo. It was grainy and out of focus, nothing but shadows until I looked closer. My pulse picked up as I tried to make sense of it. When I finally found the little curled shape in the center, everything else in the room faded. My breath caught and a bright surge of hope and awe filled me. For a moment, all I could see was the new life on the page.

"That's your pup?" I exclaimed.

"Four months to go," Leslie said, and there was so much pride in her voice that it turned thick at the end.

My throat tightened, and I had to blink quickly to keep from tearing up.

"So cute," I said. "Nolan, look, the baby's cute." I passed the photo to Nolan.

Nolan studied it with total seriousness. "It is. Very cute."

Leslie laughed and wiped her eyes. "You two are ridiculous. It's a smudge. You cannot possibly call a smudge cute."

"I can and I will," I said. "That pup is going to be beautiful, because both of you are, and I won't hear otherwise."

"She has a point," Solon said, smug about it.

"She does," Leslie admitted, placing her hand over the small curve of her belly.

She gave me her usual mischievous grin. "So, when are you and Nolan going to make this little pup a cousin? Honestly, now's as good a time as any."

My cheeks flushed with heat, and I couldn't meet her eyes. Did she really want me to answer that in front of my brother, no less?

'You shouldn't be embarrassed. It is an honest question,' my wolf said. 'If we have more nights like last night, we'll be with pup soon.'

I felt a flicker of excitement, but it quickly gave way to nervousness. The war was behind us, and for once there was space for dreams like this. Even so, it felt unfamiliar, like I was standing at the start of something I didn't know how to approach.

"We're working on it," Nolan said before I could get a single word out.

I turned on him. "Nolan!"

"What? We are."

"Good," Leslie said, delighted. "The war's over. No more excuses for any of us. I expect you both to work very hard at it."

Solon almost choked from laughing, and my face burned with embarrassment. I decided I was finished with this whole conversation.

"On a completely different subject," I said loudly, trying to talk over the three of them laughing at my expense, "we should have a party. Tomorrow evening, once Solon is cleared to leave. Everyone deserves a night to celebrate our victory. What do you think?"

Chapter 367

Talia's POV

Leslie's smile faltered at the word party.

"Solon can go home," she said, "but he still needs to recover. If you throw a full- blown party, everyone there, music until dawn, he won't get the rest he needs."

"This isn't going to hurt me," Solon said. "If anything, it'll help. We've all been tense for so long because of the Rogue King and Morgana. Everyone needs a break, myself included."

"You," Leslie said, "need to sit in a chair and behave."

"I can celebrate from a chair," Solon compromised.

She looked at him a moment longer, then sighed, the fight going out of her. "Fine. One night. But he stays seated, and he leaves when I say he leaves."

"Done," I said before she could add more conditions. "And you two don't lift a finger for any of it. Nolan and I will handle everything, from start to finish. All you have to do is show up at seven tomorrow night and let everyone celebrate you're both still alive, and Silverfang will have a new heir."

That finally melted the rest of her resistance. Solon gave my hand a quick squeeze, which I returned, and we slipped out, leaving them to rest before Leslie could reconsider.

We found Derek in the corridor outside, and I put him straight to work.

"We're having a party," I told him. "Tomorrow at seven, in the main square. Everyone's invited. If they're still here and breathing, they're on the list. Can you let the Alphas know and spread the word to whoever hasn't left yet?"

"You got it." He was nodding before I even finished. "Everyone deserves this. We all need a night that's not about loss for once."

"They have. And Derek," I caught him before he could walk away. "Thank you for holding Silverfang together when the rest of us were gone. We wouldn't have a home left without you."

"Keeping Silverfang safe is what I do, Luna." He said it matter-of-factly. "You don't owe me any thanks for that. Still, I'll accept it." With a nod, he headed off to spread the news.

Nolan watched him leave and then shot me a sly grin. "You realize Della's going to mind link you as soon as word gets out. That woman could hear a bottle pop from the other side of the continent."

"She really does." I already knew he was right. Della had never once missed a party in her life, and she wasn't going to start now.

"So what's the plan for the party?"

"Rosefall."

He raised an eyebrow.

"The rose wine, remember? You tried it the first time you came to Silverfang, when you were investigating my father." I watched the memory come back to him. “He made that wine himself, every year, from the roses in our garden. It was my mom's favorite thing, though he always said hers tasted better. I helped him with the last few batches before he died." I felt sad for only a moment, then pushed it aside. There were too many things to be happy about. "This time, I want to make it myself. I think he'd love the idea of us toasting survival with his wine," I continued.

"Then I'm helping you make it."

"You don't have to."

"I know I don't, but it is an important part of you, and I want to share it with you." So we went to the rose garden.

The garden looked better than I expected. It was full of blooming roses, with every plant cared for despite everything that had happened. Solon had made sure the maids took care of it despite the war. I lingered at the path's edge for a moment, letting old grief and happiness wash over me before making my way down.

"Pick the darkest red roses," I said to Nolan, pointing out the blossoms my father always favored. "Their scent is strongest, with petals just past the first bloom but not yet wilting. That's when they're at their best. Skip the new buds; they haven't got any fragrance yet."

"How do you know all this?"

"I spent multiple summers of my childhood following him around this garden with a basket. He never let me leave until I could tell a good bloom from a lazy one by smell alone."

We worked down the rows until the baskets were full, the scent getting into our hands and our clothes and the warm afternoon air, until we both smelled like the garden itself. Then we carried them down to the cellar, cool and dim and quiet after the brightness above.

"First the petals," I said, stripping them from the stems the way my father taught me, dropping them into the wide bowl between us. Nolan followed, clumsy at first as he was trying to be gentle.

"You can be rougher. They're not going to break."

We crushed them by hand until our palms were stained pink and the bottom of the bowl ran deep red, and I folded the pulp into a base of Silverfang wine to start the fermentation.

"All it needs now is time. A few days, minimum. The roses and the wine have to become one thing, not two." I scooped a little into a cup before sealing the rest away. "My father always let me taste the first batch before it was ready."

I passed Nolan the cup.

He tasted it, paused, and handed the cup over. "It's not bad."

I took the last swallow. It was raw and sweet and far from finished, but I could taste the rose and the promise underneath. For a moment, I was a child again, back in this cellar, grimacing at the first mouthful while my father laughed at my expression.

Coming back to myself, I set the empty cup aside. "It'll taste even better with time," I told him.

Nolan came up behind me, slid his arms around my waist, and put his face against my neck. "You smell better than the wine," he murmured.

"That's a low bar right now. The whole room smells like wine," I said. The whole cellar was thick with the smell of it.

"Still true."

I turned in his arms and kissed him. He kissed me back, and for a moment the party and the wine and everything else could wait.

Then Della's voice cut into my head, loud and demanding, shattering the quiet. 'Talia!'

Nolan felt me tense and groaned against my mouth. "I'm guessing that's your Beta."

I laughed, reluctantly pulling away as I opened the link. “Hey, Della. What's up?”

Chapter 368

Talia's POV

'How long is this Silverfang party of yours?' Della asked eagerly.

No greeting, no small talk. Derek's message had clearly reached her, and she skipped right past the fact that we'd won the war against the Rogue King. Silverfang was still reeling, but Della moved straight to what mattered most to her.

I bit back a laugh. 'Just one night, Della. We've got way too much to deal with now that the fighting's over. There's no way we could drag it out any longer.'

'Just one day?' she exclaimed. 'Really, Talia? If you'd said two, I'd be on the road already. You know I would drop everything.'

'I do know. That's why I kept it to one.'

'Rude,' she huffed, but she was already shifting tactics. 'That doesn't mean I can't go.'

'Della, we need you at Bloodmoon,' I told her. Even though the Rogue King was gone, there were still rogues who could take advantage in an attempt to become the next Rogue King. Della needed to be there with Marco.

'Alright, here's the deal: I want something in return. When you're back, Bloodmoon gets its own party. It has to be bigger than Silverfang's, and I get to run the show. You owe me, after sidelining me for the entire fight and making me stay behind while everyone else risked their necks.'

'Are you still upset about that?' I questioned.

‘Damn right I am,' Della responded. 'I'm your Beta. I should have been there fighting alongside you.'

'You're right,' I said. 'We did sideline you. You kept Bloodmoon safe while we were gone, and we appreciate it.' I could feel her getting ready to argue, so I kept going. ‘So, I agree. Bloodmoon gets its own party. Make it as big as you want, your rules, no one to stop you. When we get back, you can start right away.'

'Good,' she said, vindicated at last. 'Enjoy your one sad little day. See you soon.' Then, she closed the mind link.

Nolan was watching my face. "What did she want?"

"We owe Della a party. Bloodmoon gets one when we're home. That's the deal for making her stay behind."

I half expected him to protest, but Nolan nodded and said, "Good."

I blinked. "Good? I thought you hated parties."

He shrugged and said, "People change."

"Is that so?" I moved closer, sliding my hands up his chest. "The Nolan I remember would have chosen another fight with Kargon over mingling with Alphas at a stuffy party."

“That Nolan didn't have you at the party,” he said, and I went up on my tiptoes to kiss him.

"You know, it's funny. I've noticed I can't seem to keep my hands off you lately. It's like I don't want you to ever stop touching me. It's a little ridiculous, honestly," I teased.

Nolan gripped my hips, pulling me closer to him. Then, he leaned in, his mouth hot against my ear. "Prove it," he said, and the challenge in his voice sent a jolt of heat straight to my core.

I slipped my hand into his and guided him to the cellar lounge. It was low-lit, and the smell of roses was even stronger here. The door shut softly behind us.

I had intended to take control, but Nolan clearly had other ideas. He pushed me against the nearest wall, his body pressing firmly against mine. His mouth

descended on mine with a hunger that left me breathless. His hands roamed freely, tugging at my dress, pulling it down and off me.

"Tell me again," he demanded, his mouth moving to my neck, teeth scraping against my skin.

I gasped as his hand slid between my legs, his fingers discovering that I was already wet and aching for him. "I don't want you to stop touching me," I managed to say. "I never do."

He kissed me again, swallowing my moans as his fingers plunged in and out of me.

I reached for his belt, my fingers fumbling with the buckle as he chuckled softly against my mouth "Impatient," he chuckled, yet he didn't stop me. Just when I felt frustration creeping in, Nolan's hands covered mine, guiding me until the leather slid free. Once his pants were undone, he pushed them down his hips, freeing himself.

I wrapped my legs around his waist and pulled him closer. He thrust into me in one fluid movement and I moaned, clutching to him hard. All thoughts had vanished; just this moment and Nolan was all that mattered. Moments later the room was filled with heavy panting and the gentle slap of skin on skin and the wet slick sounds of our bodies moving together.

In the morning, the first thing we did was check the wine.

Much to my disappointment, it hadn't finished fermenting. It was days off from being ready, nowhere near what it needed to be for tonight.

"It won't be ready in time," I pouted as I handed him my cup.

Nolan took a sip from my cup and said, "It's still good, and it doesn't have to be the only thing we serve. The cellar's full of wine that's already aged. We will use that for the party and let this one finish for another night."

"You're right." I looked around and didn't see any familiar barrels of Rosefall. “But I'm not seeing anything."

'He may have hidden them away for special occasions,' my wolf suggested.

She was right. That was exactly the kind of thing he would have done: hiding bottles away for a special occasion, for us.

"Come on," I told Nolan. "My father must have kept some of the older batches of Rosefall down here somewhere."

We searched the cellar and went farther than I ever had before. We passed familiar racks and new barrels, then entered the oldest part, where the stone ended and the air grew colder. The lamps barely lit the walls. It felt more like a cave than a cellar.

At the very back, hidden behind dusty barrels, we found a locked door.

I struggled with the old iron latch until at last it gave. The moment the door swung open, the scent hit me. It was a rich and aged Rosefall, just like my father made. Inside, in the dark, waited three full barrels.

Chapter 369

Talia's POV

I didn't really believe it was real until Nolan opened the first barrel. As soon as he did, the smell struck me right away, thick and heady, curling in the air like a breathing thing. There was no doubt this was my father's wine.

This wasn't like the new batch we made yesterday. This was the real Rosefall, rich and warm, full of roses and something deeper, earthy and almost sweet. The smell lingered in my nose. For a second, I felt like a child again, standing next to my dad, helping him with the barrels.

Nolan poured two cups, gave me one, and we tried it together.

I couldn't say a word. This was my father's wine, no doubt about it. Years in storage hadn't spoiled it. If anything, it tasted even better, just like he always said. It grew richer as time passed.

"That's it," I finally said. "It's my father's. He really did save some for us. He must have sealed that room and never got the chance to tell us about it."

'He would have wanted us to use it for the party,' my wolf said, and I agreed.

"This is amazing," Nolan said as he looked at the color. "Solon's going to flip when he tastes it. You should tell him now, before the party."

"Nope." The idea hit me, and I was sure about it. “Let's make it a surprise. He should find out tonight, in front of everyone, that Dad left us his Rosefall. I want to see his face when he finds out."

Nolan laughed. “Alright, I'll keep quiet. Let's bring these to the kitchen.”

A few hours later, the square was full of lights, tables of food, and music filling up the night. I took care of the wine while everything else came together. As I watched servants bring out dish after dish and everyone in their best clothes, I felt something I hadn't let myself feel in months: pride at seeing my people gathered, relief building within my chest as laughter and music pushed out the shadows, and a soft ache for how much I'd missed this. The whole pack arrived, happier than they'd been in a long time. Kids ran between tables, warriors hugged their families, and tonight was for celebrating, so that's what we did.

In the center of the square, Derek stood holding a torch, waiting for everyone to look his way. Once enough people were watching, he held it up high.

"For the fallen. May they never be forgotten," he called out, then touched the torch to the huge pile of wood. The fire caught right away, sending golden flames rising into the night. The crowd cheered as the heat spread.

Henry had set up a bar off to the side, and it was already three rows deep with people. At one end, young pack members gathered, just old enough to join in, full of wild energy. One boy kept sneaking glances at the girl next to him, too shy to say anything.

"Go on," his friend said, loud enough for everyone nearby. "Say something."

Blushing, he finally said something to her, though I couldn't hear what it was. She laughed and answered, and his whole face lit up. His friends nudged him from behind, but he only looked at her.

I laughed too, recognizing that look.

"What?" Nolan asked.

"See that boy? The one blushing over there? That used to be you." I grinned at him. "Remember your first Silverfang gathering? Everyone was scared of you. You looked like you wanted to be anywhere else, but you still sat with me all night and barely touched your drink."

"I remember it differently."

"Oh? How do you remember it?"

Nolan watched the boy, who was now struggling to keep the conversation going. "The difference is, I actually pulled it off. That poor kid is floundering. I had a plan."

"So your plan was to stand there and judge my choices?"

"I was protecting you," he said, taking a slow sip. "That's a big difference. That kid's about to dig himself into a hole. I never did that."

"That's some impressive revisionist history."

"Hey, it worked. You picked me."

"Fair enough," I said, laughing.

We walked over to Henry's bar. He grinned as we came up.

"Luna Talia, Alpha Nolan, welcome," Henry said as he wiped his hands on a towel. "Everything's ready. The aged wines are being served, but the Rosefall stays sealed until the Alpha King arrives, exactly as you requested. If you want anything else, just let me know."

"When did you get so good at being a bartender?" I asked, watching him line up bottles and glasses.

"It's just a hobby. It helps me relax," Henry said. "I don't get much free time, but when I do, I like to try new recipes. Let me make you both something."

We nodded, and Henry started mixing drinks, working quietly and quickly. Soon, he handed us two drinks. Mine was clear and bright, floral with a hint of fruit, something I could sip all night. Nolan's was dark, smoky, and strong, with a sharp finish.

"Henry, this is honestly fantastic," I said after taking a sip.

"You're wasted on pack business," Nolan said. "You've really got a gift."

Before Henry could answer, Derek's voice rang out across the square, and everyone turned to look at him.

"The Alpha King is here!"

Chapter 370

Talia's POV

Solon and Leslie entered the square hand in hand. Solon walked slowly, but was able to walk without assistance. He already looked a lot better than he had only a few days ago. The moment the pack

spotted him, they cheered so loudly it made my ears ring. I reached him first and hugged him softly, careful not to hurt him.

"You look like you're almost back to yourself," I said softly.

“I'm close. Thanks to Leslie,” he replied, glancing at her gratefully. She pretended not to hear, but her smile gave her away.

Soon, the other Alphas joined us. Colin, Landon, and a few others were drawn by the excitement. I got Solon's attention and nodded toward the central platform. That was our signal.

He nodded, took Leslie's hand again and stepped on to the platform.

The square fell silent, all eyes turned to him.

"I promise I won't make another long speech," Solon said, and people laughed. "You've heard enough from me already. I just want to say what this means. We fought hard for this victory, and we almost didn't make it. The Rogue King is gone. Morgana is gone. And thanks to Leslie, anyone who's bitten doesn't have to be afraid anymore. There's a cure, and it works. I'm proof." He paused, letting everyone feel the relief that the mad rogue toxin would never take someone from them again. "As your Alpha King, I'm grateful to all of you," Solon went on. "We'll remember what we lost, but we kept what matters most, together. To our fallen!"

“To our fallen!” the crowd responded with a roar.

"To the Alpha King Solon!" someone in the crowd yelled, and the crowd joined in. Solon waited until the noise subsided, then pulled Leslie closer. Gently, he put his hand on her belly. "And another thing, Silverfang is going to have an heir!

This was followed by louder cheers. The sound echoed across the square, warriors drumming on tables, somebody chanting Silverfang until half the crowd was chanting along. Leslie laughed and cried at the same time, one hand on her belly, the other over her mouth. Solon grinned. Nolan and I were caught up in the moment and clapped and cheered with them.

"Alright," Solon called out, raising his voice over the crowd, "I'm done talking. Go eat, have a drink, and dance as much as you want. That's an order." He stepped down from the platform with Leslie beside him.

"That was a good speech," I told him when he reached us.

"You don't know how long we worked on it. He was trying to talk for at least two hours," Leslie said, pleased with herself.

Before I could answer, Colin and Landon shouldered through the crowd with a pack of young warriors in tow, all of them grinning and shoving each other forward, clearly eager for a challenge.

“Alpha King,” Colin called out, "these guys have been bragging all night that they could take you in a sparring match. Want to show them they're wrong?"

"Absolutely not," Leslie said before Solon could open his mouth. "He is not sparring anyone."

The young warriors' faces fell so fast that I took pity on them.

"He's not,” I agreed, "but that doesn't mean we can't have a little competition tonight. Go ahead and spar with each other. The best fighter gets a prize from the Alpha King."

Grins spread across their faces, and they disappeared into the crowd before I got the last word out. They argued about who got to go first.

Solon raised an eyebrow at me. "And just what kind of prize am I giving away?"

"Nolan and I found three barrels of Father's Rosefall down in the cellar. It's the wine he made himself. One of those barrels is here tonight. The winner gets a glass. How about that?" I suggested.

Solon's eyes sparkled, and his jaw tightened as he wrestled with grief and joy. "You really found it?"

"Locked away at the very back of the cellar, behind a sealed door. I'm certain he made it for us."

"That's incredible. That's the best prize we could give." He shook his head, visibly moved. "Us drinking and sharing his wine to celebrate Silverfang's survival. He would have loved this."

"I know," I laughed.

Leslie let out a dramatic sigh, resting her hand on her stomach. "And I can't have any. The finest wine around is right here in front of me, and I've got months left before I can even taste it."

"There are two barrels left. I promise Della, and I will go on a drunken binge with you once the pup is born," I said.

“I'm going to hold you to it, Talia," Leslie said with a wink.

We moved back toward the bar, and I waved Henry over. "Pour a glass of Rosefall for the Alpha King."

Henry uncorked the barrel and poured him a glass. The smell drifted over to Solon and I saw the recognition on his face. "It smells just like I remember," Solon said, taking the glass from Henry. Henry poured drinks for the rest of us and a mocktail for Leslie.

"To survival," Nolan toasted, lifting his glass.

"To the future," Leslie added.

Solon raised his own. "To our father."

"To our father," I echoed, and we clinked our glasses together.

Solon finished his drink in one gulp. Then, he grimaced.

"Are you okay?" Leslie asked, placing a hand on his back.

Solon clutched his throat, bent forward, and coughed as if he were choking. As he coughed, blood splattered across his hand.

I froze.