Barren Luna 381

Chapter 381

Talia's POV

The next morning felt tense and quiet. When I walked into the lounge, Solon was already there, drinking coffee and reading paperwork. He motioned for me to sit. Once I did, he leaned in and asked, “Before the meeting, I want to know if you have come to a decision."

"This decision affects everyone. I think we should let the packs decide," I said. "If we hold an anonymous vote, people can speak honestly, without fear or pressure.”

Solon frowned, looking uneasy. "I don't like the risk of someone we don't want becoming Alpha King."

"I understand your hesitancy, but this is the best option. No one can argue with the result if it's anonymous," I said.

Solon sighed, and the lines on his face grew deeper. "All right. We'll do an anonymous vote and treat the outcome as the Moon Goddess's will."

I nodded, grateful for his trust. Solon forced a weak smile, but I could see how much this weighed on him. I hoped today would finally bring him some peace so he could

start to recover.

Soon, the hall next to the lounge filled with Alphas, Betas, and pack representatives. The room was tense as everyone waited for Solon's decision. I spotted Geoffrey across the room, arms folded and wearing a smug grin.

'The smug bastard is so sure he's won,' Nolan scoffed through the mate bond.

'That smirk makes me want to slap it right off his face,' I replied. I couldn't wait for him to see what Solon had planned.

Solon walked to the front, and the room went quiet. “Thank you all for coming. Today, I am announcing my decision to step down as Alpha King."

The hall filled with surprised gasps. Some faces showed shock and disbelief, while others, like Geoffrey's, looked eager and expectant.

"My health no longer lets me serve as Alpha King, and after thinking it over, I decided this is best for Silverfang and our territory," Solon continued.

Murmurs spread as Alphas started to wonder who would be the next Alpha King. Geoffrey moved closer to the front, ready to speak.

"Then how exactly are we supposed to choose another Alpha King? Please, enlighten me,” Geoffrey said, and I shot him a glare.

"We'll choose my successor with an anonymous vote," Solon said. "Beta Derek will count the ballots. Please write down the name of the person you think should lead

us."

Derek handed out slips of paper. The room filled with the sound of pens and paper. I noticed Geoffrey watching me with a sharp, almost threatening smile. I quickly wrote Nolan's name, folded my slip, and tried to ignore him.

A few minutes later, Derek gathered the votes. The room grew tense and quiet while he counted, his lips moving as he tallied the names. Finally, he looked at Solon, who nodded for him to announce the results.

"By anonymous vote, Alpha Nolan received the most votes," Derek announced. “Luna Talia had two fewer than Alpha Nolan, and Alpha Geoffrey had five fewer."

A low rumble of surprise and murmured conversation swept through the hall. Some Alphas exchanged apprehensive glances, clearly caught off guard by how close the vote was between Nolan and me.

Relief washed over me. Geoffrey's face fell, his confidence gone as his plan had failed. It had finally become my turn to smirk at him. Anger flashed in his eyes, but he didn't say anything.

"Alpha Nolan, the packs have chosen you as the next Alpha King. Do you accept it?" Solon asked.

'Looks like I won the bet,' I teased Nolan through the mate bond.

"Thank you for your trust in me, Alpha King," Nolan began. "But I can't accept it. I don't want to be Alpha King. There's someone else who deserves it more, someone who's already proven themselves." He looked around the hall before his eyes landed on me. "Talia is the leader we need. If anyone can bring us together and guide us forward, it's her."

The room broke out in shocked whispers. No one had ever refused the title of Alpha King, let alone suggested a Luna for the role.

Geoffrey's sharp, mocking laugh pierced through the noise. "You'd give the throne to her? She's just a Luna. She can't handle a man's burden, let alone a king."

I bristled at his words. It proved he was just like the worst version of Michael. He believed women, especially Lunas, should only care for the pack and stay out of politics.

Before I could answer, Henry snapped, "Enough!"

Geoffrey turned to Henry, clearly annoyed. "Do you have something to say, Beta?" He said the title like it was beneath him.

"Luna Talia kept Shadowclaw and Bloodmoon together when others would have failed. She led Shadowclaw alone for years, without help from the former Alpha King. That's more than most Alphas here have done," Henry said in my defense.

"That's her job as a Luna. There's nothing special about it," Geoffrey shot back. Some Alphas agreed with him.

"That is very sexist of you, Alpha Geoffrey," Nolan growled.

"No offense to Luna Talia, but we have roles for a reason," Geoffrey stated.

"Are we going to allow tradition to stunt our growth?" Colin interjected. "If we stayed in the past, we would have never won against the Rogue King. It was Luna Talia who took the risk to engage the coven for help, and now we have an alliance with the witches. Could any of you have accomplished that? What about you, Alpha Geoffrey?"

Geoffrey's face darkened, and he had no response.

"And if she hadn't suggested the wall, the mad rogues would have done even more damage to our packs," Landon added.

Slowly, those who opposed me went quiet as more Alphas spoke up for me. Geoffrey gave up on arguing when he saw things weren't going his way. All his confidence was gone, and he glared at me silently.

Solon watched everything with a gentle, proud smile. "Then it's decided. By the will of the packs and the Moon Goddess, I name Luna Talia our first Alpha Queen."

The hall erupted with cheers and applause, voices climbing: "Alpha Queen Talia! Alpha Queen Talia!"

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Talia's POV

The applause faded as I stepped forward. The Alphas looked at me, seeing me not just as Solon's sister or Luna of Bloodmoon, but as their leader. I paused, feeling the weight of responsibility, then spoke. “Thank you for believing in me. I know this decision was fast for some of you, and I'm grateful for your

trust. As your Alpha Queen, I will lead our packs and carry on the work that Solon and my father started. I promise I'll do my best to deserve your faith in me."

Solon stood to my right and nodded in approval. I went on, "Solon will remain Alpha of Silverfang and manage his own pack's affairs."

I looked at the other leaders. "In three days, Nolan and I will return to the Bloodmoon Pack. Our doors will always be open to any Alpha who needs us, whether for advice, help, or just someone to listen. You can reach out or visit us anytime. Let's keep supporting each other, because what happens next matters to all of us."

After I finished speaking, the room was quiet for a moment, then filled with cheers and applause again. Henry, Colin, Landon, and even Geoffrey of Doomfur, though he wasn't happy about it, accepted the decision. Now that the new Alpha Queen was chosen, everyone's earlier worries seemed to fade away.

When the room emptied and only Nolan, Solon, and I remained, I sighed and rubbed my temples. This day hadn't gone as I expected, and now everything depended on what would happen next.

'Overall, it went well,' my wolf said. 'We will do well as Alpha Queen.'

My wolf's encouragement echoed in the back of my mind, but doubt pressed in. What if I let them down? What if I disappointed Solon, or failed to honor my father's legacy? I calmed myself with a deep breath, allowing the worries to fade.

Movement in my peripheral vision pulled me out of my thoughts. Nolan waited by the window near the exit. I walked over to him and said, "You know you didn't win the bet."

"I do because you were chosen to be Alpha Queen," Nolan said.

"Only because you refused the position," I replied. "Everything happened so fast. You could have told me you wouldn't accept the title, even if you were chosen."

Nolan grinned, not bothered by my frustration. "I told you before, Talia, I have no desire to be Alpha King. I'd rather support you. You're the one everyone trusts."

I frowned at him, though it was hard to stay upset for long. "You still should have told me," I pouted.

He shrugged. "The only way I would have accepted the title was if Geoffrey had come in second, but he didn't."

"I'll admit, you surprised me, Nolan. But I'm glad you made this choice. I wanted Talia to succeed me from the start," Solon said.

"I feel like you two planned this behind my back," I pouted.

Solon just smirked, and Nolan shrugged. I rolled my eyes. "We have full faith in you, and I'm here to support you however I can," Solon said.

His support helped, but I still had something on my mind. Solon noticed my worried look and asked, "What are you still worrying about?"

"Leslie didn't come to the meeting, and I am worried about what she's going to think," I admitted. "Do you think she'll have a problem not being the Alpha King's mate, now that everything has changed?"

Solon shook his head with a smile. "You know Leslie doesn't care about titles. She'll be happy for you, Talia. Trust me. Leslie never wanted the burden of leading all the packs. If anything, she'll be relieved, but you should tell her yourself."

When Nolan and I got to the packhouse, Leslie was waiting in the foyer. She didn't wait for any explanations. As soon as she saw me, she grinned and pulled me into a tight hug. "So it's official. Congratulations, Alpha Queen," she teased, her eyes sparkling.

I blinked in surprise, then laughed. "How did you know?"

She rolled her eyes. "Come on. Do you really have to ask? Solon can't keep a secret for more than five minutes."

I hugged her again. "Honestly, I was worried you'd be upset."

"Not at all. Actually, this is a relief. I never liked the pressure and responsibility of being the Alpha King's mate. I had to adjust because Solon is my mate, and of course I support him, but I want a quieter life, and you gave that to me. So, thank you, Alpha Queen."

Solon appeared in the doorway, pretending to be offended. "You'll still have Silverfang to help manage, you know."

Leslie smirked. "Your job is easier than Talia's now. She's the one who has to keep all the packs in line."

I glanced at Nolan. "He'll help me."

Nolan raised his hands in mock surrender. "Whatever you say, my queen."

Solon groaned theatrically. "Finally, I can properly rest."

"If you listened to me and kept your butt in bed, you wouldn't feel so tired," Leslie scolded.

I pointed a finger at Solon, faking sternness. "Don't get too comfortable. I'll still need your support."

He laughed and gave an exaggerated bow. “As you command, Alpha Queen Talia.”

Before our laughter faded, Derek appeared in the hallway with a serious look. "Some of the Alphas are getting ready to leave, my Queen. They'd like to say goodbye before they go."

Chapter 383

Talia's POV

I nodded, and Nolan and I followed Derek outside. The late afternoon sun came through the trees, casting moving patches of light and shadow along the Silverfang border. At the edge of the territory, Henry, Colin, and Landon waited. I could see pride, uncertainty, and a bit of sadness on their faces.

Henry stepped forward first, bowing his head. "Luna," He stopped, correcting himself with a sheepish smile. "My queen."

I smiled, trying to show Henry I was both grateful and reassuring. "Either is fine, Henry," I said softly, hoping to make the change from my old role to my new one a little easier.

He shook his head, his expression growing more serious. "No, you deserve to be called by the proper title," he said.

I looked at Henry, wanting to be both serious and kind. "Henry, you've always supported me, even when I lost my position as Luna in Shadowclaw. When others didn't believe in me, you spoke up and helped me when I needed it. You defied your own Alpha to help keep me safe. That's why I trust you. Today, I'm happy to announce that you are the new Alpha of Shadowclaw. You really deserve it."

Henry blinked in surprise. "Are you serious?" he asked.

"Yes," I said. "I'm serious about this."

"I'm honored, but..." His voice faded, and I saw disbelief and humility in his eyes. He ran his hand through his hair, searching for what to say.

"I'm not asking, Henry. Don't make me have to command you into accepting," I said.

Henry hesitated for only a moment before he dropped to one knee and bowed his head. "I accept, my queen. I won't let you down."

I let out a nervous laugh. “You don't have to be so formal."

"Of course he should be formal. This is a big deal," Nolan said, stepping up and clapping Henry on the back with a grin. "You've earned this, Henry. You'll lead Shadowclaw with the strength and heart it needs." Nolan's voice was steady, like he had been waiting for this day too.

"Rise, Alpha Henry," I said, giving him a respectful nod. Henry stood up, and I could see the pride in the way he held himself.

Colin grinned and shook Henry's hand. "Congratulations, Alpha Henry. It is good to finally officially call you that. You've done well leading Shadowclaw on your own."

Landon nodded. "Honestly, you should have been Alpha from the beginning, but I'm glad it's finally happened."

I leaned in and spoke quietly so only Henry could hear. "I'll tell the other Alphas about your promotion later. When you return, please watch Alpha Geoffrey closely for me. If you notice anything strange or suspicious, even if it's small, let me know right away."

I was certain Geoffrey wouldn't take defeat gracefully. The last thing I wanted was a repeat of what happened with Michael.

Henry nodded, his expression serious. "You have my word, my queen."

I turned to Colin, feeling both nostalgic and grateful. “I couldn't have done any of this without you, Colin. You've always been there for me, even before we ever thought about leading a pack."

"I told you. You'd always have my support," Colin said, his voice soft but steady. We weren't meant to be mates, but I'm grateful for the friendship we've built.

I turned to Landon, wanting him to know how much what he did meant to me. “The Lonefur ember you gave Leslie protected her and the baby. It's your gift that kept them safe during the war, thank you Alpha Landon. Because of you, my family is safe and well."

He blushed and looked proud. "I'm glad I could help. It's the least I could do after all the stress I put her through." He spoke softly, and I noticed the relief in his shoulders.

In the days that followed, Nolan and I helped Solon finish up Silverfang's remaining pack affairs. There were countless details to manage, papers to sign, traditions to honor, and goodbyes to share. We also checked in with the other Alphas to make sure everything was alright and to remind them that we all wanted peace.

On our last morning in Silverfang, I stood looking at my empty bedroom while Nolan prepared to carry our bags to the car. I would never have believed that, coming back to Silverfang, I would've lost my father, beaten the Rogue King, and then become the Alpha Queen. Moon Goddess really did have an interesting plan for me. "Reminiscing?" Nolan asked.

I nodded. “Feels like a lifetime ago, I was in here stressing over whether you liked

me or not. So much has changed in such a little time," I said.

We stepped out into the chilly morning air and found Solon and Leslie waiting on the porch, their faces showing both excitement and sadness.

Leslie hugged me tightly. "Make sure you're back in four months when the baby arrives,” she said softly. She hugged me tight for another second before she let go.

"There's no way I'd miss it," I promised.

Then I turned my attention to Solon. He pulled me into a hug. "You will be safe on the way back," he said.

“And you make sure to take it easy,” I said as I pointed a pretend-stern finger at him, but couldn't hide my smile. "If I hear you're not following Leslie's treatment or you haven't gotten better when I get back, you'll be in big trouble."

Solon grinned and saluted playfully. "I promise, Alpha Queen."

Chapter 384

Nolan's POV

By the time we made it back to the Bloodmoon pack, the sun had dropped below the hills, painting the sky red and violet. Seeing the big iron gates in the distance with the Bloodmoon crest brought relief, as being away from my pack had weighed on me more than I realized.

As we got closer to the gates, I nudged Talia awake. "Almost home," I said.

"How long have I been out?" she asked, yawning.

"Just a few hours."

"I can't believe we're back home."

"I know, and now we can finally get everything back to normal."

"Do you think everyone is angry with us for being gone so long?" Talia asked as I parked the car.

"No one's angry. They're just glad we're safe." I paused. "Maybe not everyone. I think Della may still be upset that she couldn't have her party sooner rather than later."

Talia laughed, and I noticed the tension within her shoulders leave. "She'll get over it. I am not looking forward to the chaos that is going to happen. You know this is probably going to be a week-long event."

“I know, but we're going to love every minute of it anyway."

People were calling our names as soon as we got out of the car. They stood on either side of the gravel path, clapping their hands and cheering us on as we passed. Out front with a crowd of pack members were Della, Marco, and Walden.

"Welcome back! " someone yelled.

"We missed you!" another voice called out.

Della reached us first and hugged Talia tightly, almost lifting her off her feet. "Welcome home, Alpha Queen!" she called out. The crowd repeated the title, passing it along with pride and joy.

Talia looked startled for a moment, and then Della said, "Don't look so shocked. What made you think that no one would spread the word that you are the new Alpha Queen?"

"Actually, yes," Talia laughed.

"Nope, we found out. Leslie couldn't keep it to herself," Della said. "Everyone is so proud of you. So, you know that means the party has to be even bigger than I originally planned."

"Goddess help me," Talia groaned, but she wasn't upset. I could feel her happiness through our mate bond.

Marco clapped me on the back and then pulled me into a hug. "Good to have you home, Alpha," he said, his eyes bright with relief. "How does it feel being the Alpha Queen's consort?"

"Not so bad," I said. "Talia was meant for this."

Walden came to his side, a rare smile breaking his serious face. He stepped out of the way, and I saw a young woman standing behind him. She was average height with brown hair and braided neatly down her back. She looked to be about eighteen, maybe a little older. Her blue eyes lit up when she saw me.

"And who is this?" I asked.

Walden put a proud hand on her shoulder. “Alpha, I don't believe you've met our new deputy. This is Arya. I promoted her a few months ago, and she took first place in the warriors' competition."

Arya stood up straighter, trying to look more serious. "It's good to meet you, Arya," I said as I held my hand out to shake hers.

She shook my hand with a solid grip, strong for someone her age. “Thank you, Alpha. I've admired you since I was a child. My dream was always to stand before you as a real warrior, and now..." She paused, her cheeks turning red, "I guess I finally made it."

Her words surprised me. It felt both humbling and strange. I had never gotten used to being seen as someone's hero. The way she looked at me reminded me of Maggie, which made my wolf uneasy.

'That is not good,' my wolf growled.

'She's harmless,' I said, though I kept my eyes on Arya. 'Walden would know what to look out for.'

'And yet Walden didn't notice Maggie either,' my wolf countered, making it clear why I was uneasy.

Before I was able to respond, Talia slipped her arm through mine. I sensed a mix of emotions through our mate bond. My wolf perked up, amused. 'Be careful, she's jealous.' I almost laughed when I noticed how tightly Talia held my arm. She had nothing to worry about, but I still took a step back to maintain space between Arya and me.

Talia smiled at Arya, her voice kind and genuinely congratulatory. "You've worked hard to get here. I hope I get to see you in action soon."

Walden gave Arya's shoulder a proud squeeze. "Can you believe it, Luna? She hasn't even finished her first shift, and she's already making a name for herself. Marco and I have both watched her spar. She's really talented, and she never backs down."

Marco nodded, beaming. “She reminds me a little of you, Alpha Queen. Same stubborn streak."

Della joined in, giving Talia a soft nudge. "You've set a high bar for the pack's warriors. So get ready because everyone will want to impress you."

I squeezed Talia's hand. “They're right. You're the one everyone looks up to now."

Then, all of a sudden, Arya blurted out, "Luna, do you think I could spar with you sometime?"

"We just got home, Arya," I said. "At least wait until next week before challenging my mate."

"I just wanted to continue learning," Arya explained.

Walden laughed, his deep voice projecting out across the courtyard. "Besides, Arya, you should finish your first shift before you try to take our Alpha Queen."

Arya ducked her head, embarrassment and excitement warring on her face. "Of course. I...I didn't mean..."

"It is okay, Arya. There will be plenty of time for sparring,” Talia said in a soft voice, and Arya visibly relaxed.

"Alright, everyone, back to your duties," I called out to the crowd. "We'll meet tomorrow morning to get a full report on the pack and what happened while we were away."

Chapter 385

Talia's POV

When the crowd started to leave, Arya lingered, looking back and forth between Nolan and me. My wolf gave a tense huff, and I could already tell what she was thinking. She still hadn't moved past Maggie's failed attempt to take Nolan from us.

'I know what you're thinking,' I said before she could speak, but she kept going anyway.

'She's just like Maggie,' my wolf grumbled. 'She's watching him like he's the moon. We should keep an eye on her.'

'Arya's just a young, impressionable warrior,' I said. 'It makes sense for her to admire a strong Alpha.'

'There's a thin line between admiring someone and wanting them,' my wolf huffed.

Nolan nudged me gently. "Don't worry. I only have eyes for you."

“I have no idea what you're talking about,” I said, laughing.

"Yes, you do," he chuckled, leaning in to kiss me.

I watched Arya walk into the packhouse, her head held high, other warriors gathering around her. My wolf relaxed, but I told myself to remain alert. We didn't need another Maggie.

'If she crosses the line this time, kick her out of the pack immediately,' my wolf said. 'You don't have to remind me. I won't hesitate,' I replied.

Nolan and I walked to the pack house. The house was just as I remembered it, not as extravagant as Silverfang's but still warm and cozy in its own way. When we reached our suite, Annie practically bounced with excitement, and Clara stood at the door with her.

Clara hugged me so tight I couldn't breathe. "Welcome home!" she said, her voice full of relief and happiness.

I laughed. "I missed you too, Clara.”

When Clara let go, Annie hugged my waist and giggled.

"Welcome home, Luna!" Annie said gleefully.

"You've grown taller," I said, ruffling her hair.

Annie bounced on her toes. "Are you going to stay for a long time this time?"

"I'm staying for a long time," I said.

Annie grinned. "Clara's been taking care of me. She even arranged training, and sometimes she lets me help cook."

Clara let out a fake groan. "Help is a strong word."

“Hey! I helped make the bread last night,” Annie said.

Clara rolled her eyes, but she was still smiling. "Cook? You mean burn the food."

Annie stuck out her tongue. "I only burned the bread once!" She glanced at me, a little shy. "I'm still learning."

"Honestly, it's been nice. I never thought I'd have a little sister," Clara said.

"Thank you, Clara,” I said. "I worry about Annie every day, but you've done more than I could have hoped."

Clara shrugged, pretending to be modest. "She makes the kitchen more fun. She keeps me on my toes."

Annie piped up, "She makes the best soup, too!"

I was relieved to see how well they got along. I knew I could never be her father, but

I was happy to give her a home where she was wanted and loved. Clara and Annie excused themselves to complete dinner preparations.

From the kitchen, Clara's voice floated out. "Annie, don't you dare sneak some of the pudding before dinner!"

Annie giggled in reply. "Too late!"

Finally, it was just Nolan and me in the dining room. “Looks like it's just us now," he said. “It has been a long day, hasn't it?”

"Yes, I can't wait to take a proper bath,” I said. I had plans to sit in the bathtub until I turned into a prune.

"You look relieved when you see Annie," Nolan said. "Did you think she was being mistreated?"

"Of course, not. I was worried about Annie. After losing both her parents, I wasn't sure how she'd cope, but I'm glad she's fitting in,” I said. "It's really good to be back."

Nolan reached for my hand. "It's strange, isn't it? Coming back after everything."

"I was worried it wouldn't feel like home anymore."

Nolan gave a reassuring smile. "Bloodmoon will always be your home."

And Bloodmoon did feel like home, even more than Silverfang now. I was wrapped in the warmth of the people who had become my second family. It was a new beginning.

"Are you tired?" Nolan asked, bringing me out of my thoughts. "We can go back to the bedroom to rest."

“I was,” I said and then smiled mischievously at him, "until I met your biggest fan.” Nolan raised an eyebrow in surprise. "Don't tell me you're jealous?"

My wolf perked up, full of smugness and mischief. 'Of course we are,' she said. 'He didn't have to shake her hand.'

"Maybe I am," I responded seductively as I caressed his chest. "What are you going to do about it?"

Nolan grinned, slipping his arms around my waist. He pulled me closer to him. “I'll just have to show you who I belong to, my Alpha Queen.”

I leaned in to kiss him, but we were interrupted by an awkward cough. Clara was at

the door, the maids behind her bearing armfuls of steaming dishes.

I jumped back, my face hot. Nolan just laughed, completely at ease. "Dinner's ready," Clara said.

I moved to my seat at the table. Clara and Annie set the table with familiar dishes: roast chicken, fresh bread, Clara's famous soup, and a dozen other dishes that filled the room with delicious aromas. My stomach rumbled loudly, and Nolan stroked my thigh under the table, making me almost forget about my hunger.

"Eat first,” he whispered with a wink. "We can finish our conversation later."

Chapter 386

Talia's POV

We hurried to our room after dinner. I grabbed Nolan's shirt and yanked him in. He laughed and came after me. I could see he'd been waiting for this for a long time.

Clara must have cleaned up while we were gone. The bed was made, the pillows were super fluffy, and the floor spotless. Fresh roses lay by the window. I grinned and absorbed it all.

"Clara went all out," I said, looking around.

"Are you actually giving me a room tour right now?" Nolan teased.

“Perhaps,” I said, and grinned. "I ate too much. I got to walk it off."”

I touched the dresser and wandered around. My wolf liked things clean, and it was good to know that while we were away our place would be looked after.

I opened the bathroom door and expected to just see a clean bathroom. Instead, I was struck by a pleasant floral scent. The tub was filled and steaming, pink petals floating on the water.

I looked back at Nolan and asked, "Did you have Clara do all this?

Nolan smiled, looking proud. "Yeah, it was a surprise to you. I thought you'd like a bath after today."

I walked over and pushed him gently into the bathroom. There was warmth and sweet smells all around us. "You're really going all out, huh?

"I can go bigger if you want," he said, suddenly low and flirty.

"I'd like to see that, my mate," I teased, already unbuttoning his shirt and tossing it aside. I hurried out of my own clothes, wanting to feel him close.

Nolan watched me for a second, eyes trailing up and down. He moved closer, his hands on my hips, and he turned me so that my back was against his chest. He leaned in, breathing me in at his favorite place on my neck.

I pulled away and walked over to the tub. I dipped a toe in to test the water. At first it was hot, then it was amazing. I slipped in slowly. "Are you getting in or am I enjoying this alone?"

Nolan took his jeans off and threw them down, then climbed in behind me. The tub was barely big enough for the both of us. He pulled me back against his chest, his arms around my waist.

We just sat in the water for a bit, letting the heat do its thing. My head rested on his shoulder, eyes shut, muscles finally unwinding. I had to remind myself to take a bath every day.

I took his hand and put it on my heart. Petals clung to my skin, and his fingers

moved smoothly over them.

"What's on your mind?" Nolan asked.

"I'm not always worrying about something," I replied. "I just want you close. That's all."

He began to rub my shoulders. I sighed and leaned into him. His thumbs worked up my neck and down my back. "That's perfect," I muttered.

Nolan's hands then slid up my sides, over my chest, pinching my nipples. I shivered, then reached between us, and found him hard already.

"Looks like you're enjoying it too," I said.

Nolan turned me around and pulled me onto his lap. I wrapped my legs around him, and he kissed me deep and hungry. Nolan slowly slid into me as I arched into him.

He almost pulled completely out before slamming back into me, causing me to moan. Water splashed, petals swirling everywhere as he pistoned in and out of me. "You feel so good," he groaned.

"Harder," I growled.

"As you wish, Alpha Queen," Nolan said before he began slamming into me at a speed that had the water sloshing out of the tube. My hips matched his as the pleasure built up.

"Nolan!" I screamed as my climax hit and clung to him as I convulsed around him.

"Goddess, you're so tight," Nolan groaned as he continued to thrust through my climax. His nails dug into my waist as I felt he was close, so I continued rocking my hips into his until he came too, pulsing inside me.

"That was amazing," I said, my voice just a whisper.

Nolan kissed me hungrily as I felt him getting hard inside of me. "Let's try Moonfire again," he said as he slowly thrusted in and out of me.

I grinned. "You're insatiable."

After the second round, the water had become lukewarm, and I could barely stand. My wolf hummed happily inside of me. Nolan wrapped a towel around me and dried me off, then carried me to bed and slid in beside me.

"Was that good enough for my Alpha Queen?" Nolan teased.

"Yes, but I can always use more of your attention.

He chuckled. "And you call me the insatiable one?"

"Can you blame me? I have the best mate in the world," I grinned. "You did leave me a little sore though."

"You said harder," Nolan said, grinning. "And I was making sure to follow Leslie's orders."

I was so tired, sinking into the soft sheets and Nolan's warmth. I tried to stay awake just to enjoy the feel of his arms around me and being home.

"What do you mean?" I mumbled, already half asleep. "Leslie told you to make me sore?"

Nolan laughed and said, "No, but she said we should try harder to have a pup."

I giggled and snuggled into his chest. "That's a good idea. "Hopefully the Moon Goddess will bless us with a pup soon too."

Chapter 387

Talia's POV

Light poured in through our bedroom window, streaking the sheets with gold and heating my face. Waking up slowly, I stretched and groaned. My muscles were pleasantly sore from the night before and my stomach rumbled loudly. I checked the clock. It was already noon. Nolan's side of the bed was empty, and the sheets were cool. I pouted a little as I wanted round three.

'Food first and then find him,' my wolf said eagerly.

I got out of bed, pulled on a hoodie and sweatpants, and walked to the kitchen. The house was quiet except for some distant clattering and the smell of food coming from the kitchen. My mouth watered as I got closer, with the scent of beef stew and fresh bread getting stronger. When I turned the corner, I saw Della, Clara, and Annie deep in a debate.

"I'm telling you, it needs more chili!" Della insisted, planting her hands on her hips.

"If you add more spice, half the pack won't be able to eat it," Clara retorted, glancing at Annie for support.

Annie, flour dusting her cheek, shook her head as she kept a jar of dried chilies away from Della. "Miss Clara is right. If you put too many in, we won't be able to taste anything for days."

I laughed, surprising them. Della turned around with a sly grin. “Well, look who finally crawled out of bed! Late night?”

I blushed and rolled my eyes. “Good morning to you, too. I see you're all working hard to give the whole pack indigestion."

Clara smiled. “You missed breakfast, so we prepared lunch for you."

"We would have had it ready for you if we didn't have to start over," Annie said, cutting her eyes at Della.

"Spicy food is good for the soul," Della complained. "And besides, I didn't hear anyone complaining about the stew last week.”

"Because they all came to me," Clara retorted.

I grinned, poured myself some coffee, and sat down on a stool. "Where's Nolan? Did he leave to escape the chili debate?"

Della rolled her eyes. "He and Marco left early to check on the patrols and make sure everything's running smoothly. He asked me to remind you about the meeting at two."

“Great,” I said, taking a sip of coffee. "Nothing like a council meeting when you're hungry."

Clara ladled a bit of stew into a bowl and offered it to me. "Taste this. Tell us if it needs more chili."

I tasted it, enjoying the rich flavors and a little bit of heat. "It's perfect."

"I think you've gotten used to Leslie's cooking. There is no way that is good," Della said.

"Since you want it spicier, why not split the pot?"

Della's eyes lit up. "Yes! Let me have my fire, and everyone else can eat their bland stew."

Annie and Clara exchanged a look, then nodded. “Deal,” Annie said, moving to fetch another pot. “But you're eating every last bite of your version."

We worked together, splitting the stew and adding a big handful of chili to Della's part. Della bent over the pot and sniffed, her eyes almost watering from the spiciness.

As lunch finished cooking the kitchen began to warm and the smell of herbs filled it. I cut the bread, Clara chopped the parsley, and Annie washed the bowls.

When everything was ready we sat round the table. Della wasted no time in ladling the red hot stew into her bowl and taking a big bite. She coughed, waving a hand in front of her mouth, but grinning, tears in her eyes. “Now that's real food!"

Clara passed me a milder bowl. "You'll thank us later," she whispered.

I grinned, enjoying the comfort of a good meal with friends. "If Della bursts into flames, that's on her."

After lunch, Della and I cleaned up together, talking about all sorts of things. "Are you nervous about the meeting?" she asked as she scrubbed a pan.

"A little,” I said. "It always feels strange coming back, even though I know everyone managed fine without us."

She bumped my shoulder. "You worry too much. You need to be confident, Mrs. Alpha Queen."

We headed to the meeting room. The high-born wolves were already there: Arya, Marco, Walden, and a few others. Nolan sat at the head of the table with his dark hair falling into his eyes as he read a report. Arya sat nearby, watching Nolan. My wolf growled inside me. 'I don't like how she's looking at our mate.'

Della slid into a seat beside me, nudging my foot under the table. "You're staring," she muttered.

I pulled my gaze away from Arya and told myself she was nothing to worry about.

All talk stopped as Nolan stood, and everyone focused on him.

"Thank you for being here," Nolan began, his voice steady. "And thank you for protecting Bloodmoon while we were away. I know it wasn't easy, but I'm proud of all of you. Now, let's get down to business. How did Bloodmoon fare during the war?"

"We mostly did well," Marco answered. "A few of our warriors were injured and infected by mad rogues, but they're recovering well now, thanks to the antidote. The healers are still monitoring them closely."

"Following Alpha Henry's idea and Arya's implementation plan, we've created a new department to help recovering warriors," Walden added. "We're also including members who were born without wolves, so everyone feels included."

Nolan looked at Arya and said, "Good job on getting this done so quickly."

Arya smiled at that, her eyes gleaming. "Of course, Alpha."

My suspicions were heightened when I noticed that she was staring at Nolan once

more.

Nolan nodded. "This will make the pack stronger. Now, let's look at the requests."

Nolan and I handled requests from pack members that seemed like cakewalks from what we had to deal with at Silverfang. After thirty minutes, I glanced around the table and asked, "Is there anything else anyone wants to bring up?"

Before anyone else could answer, Della leaned forward, a mischievous glint in her eye. “Yeah, I have a question. When's the party starting?"

Chapter 388

Talia's POV

In my mind, my wolf could barely stop laughing. 'Della only cares about two things: parties and Marco,' she laughed.

I tried not to smile as I looked across the table at Della. She spun a pen between her fingers, obviously already thinking about the party.

"You know, maybe we should have the party tonight, and I will let you take charge,” I suggested.

Della dropped her pen as she looked at me in surprise. "Tonight? Are you serious? You're not playing with me, are you?"

Nolan's mouth twitched as he tried to keep a straight face. “Well, if the Alpha Queen says we need a party, then let's have a party,” he said.

Della didn't need any more encouragement. She squealed and sprang to her feet, her chair almost toppling behind her. "Oh, you will not regret this!" She turned to Marco, who was quietly sorting the meeting notes. "Marco, you're with me. We are going to throw the biggest, wildest, most unforgettable night Bloodmoon has ever seen!"

"Woah, woah, can we talk about this?"

"No!"

Before anyone could say anything, not that they would have, Della was already halfway out the door, pulling a confused Marco with her.

We wrapped up the meeting, and soon it was just Nolan and me. "What have we done?" Nolan asked. "You know she's going to go overboard."

"Yes, but it'll be fine."

He gave me a sideways look, part serious and part amused. "You aren't worried she'll get carried away?"

"Of course she'll get carried away," I said, laughing. "But that's part of the fun. Besides, Marco will keep her from burning the place down. Probably."

"That doesn't make me feel any better. I've heard about the Della parties. Isn't that why her father was banned from event planning?"

"Maybe...and that was years ago," I said.

Nolan groaned. "We're going to have so many hungover wolves tomorrow."

"I'll ask Clara to make something for that," I said, and Nolan just shook his head. Even though he pretended to be worried, I could tell he was excited too.

When we left the room, I noticed Arya down the hall. She swayed from side to side, as if she were waiting for someone. When she saw us, she quickly stepped forward and asked, "Alpha, may I say something? Alone?"

I was about to give them some space, but Nolan gently caught my wrist. "Whatever it is, you can say it in front of my mate."

Arya's cheeks turned red. She glanced from Nolan to me and back, twisting her hands nervously. "I...never mind. It's not urgent. I'll tell you later, Alpha."

She left before I could say a word, her footsteps quick as she hurried down the hall.

I watched her leave, feeling a twinge of curiosity. "That was strange. Any idea what she wanted?"

"No idea," Nolan responded.

That evening, the packhouse buzzed with excitement. Music played before the sun even set. Nolan and I took our time getting ready, but brushing my hair and smoothing my dress didn't help my nerves. Why was I even nervous?

'Because at the previous party, we were kidnapped,' my wolf said.

'That won't happen this time,' I said.

As we walked down the steps, the smell of food filled the air and laughter echoed from the plaza. Just past the courtyard, Annie and Clara waited. Annie wore a flowing blue dress that swished around her knees, and Clara wore a pale yellow skirt with a simple blouse.

"Look at you two!" I said, and Annie beamed. "You both look beautiful."

Annie twirled in her dress and said, "Thank you! Beta Della told us to dress up because it's a grand party for Bloodmoon."

"Do you really think the dress is nice?" Clara asked.

"Of course," I said. It wasn't like Clara to be unsure of herself.

“Beta Della also said there'd be games to help young wolves without mates to

meet,” Clara said bashfully. “She wanted everyone to have a chance."

I leaned in and whispered, "You look great, Clara. Don't overthink it."

Clara nodded, relieved.

“Don't wait for us,” I said. “Go have fun! Tonight is for you too."

Annie grabbed Clara's hand. "Thank you, Luna! You and Alpha have to dance too!” "We will," I promised as they hurried off, their laughter following them.

Nolan chuckled, watching them go. "Della really knows how to get people excited."

"She really has a gift," I said, linking my arm with his. "Come on. I can't wait to see what she's done to the plaza."

As we approached, the music grew louder. Its energetic and wild rhythm made even the most reserved people want to dance. The plaza looked completely transformed. Lanterns hung from every tree and pole, bathing the crowd in a golden glow. Platters of food lined the tables: cheeses, fruit, freshly baked bread, and roasted meats. Then, there was a makeshift bar. Wolves were already gathered around, ordering drinks.

Della hurried between the food tables and the dance floor, holding a clipboard with a whistle around her neck. She looked like she might burst with happiness. When she saw us, she waved her clipboard and ran over.

“Alpha! Luna!” she called, beaming. "You made it!"

"We wouldn't miss it for anything," I said, laughing.

Della could barely stand still. She was so excited. "Okay, listen up! I've set up dancing, drinking contests, archery, and even a three-legged race. The winner of each activity gets to pick someone, anyone, and make a wish. If the person agrees, they have to grant it. If they don't... well, I've got punishments ready. Tonight, no one leaves without having fun. Who knows? There might be a few new mates by the end of the night!"

"Sounds a lot like truth or dare with extra steps," Nolan said.

"What if someone refuses a wish?" I asked.

"No one's going to ruin the fun. If they try, I have a special jar of pickled eggs for them. Trust me, one taste, and they'll wish they hadn't refused," Della said with a wink.

I burst out laughing. "Only you would think of a punishment like that, Della."

At that moment, the music suddenly slowed, switching from a lively beat to a slow, sappy tune. Della's face crumpled in horror. "Marco!" she shrieked, wheeling around and sprinting toward the DJ booth. "That's the wrong song! You had one job!"

Nolan and I shared an amused look. "Remind me to never cross Della at a party," he said quietly.

We moved through the crowd, smiling and hugging everyone we met. We found two empty stools at the bar. The bartender was a shy young wolf, named Jamie, who was polishing glasses nervously.

"Hi Jamie. Get me an apple mojito," I said.

"Whiskey sour," Nolan added.

Jamie nodded and proceeded to make our drinks.

When he offered us our drinks, Arya stepped forward and grabbed them before we

could get them.

"Sorry, Luna. Sorry, Alpha. You can't drink those," she said.

"And why not?" I asked, confused.

Arya's lips curled into a mischievous smile. “Because you two are joining the

drinking contest!"

I stared at her, dumbfounded. "What?"

Chapter 389

Talia's POV

I stared at Arya, unsure if she was serious. "You're kidding, right?" I looked for any hint she was messing with me, but she only grinned wider.

"Della's orders," Arya said. "She said if Alpha and Luna want to be part of the pack, they have to play by the same rules as everyone else tonight."

Nolan chuckled, shaking his head. “Well, I suppose even the Alpha can't escape Della's party schemes."

I started to protest, but Arya was already calling Della over. Della hurried up with Marco right behind her. Her cheeks were red, her hair slipping out of its knot, and she looked happier than I'd seen her in a long time.

"Did Arya tell you?" she practically squealed. “You two are the guests of honor for the drinking contest! I want the whole pack to see the Alpha and Luna can still hold their own."

"I don't know about this," I said.

“Come on! Join the drinking contest!" Wolves nearby shouted excitedly.

The crowd started chanting, “Luna! Luna!” Their voices got louder, hands pounding on tables until I could feel the rhythm in my chest.

I gave in, laughing as I threw up my hands. “Alright, alright! I'll do it!" The crowd cheered so loud, my ears were ringing. Jamie quickly set up the glasses on the bar.

"Here's how it works," Arya said. "We each get ten drinks. Whoever finishes first wins. No skipping, no throwing out your drink, and if you pass out," she winked at Nolan, "you lose."

Walden leaned in from the side and called out to Nolan and me. "Arya's undefeated tonight! So, watch out!" He lifted his mug in salute, and everyone laughed.

Nolan gave Arya a skeptical look. "You're hiding a second liver, Arya?"

Arya shrugged, a small smile on her lips. "You'll see soon enough."

Before I could answer, Della rushed to my side, almost shaking with excitement. She turned to the crowd. "You don't know what you're in for! Talia helped the Alpha King brew wine before she could even shift!"

I groaned, blushing. “Della, what are you.....”

She cut me off, her eyes shining as she spoke to everyone. "Tonight, our Luna's going to show you how it's done. Arya doesn't stand a chance!"

The crowd laughed and clapped. Someone started chanting again, “Luna! Luna!” I grabbed Della's wrist and pulled her closer. "What are you doing? Father never let me drink any wine when I was a kid," I whispered.

"Yeah, but they don't know that," Della responded. "We have to keep the crowd excited."

"Ugh, just stop exaggerating and keep time," I said, playfully pushing her.

Della grinned and took a battered stopwatch from her skirt pocket. "Of course," she said.

Arya, Nolan, and I stood in front of the drinks. The crowd pressed in. Della climbed onto a crate and held the stopwatch high.

"On my mark!" she called out, her voice clear and strong. "Three... two... one... go!"

I picked up my first glass and drank. The liquor burned my tongue and throat. I coughed and blinked back tears while Arya and Nolan slammed their glasses down and grabbed the next. My eyes watered, but I kept going and took the second glass. It tasted even stronger, almost like medicine.

The crowd cheered us on from all sides.

"That's it, Luna!"

"Come on, Arya!"

"Alpha, don't let them show you up!"

After the third glass, the lantern light blurred at the edges of my vision. By the fifth, my stomach turned, and I almost gagged.

'Do you want me to take over? I will handle this in no time,' my wolf suggested. I could feel her competitiveness. She did not want to lose to Arya.

'They'll know it is you. We're just going to have fun,' I told her.

'Fine,' she huffed.

Arya was already halfway through her row and hardly stopped to breathe. Nolan's face turned red after his sixth drink. I reached for my seventh glass, but I swayed and my fingers slipped on the wet glass. It fell and spilled all over my boots.

Della hurried over and grabbed my arm to steady me. "Are you okay?" she whispered so only I could hear.

I laughed shakily. “I'm terrible at this. I give up." My cheeks burned with embarrassment, but I also felt relieved.

Della handed me a glass of water. "No shame in knowing your limits." She watched me closely as I drank, the cool water soothing my throat.

The crowd turned their attention back to Arya and Nolan. Arya wasn't smiling anymore; she was focused. Nolan's face was even redder now, and I wondered if he would make it.

Arya took her eighth glass while Nolan picked up his seventh. He paused, his eyes unfocused, but managed to drink it. Arya's hand stayed steady and her breathing was calm as she finished her ninth drink.

Nolan picked up his eighth glass, made a face, and set it back down. "I'm done," he said.

Arya smiled, grabbed her last two drinks, and finished them quickly. Della stopped the timer and shouted, "Arya wins!" The crowd cheered and clapped.

Arya steadied herself and asked excitedly, "Now I can make my wish, right?" "Yes, that's the rules," Della replied.

"Alpha, will you come with me to my first shift ceremony? It's in three days!"

The crowd went quiet. The first shift was a big deal, a ceremony for family or a fated mate. I remembered my own first shift. My father and Solon helped me through it. My wolf inside me bristled, upset that Arya would even ask.

Nolan opened his mouth, then closed it. He stared at Arya, unsure what to say.

"I don't have any family left. I want you there," Arya said, then looked straight at me.

A teasing challenge flashed in her eyes. “Luna Talia, you wouldn't object, would you?"

Chapter 390

Talia's POV

Before I could reply to Arya, Walden jumped in. "I'd be happy to go with you for your shift ceremony, Arya," he said warmly. "You've always been like a daughter to me."

But Arya shook her head. "Thank you, but I want Alpha Nolan with me." She then turned to me again. "Please, Luna. Won't you agree?"

Nolan stood stiffly beside me. I could tell he was uncertain. He felt responsible as Alpha, worried about me, and unsure what Arya really wanted. My mind raced. Was Arya testing us, or trying to come between Nolan and me?

'This little brat,' my wolf growled. 'You have to agree. Otherwise, it'll seem like we don't keep our promises.'

I forced a smile, even though I hated all of this. "I don't mind, and those are the rules," I finally said, trying to sound calm. "And I, for one, don't want any of Della's nasty eggs." I gave a weak laugh.

Arya relaxed, giving a small, grateful smile.

'You should say yes,' I told Nolan through our mate bond.

Nolan hesitated. I could feel he was torn between his duty as Alpha and his loyalty to me. He finally nodded, and Arya said happily, "Thank you, Alpha. Thank you, Luna!"

The tension in the crowd faded just slightly as people started talking again, but I could feel the pack watching us, eyes flickering in our direction. Near the drinks table, a woman leaned in to whisper urgently into Jamie's ear, and their glances kept darting from Arya to me. Two warriors exchanged uneasy looks behind folded arms, pretending to carry on their conversation but clearly straining to catch every word.

I heard someone mutter, "Did you see Luna's face?" while another voice answered, "Arya always was bold, but that's a new record."

Arya's request seemed to undo all the good Della had tried to do tonight. The pack was tense again, waiting to see if I'd lose my temper. I had to stay calm, even though I wanted to call Arya out for asking something so bold.

Noticing the pack members gossiping, Della frowned. "No, we're going to have a fun night, dammit," she muttered before climbing back onto the crate.

"What do you think you're doing? This party isn't over," Della yelled. "Jamie, keep the drinks coming. We've got more rounds to play. Or is everyone scared to keep going?"

A few pack members stepped forward to get the game going again while Marco played more music. I took another sip of my water before Nolan gestured toward the packhouse. I was fine with leaving. I wasn't in the mood to celebrate anymore

Once we were far from the party and the music was just a low hum, Nolan pulled me aside. "You don't look so good," he said, worried. "Are you alright?"

I laughed, trying to break the tension. "It's just the Bloodmoon Pack's drinks. They're strong enough to drop a moose."

He frowned and brushed my hair out of my face. "Maybe you should see a doctor. You look really pale."

I pushed his hand away and tried to joke. "I'm fine, really." He still didn't look

convinced, so I took his arm and led him away from the crowd.

We walked in silence, our boots crunching on the ground. After a while, Nolan spoke quietly. "I didn't want to say yes to Arya."

I stopped and squeezed his hand. “I know. I'm not mad at you."

He shook his head, looking embarrassed. "It was disrespectful to both of us. I felt awkward. Why did she put you on the spot like that?"

"It's okay, Nolan. As Alpha Queen and Luna, it is my job to guide the pack, keep the peace, and show everyone they can rely on me. The pack and Arya need to trust me, so if this is what she wants, I can't say no," I said. “Even if I am a bit jealous."

"I think she's planning something."

"Arya isn't planning anything I think. She's just a young woman looking for a daddy figure,” I said, though I wasn't sure I believed it. “Maybe that's what she wanted to talk about earlier."

He looked away and ran a hand through his hair. "Walden told me more about her past tonight. Arya's an orphan. She had no one. Her parents died just after they joined the Bloodmoon Pack. The warriors took her in, and she trained harder than anyone else. Walden noticed her because she beat half the warriors in the ring, even though she's so small. Eventually, he made her his deputy."

I saw Arya in my mind as a little girl, struggling to find her place. Now her request made sense. She wasn't trying to trick anyone; she had simply always had to fight for everything. Even my wolf, who had been suspicious of Arya, calmed down within me, and a sense of respect grew where there used to be mistrust.

Nolan squeezed my hand, his eyes gentle. "You're a good Luna, Talia. You always give people a chance even when it's hard."

My face flushed. “Don't give me too much credit. I'm still jealous, but I trust you, and

I want Arya to get the ceremony she deserves."

He pulled me into a hug, steadying me with his warmth. "Thank you."

I relaxed in his arms, letting the night air cool my face. "Tomorrow, when you help Arya, I'll wait outside the forest. I'll be there if you need me."

He pressed a kiss to my forehead and chuckled. "I only hope her shift ceremony goes smoothly... and that she doesn't give me too much trouble."