Barren Luna 401

Chapter 401

Talia's POV

I sat up quickly, rubbing my eyes to clear my mind. "I'm fine. Just tired, that's all."

"Alpha working overtime to get that heir," Della teased.

“It's not like that,” I said, my face heating up as I quickly changed the subject. "Where's Arya?" I asked.

Suddenly, there was a noise from the kitchen. Arya's voice called out, sounding a little nervous but determined. "Walden, I can handle this! You said I could do it myself tonight."

We drifted closer and peeked in through the doorway. Arya was searching the cabinets, moving pots out of the way. Clara was at a counter, chopping vegetables alongside Annie, while Walden supervised.

Arya's voice grew more urgent as pots clanged. "Clara, do we have any more thyme? Walden said it's the secret ingredient!"

Clara yelled back, "Check the top shelf! And move the mitten from the stove! You're going to catch it on fire!"

Arya shot a mock glare. "I'm not going to catch anything on fire."

"You're doing great, Arya. Remember, just like we practiced. Call me if you need anything," Walden said.

"If I mess up, it's your fault for teaching me," Arya said.

"You'll do fine. Just don't forget the extra beef!" Walden said as he was leaving the kitchen. "And if you burn anything, just call it 'smoky flavor.'"

Clara snorted without looking up. "That's not how flavor works, Walden."

Curious, I glanced at Walden as he joined us in the breakfast nook. "So, Arya was telling the truth when she said she could cook."

Walden puffed up. "Yes, she learned from the best."

Marco snorted. "The best? I remember your infamous stew with the mystery meat. Some of the warriors still talk about it."

I smirked. "Should we be worried?"

"Yes," Marco answered quickly.

Della folded her arms. "We shouldn't be eating anything she makes after what she did." Della was still holding a grudge.

'I don't blame her. You're too forgiving,' my wolf muttered.

"Come on, Della." Marco nudged Della with an easy grin. "You act like Arya's going to poison us."

“She just might," Della muttered.

“Lighten up, Della. If anything goes wrong, we'll just need some laxatives later," Marco said with a grin. Della tried to keep a straight face, but ended up cracking up.

Clara yelled from the kitchen, "Arya, that's too much rosemary!"

Arya defended her choices. "I like things bold!"

The kitchen turned into chaos. Arya and Clara argued over spices. Pans crashed. The sharp smell of rosemary and garlic filled the air, mixed with curses and yelps.

Nolan whispered, "Do you think we should help them?"

“I'm not going in there. I was already threatened with a butcher knife," Walden said.

"I'm worried they'll kill each other or burn down the kitchen before dinner," Marco said.

I laughed softly. "I only hope the food survives."

Even with all the chaos, the house smelled like beef, potatoes, and onions later. My stomach growled. Della tried to act cool, but finally gave in. "Fine, it does smell pretty good."

Marco grinned. "See? I told you everything would be fine."

After a few minutes, Walden glanced at the clock and stood. "Let's head to the dining hall and get settled. With how it's smelling, dinner should be ready soon.”

We left the breakfast nook, headed to the dining room, and waited for dinner.

Arya came in from the kitchen, carrying a steaming platter. Clara and Annie followed with salad, bread, and roasted vegetables. Arya set her dish down and grinned. "My specialty: beef and potato stew!" she said, eyes shining.

Della eyed Arya's dish and asked, "Should we say a prayer before eating?"

"Stop it, Della," I scolded lightly.

Annie giggled. "I think it smells wonderful."

Arya feigned offense. "Hey! I slaved over this. At least try a bite before you panic."

Arya watched as I took the first bite. The stew was rich. The beef was tender. The potatoes were perfect.

"Do you like it?" she asked.

I smiled after tasting it. "Honestly, it's awesome. The meat is so tender, and the potatoes are perfect."

Arya let out a breath. “Thank goodness. I was worried I messed it up!"

Everyone started eating and praising Arya. Even Della, who doubted her, began scarfing down the food after a few bites. "This doesn't fix everything, but this is a good start," she said.

"If you ever get tired of being a warrior, Arya, you could become a chef in the pack," Nolan suggested.

Arya shook her head, laughing. "I'll stick to fighting, thanks. Cooking is fun, but I belong on the battlefield."

Dinner was loud with laughter and stories. Nolan kept sneaking food onto my plate and ignored my glares. Marco told us about his last patrol. Della shared how a pup stole three apples from storage. Annie blushed when Arya praised her table setting. Clara sighed, glad everyone liked the food, even if she hadn't cooked it.

As everyone finished eating, Walden excused himself and returned a few minutes later, holding up a dusty bottle of wine. "I brought something special for tonight," he said with a grin. "It's from the last harvest festival. Only the best for Arya's first time cooking."

He poured wine for everyone. The red liquid caught the light and filled the room with

a sweet smell. Clara sniffed her glass and wrinkled her nose. "This smells stronger than I'm used to."

Marco lifted his glass. "All the better! To Arya's first feast."

We raised our glasses together.

"To Arya," I said as I lifted my glass. "And starting anew."

Arya grinned, lifting her glass, and the others echoed my words.

I took a sip, savoring the rich flavor of the wine. Then a sudden wave of nausea hit

me. My stomach twisted, and I immediately spat it out.

Chapter 402

Talia's POV

Red wine ran down my chin. The room got quiet. I wiped my mouth, my face flushed from embarrassment. I tried to smile. "I'm okay, really. Sorry."

The taste stayed, sharp and sour.

"Arya, you better not have poisoned us. Goddess help me, I'll take you with me," Della growled.

"I didn't do anything," Arya said. "I ate some too."

"Della, calm down. I am just a little nauseous," I said.

Clara rushed over and put a hand on my forehead. "Are you sure? You look pale."

"I'm fine, I promise." I laughed, even though I didn't feel like it. "I guess I just can't handle wine tonight."

I looked at Nolan. He tried to look calm, but I could see he was worried. "Are you sure you're okay?" he asked.

I nodded and said, "I think so. I don't think I'll be having wine for a while."

Through the mate bond, he said, 'You don't have to pretend in front of me. If you're not feeling okay, you can tell me. We can go to the hospital now.'

'I am serious, Nolan. I am feeling okay,' I responded.

Walden looked apologetic and confused. "I'm sorry," he said, "I checked the wine earlier to make sure it was safe."

"Check it again," Nolan ordered.

Walden picked up the bottle and checked it again, inspecting the liquid and sniffing it carefully. Then, he checked my wine glass. After a moment, he nodded. "Nothing is wrong with the wine. It wasn't tainted, and neither was Luna's glass."

“This is no one's fault,” I said firmly. “The wine's just not agreeing with me tonight. Everyone just relax and let's finish enjoying dinner."

Della raised an eyebrow. "But it is strange. Wine never bothered you before."

Marco shrugged. "She's right. You were fine a few days ago at the party."

Della leaned in, suddenly serious. "You should see a doctor after dinner. Sudden changes aren't normal."

Nolan, still frowning, spoke up. "Why wait? We should go now."

I could feel his worry through the mate bond. "Nolan, really, I'm fine. Let's finish dinner," I said.

"No, I think Alpha is right, Luna," Arya said. "You started to feel sick during the drinking contest, too."

My heart raced. What if something was wrong with me? I felt both scared and hopeful.

'You're healthy I can feel it. Don't let them worry you,' my wolf said, sounding sure. 'I'd know if something was wrong.'

Marco and Walden looked at each other. "If you say you're fine, we believe you," Marco said.

Nolan squeezed my hand. "I'm not trying to control you, Talia. I'm just worried."

I smiled at him. "I know. But I feel fine now. Really."

Suddenly, Della snapped her fingers, commanding everyone's attention. "Wait. When my mother was pregnant, she couldn't stand the sight or smell of alcohol. She also ate double her usual portions."

Everyone turned to look at me. Arya's eyes went wide. Clara's mouth dropped open. Annie gasped.

"Do you think Luna is pregnant?" Annie asked.

Nolan turned to me, hope flickering in his gaze. “Have you been keeping track?”

My cheeks burned. "I... I don't know. It's not impossible." I hadn't kept track of my cycle. I couldn't even remember the last time. I remembered being in heat, when I was most fertile and restless, wanting Nolan close. It was hard to ignore. 'Are we pregnant?' I asked.

'I...I don't even know,' my wolf said, sounding completely floored.

The table erupted with whispers and questions. Della bounced in her seat. "Forget the food! You have to get checked! Now!"

Marco grinned. “We'll have to start baby-proofing the pack house."

I met Nolan's eyes, searching for worry, but found only hope. Still, a knot formed in my stomach. What if I wasn't pregnant? What if it was just some strange illness?

My wolf's excitement bubbled up. 'No. We're not sick. There is no illness. We were never bitten by a mad rogue. We could have a pup! I hope it's true!'

Dinner ended in a blur of congratulations and laughter. As soon as we finished, Nolan was already leading me out. "Hospital. Now," he said, his eyes bright. "I'm coming with you both," Della said.

I shook my head and squeezed her hand. "No, Della, stay here with the others. I'll let you know as soon as we know anything."

She paused, looking concerned, then agreed. "You better. If you don't, I'll never let you hear the end of it."

Nolan and I quickly went to the hospital. We were ushered into an examination room. "This is not what I expected our evening would end," I said.

Nolan brushed his thumb over my knuckles. "Hopefully we'll have good news. No matter if you're pregnant or if you're actually sick, I love you, and we'll get this through together," he said before kissing me.

My wolf prowled the edges of my mind, restless and impatient. 'We are not sick,' she said firmly. 'So that means we have pups!'

'You don't know that,' I argued.

'Then, you tell me what else it could be,' my wolf responded.

The doctor walked in before I could respond. "Good evening, Luna. What brings you here tonight?" she asked as she listened to my heartbeat and took my temperature. "Liquor's been making me nauseous lately. I wanted to make sure I'm okay," I said. The doctor nodded. "We'll run some tests and let you know soon." She drew my blood and took a urine sample, then sent us to wait for the results.

"No matter what happens, you're what matters," Nolan said. "If we're not pregnant this time, we'll try again. There's no rush."

"Thank you," I said. The worry crept back in. "I want this, but I'm scared to hope."

He brushed a thumb across my cheek. "I know. We can hope together."

Time dragged. Footsteps echoed in the hall. Each one made my breath catch. My heart hammered as the door opened and the doctor walked in, holding a folder with my name. Her footsteps sounded like a countdown.

"Luna Talia," she said, stopping in front of me. "Your results are here."

Chapter 403

Nolan's POV

I sat next to Talia, holding her hand as the doctor walked in. My heart beat fast, but I kept my face steady. I had to be strong for her.

I nodded, trying to come across calm. "What did the results show, doctor?"

“Luna's symptoms, her increased appetite and sensitivity to alcohol, are both classic signs of pregnancy," the doctor explained. She smiled and added, "Congratulations -you're expecting."

Talia gasped. My heart jumped. My wolf howled, 'We have a pup, an heir!' For a moment, everything stopped. All those dreams of holding our child, teaching them to run, hearing Talia laugh, felt real now.

“Pregnant?” I said, barely believing it. "We're going to have a pup?”

The doctor's smile grew. "Yes, you're going to have a baby."

"How far along?" Talia asked.

"About two months," the doctor replied.

Talia's eyes were full of worry as she bit her lower lip. I reached up and brushed a stray tear from her cheek. "We'll do everything right from now on," I promised, my voice soft but resolute. The idea that our choices could affect the tiny lives within her womb filled me with amazement and a little fear.

"Did the liquor harm my baby? Will my baby be okay?" Talia asked.

"The small amount of liquor you consumed shouldn't have an effect on them," the doctor answered.

"Them?" I repeated. "What do you mean by them?"

The doctor smiled slyly. "Actually... Luna is pregnant with twins."

I looked at Talia, stunned. Twins. My mate was carrying our children, two of them. The world appeared to tilt as the doctor's words sank in.

All the stories I'd heard about twins, the double blessings and double trouble, rushed through my mind in an instant. My wolf was beside himself with excitement, pacing restlessly in my head. "Two pups, Nolan. Two!" I could hardly believe it. I kissed Talia's forehead and silently vowed to protect her and the children, no matter what. Tears filled her eyes as she covered her mouth. I pulled her into my arms and held her close.

The doctor continued. “Luna, you are now eating for three. You must avoid alcohol completely, get plenty of rest, and don't push yourself too hard. If you have any symptoms that bother you, don't hesitate to come to the clinic."

We thanked the doctor and walked out of the hospital, hand in hand. Talia leaned on me, her hair brushing my cheek. I wrapped my arm around her shoulders and pulled her close as we returned to the pack house.

Talia wiped her tears and smiled at me. I grinned back, but my chest tightened with guilt. I remembered how she'd gotten sick during the drinking contest with Arya. I should have made her see a doctor sooner. Talia caught my expression and raised an eyebrow.

"What are you blaming yourself for now?" she asked.

I chuckled lightly. "You know me so well."

"Well, what is it? It has to be serious to make you no longer excited about me being pregnant."

"I should have brought you in right away, after you felt sick during the drinking contest. I should have noticed the signs earlier," I admitted. "If I had, we would've known sooner, and then you wouldn't have gotten sick at dinner tonight."

"Stop it, Nolan, you didn't do anything wrong," Talia said. “Even if you had tried, I wouldn't have gone. I felt fine. We found out now, and that's all that matters."

I smiled at her, my heart full. "Thank the Moon Goddess for this blessing."

Inside, Della, Annie, and Clara were waiting anxiously in the main room. As soon as they spotted us, they hurried over, questions tumbling out.

"Well?" Clara demanded. "What did the doctor say?"

"It was a good report," Talia said.

"Oh come on, Talia. Don't keep us in suspense." Della demanded.

Talia grinned, cheeks glowing. "We're having twins."

Clara pressed her hands to her heart and said, "Thank the Goddess for this blessing! I have to make sure your meals are more nutritious moving forward." Della squealed and hugged her. "That's wonderful! I told you so." "Told me what?"

"I told you between the two of us you would be pregnant first," Della said with a smirk.

"Now, that just means you and Marco need to work harder," Talia teased, and for the first time, Della seemed bashful.

Annie pressed her ear to Talia's belly. "Can I hear them yet?" she asked.

Talia laughed, shaking her head. "Not yet. They're too small, but you'll be able to hear them soon."

Della and Clara started asking right away, "What will you name them? Do you think they'll be boys or girls?"

Annie chimed in. "Maybe you'll have one of each!"

I smiled, happy for Talia as excitement pulsed around us. But soon I noticed her shoulders sag and a yawn escaped her.

'Our mate needs to rest. She can answer questions tomorrow,' my wolf said, and I agreed.

I laid a gentle hand on her back. “Alright, ladies. I'm sorry for interrupting, but Talia needs to rest now. The babies need it, too. Della, can you..."

"I'm already on it. I will let everyone know the good news," Della said. "Good night, you two, and congratulations again.”

Talia smiled at me, thankful. I took her upstairs. She changed and climbed into bed. I pulled the blanket over her, smoothed her hair back, and kissed her forehead. Talia was already falling asleep before I got into bed.

"Goodnight, love," I whispered, pressing one more kiss to her forehead.

Chapter 404

Nolan's POV

When I woke the next morning, Talia was still asleep next to me. Her hand rested protectively over her belly. I watched her, feeling grateful. I thanked the Moon Goddess for Talia and our twins.

I thought about everything that brought us here. The hard times, the wins, and all the times Talia kept me steady. My mind flashed back to the first days when I didn't know if I wanted to trust her or even like her. I remembered the night I realized Talia was my mate and how I didn't know if I wanted to be hers. To be here now, to have this quiet, felt like a gift I didn't deserve. I swore again I'd protect her and our kids, no matter what.

My wolf stirred within me, his pride and affection mingling with my own. 'She's perfect,' he murmured, sounding softer than usual. 'We are lucky.'

'Far luckier than we deserve,' I agreed.

Marco reached out to me through the mind link. "Congrats, Alpha. It's about time you gave us some good news."

I smiled, careful not to wake Talia. "Thanks, Marco. I still can't believe it."

"Della already wants to spoil those pups," Marco said. "But seriously, stay with Talia for the next few days. You two deserve the downtime. Della and I will handle pack business. I'll let you know if anything big happens."

I felt relieved. "Thanks, Marco."

He laughed. "You can thank me for stopping Della from coming over at sunrise. She almost dragged me out of bed last night to see Talia, but I told her to let you both rest."

I laughed. "You're the best Beta ever."

“Tell me something I don't know,” he joked, and the connection faded, leaving me with gratitude for my friend and Beta.

Talia woke up and looked at me, surprised. "You're still here?" she asked sleepily.

I leaned closer, kissed her gently, and said, "Marco's taking care of the pack. I'm off- duty for a few days to focus on you."

She smiled wide. "Really? That's the best news."

I kissed her forehead and lips. "I mean it. You and the twins are my whole world now."

She turned to me, grinning. "Well, I hope you're ready. I don't think the twins are going to make things easy."

I kissed her and ran my hand over her waist. She slipped her hand into my boxers and stroked me. I bit her neck, ready to pull her close. Then Talia laughed, wriggled out of my arms, her cheeks red and her eyes full of mischief.

"Hold on," she teased, pressing her palm to her belly with exaggerated seriousness. "The twins are hungry. Food comes first this morning."

I groaned, "You're not playing fair. I'm going to have to take a cold shower because of you."

Talia laughed as she got out of bed and said, "Go take a cold shower, Alpha. I'l meet you downstairs."

She went into the closet to change, leaving me happy and frustrated. I went to the bathroom, stripped, and turned the shower as cold as possible. The water killed any leftover lust and sleepiness.

'Why couldn't we have her and then breakfast?' my wolf grumbled. Though I agreed, I knew it was for the best that we didn't push it.

'We both know we would not have stopped until late afternoon or even dinner,' I responded. 'She needs to eat. We can have fun later.'

My wolf huffed but did not argue.

Before I even walked into our personal dining hall, I could smell pancakes and bacon. Clara had made a huge breakfast. There were eggs, bacon, sausage, pancakes, fruit, and pitchers of water and juice all over the table. Talia was already sitting down, looking both amused and a little overwhelmed as Clara handed her a glass of juice.

"Okay, you're about as bad as Della," Talia said. "She has been bugging me all morning about eating."

"And she's right," Clara said, adding food to her plate. "I spoke to the doctor, Luna. You need to eat more now even if you don't feel like eating. You're eating for three!"

Talia gave me a look as I sat down next to her. "Isn't this a bit much?"

Before I could respond, Clara cut in and said, "Not for someone carrying twins. You need to be strong and healthy, and it's my job to make sure that you are. So, please don't fight me on this, Luna."

Talia looked at me for help, but I grinned and grabbed a fork. "Better listen to her. Doctor's orders."

She rolled her eyes but grinned as she put some fruit on her plate. "If I eat all this, you'll have to roll me back to bed."

I leaned in, voice low so only she could hear. "Guess I'll have to carry you back to bed, then."

She laughed. "You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"Of course I would, and you would too," I responded. "You have no idea the things my wolf wants us to do to you right now."

Talia blushed and said, "Hush and eat your food."

We ate together while the pack chatted in the kitchen and hallways. People popped

in to say congrats, but Clara kept them away so Talia could relax. I poured her more juice and gave her some meat and pancakes, and she smiled at me.

After a few bites, Talia looked at me. "So what's the plan now? Are you going to work now?"

"No, remember, I'm on vacation," I said.

"Okay, what's the plan for today then, Mr. Alpha-on-vacation?"

Chapter 405

Talia's POV

Nolan flashed a grin at me. "We have a lot of work to do for the babies," he announced, his tone both serious and excited. "We need to start buying supplies, decorate the nursery, or maybe even build a playground near the packhouse."

I couldn't help but smile and roll my eyes while finishing my juice. “Nolan, I'm just two months along," I said, giving him a playful look."You're getting way ahead of yourself."

He didn't even flinch, his grin only growing. "That's exactly why we should start early. If we have time, we can prepare everything carefully and not have to rush." He sounded so sure, like he was planning a mission, not just getting ready for babies.

I felt a rush of warmth at how excited he was. Only Nolan could turn something simple into an adventure. 'He is right. We should prepare early,' my wolf agreed.

"All right," I said, giving in. "Where do we start?”

“Shopping,” he said, his voice suddenly lighter, as if he'd been waiting for my agreement. “As soon as you finish eating.”

I pouted. "This is really too much food."

"You don't want it to get cold. Then, Clara will have to remake everything and probably give you more."

That was all I needed. I started eating fast.

The drive to Fangvale was quiet. It felt peaceful, the kind of calm you only get with someone who knows you. Nolan hummed off-key. I looked at him, surprised and proud at how much he'd changed. There was a time not long ago when people would run from his glare, when his temper kept even the boldest wolves at a distance. The Alpha everyone once feared was about to be a dad, and he wanted to get it right.

'As he should,' my wolf said. 'Having pups changes everyone.'

When we pulled into the market's parking lot, Nolan turned the car off and handed me a folded piece of paper. "Here," he said. "I made a list last night after you fell asleep."

I took the paper and looked at it in surprise. The list was neat and color-coded, packed with things like bottles, diapers, cribs, baby monitors, toys, and books. Nolan had even added notes about the safest brands and drawn cute little pictures next to the sections for nursery décor and playground gear.

I stared at him, then back at the list. "You did all this... last night?"

He looked a little sheepish, but proud. "I want us to be ready," he said. "I watched a bunch of videos online and read some parenting blogs. I hope it's not overkill."

I felt a wave of affection for him. My wolf pressed closer, clearly approving. It was strange to think the Alpha who once scared everyone now stayed up late reading about baby wipes and crib safety.

I nudged him with my shoulder, smiling. "You're going to be a great father, you know that?"

He grinned, the tips of his ears turning red. "And you're going to be an amazing mother."

Even my wolf preened at that, stretching lazily in my chest.

We got out of the car and stepped onto the busy market path. Right away, I could feel eyes on us. Some even bowed to us as we walked past. That left me confused.

'Have you forgotten?' my wolf asked, amused. 'We are the Alpha Queen. They should bow to us.' With everything going on, I didn't realize I had completely forgotten.

Being Alpha Queen was still new to me, and sometimes I forgot what it meant. People expected a lot from me now. I was supposed to be strong, kind, and set a good example. Everyone looked to me for answers or comfort, watching how I handled everything.

Nolan's hand rested gently on my back, bringing me out of my thoughts. He leaned

in, his voice low just for me. "We can go back if this is too much."

"No, no, I am okay. Just wasn't expecting this kind of response," I said.

People from all different packs nodded or greeted us as we passed.

"Congratulations, Alpha. Alpha Queen," someone called politely. Another woman smiled and said, "We're all wishing you a safe pregnancy."

"Thank you," I replied. Nolan nodded, looking proud but humble.

Someone else teased, "Shopping for baby clothes already?"

Nolan grinned. "Of course. I need to keep the Queen happy."

The market was busy, but people were kind everywhere we went.

Nolan guided me through the crowded stalls, double-checking his list. At one booth,

he asked, "Which baby soap would you trust for a newborn?"

The vendor replied, "Alpha, the chamomile one is gentle. A lot of first-time parents pick it."

A mother from another pack added, "Don't forget to get plenty of burp cloths. You'll thank me later."

Nolan nodded and wrote it down. Watching him listen and open up made me smile. Not everyone saw this side of him. He was gentle, careful, and all in. For a moment, doubts crept in. Was I ready for all this? Could I measure up as a mother, as Alpha Queen, the way everyone seemed to expect?

'Worry about that later. You are to enjoy today,' my wolf scolded.

We finally reached the biggest baby store. It had big glass windows and murals of wolf pups playing in wildflowers. Balloons moved in the breeze outside. Nolan opened the door for me. Inside, it smelled like new fabric and something sweet. Before I could look around, a woman in a blue dress hurried over. Her eyes were bright with excitement. She looked me up and down, hands clasped in front of her. "Alpha Queen Talia!" she said, her voice ringing out. "We've been waiting for you."

Chapter 406

Talia's POV

"How did you know we were coming?" I asked. Word couldn't have spread that fast.

"Beta Della contacted me with the news of your pregnancy and asked me to prepare enough baby supplies in advance," the manager explained as she gestured for us to come inside.

I blinked, surprised. The thought of Della thinking ahead made me feel warm inside. She always seemed to know what people needed before they did. 'She's our Beta. She should know what we need,' my wolf said.

Nolan hovered close, trying to look confident as he gave the manager our carefully color-coded list. The manager looked it over, her eyes going wide.

"I see Alpha is taking his role as a father very seriously," the manager said with a laugh before looking up at us. "Let's get started. We'll go step by step so you won't miss a thing."

We started with the cribs. It felt like the crib aisle would never end, with so many choices and colors everywhere. Excitement and a bit of anxiety bubbled up as I checked out each crib, letting my fingers

brush over a plain white one before I stopped to admire a cute mint green crib. “We still don't know if they're boys or girls," I said, looking at Nolan.

Nolan didn't hear me as he was completely focused, checking hinges, reading safety labels, and measuring widths with his hands. "This one's sturdy, but the corners are sharp," he said.

The manager joined in, saying, "That one's great for twins. You can lower the sides and turn it into toddler beds."

I kept second-guessing every choice. The pressure to get everything right made my thoughts spiral. What if I chose the wrong thing? Would my babies be

uncomfortable? Was I risking their safety? Beneath it all loomed the real fear: could I truly be both a good mother and a strong leader, with so many counting on me?

"What if the color's wrong? Or is it too small?" I wondered out loud.

"We can always change the color later," Nolan responded.

"Yes, we can swap out to whatever color you want," the manager advised.

"Let's just focus on making sure they're safe," Nolan said as the manager led us to two blue cribs.

"These are our most popular," she said. "Blue works for any baby, especially periwinkle blue."

I smiled, picturing our babies sleeping side by side. Nolan asked, "What do you think?"

"I think they're nice."

"Then, let's get them," Nolan said.

Next up was baby clothes. There were so many options, like onesies with clouds, soft pajamas, and tiny hats and mittens. I picked up a yellow romper with little wolf cubs stitched on the front. “Look how cute this is!” I said, holding it up for Nolan.

Nolan took the onesie from me and began evaluating it. He checked the tag, pulled on sleeves to test the stretch, and rubbed stuff against his cheek to check softness. “This one's good for summer, but this lining feels rough,” he said. "This could potentially irritate their skin."

Nolan began to go through all the onesies in a frenzy, checking from the fabric to the zippers. I tried to stop him from grabbing too many nearly identical onesies. "We can have other styles," I told him.

"These are the best ones for our pups," he argued.

My wolf joked, 'Leave him be. We can always take everything back with Della. Let him enjoy it.'

I watched Nolan fill the cart with soft cotton, loose knits, and cozy sleepers. He even found matching hats: one with little wolf ears and another with a moon. I just let him go for it, happy to see him so excited.

Then came the accessories: diapers, wipes, bottles, pacifiers, and soft blankets everywhere. The manager came over and began making recommendations.

"These bottles are great if you want glass instead of plastic, but both are safe,” she said, picking up two off the shelf. "And slow-flow nipples are perfect for newborns because they make less of a mess." She handed Nolan a hypoallergenic salve. "Good for sensitive skin, especially if your little ones shift early."

Nolan scrolled through reviews on his phone. "This teether looks sturdy," he said, holding up a tiny bone-shaped toy.

"You have a good eye, Alpha Nolan. That is a popular item for its sturdiness," the manager stated.

We compared strollers and carriers, tried out a few car seats, and checked how heavy the playpens were. Nolan checked safety ratings on baby monitors and picked one with night vision and extra cameras. “Can't be too careful,” he said.

"You act like you won't have the babies in our bedroom for the first year or so," I teased.

"You know what, you're right,” Nolan said.

As he was about to put the monitor back, I grabbed it and put it in the cart. If we had the babies in our room the entire time, we would have no downtime.

After two hours, our cart overflowed with supplies, the pile threatening to topple with every step. I stared at it, half amused, half exhausted. "There's no way all of this will fit in the car," I said, a tired laugh escaping.

"It's all taken care of. I'll have everything sent to the pack house tomorrow morning. You two can focus on getting home." I felt a wave of relief wash over me. "You're a lifesaver," I told her, my voice full of gratitude. Nolan squeezed my hand. "Della really thought of everything,” he said. I nodded, feeling thankful for both of them.

After checking out, I thanked the manager again before leaving. We were walking to the car when Nolan suddenly stopped and turned to me. "Hold on, I think we missed something."

"What now? Haven't we bought enough to last through their first three birthdays?"

Chapter 407

Talia's POV

Nolan shook his head then chuckled. "Solon and Leslie, we haven't told them about the pregnancy yet."

I suddenly felt guilty. With everything going on, the shopping, picking out baby stuff,

I forgot to tell Solon. I told myself I'd do better next time.

"You're right. I'll reach out to Solon now," I said.

As we sat in the car, bags of tiny clothes and toys swinging between us, I reached out to Solon through our mind link. His presence buzzed in my mind, warm and instantly familiar. 'Talia? Is everything okay?'

'You know, not every time I call it's bad news,' I teased.

'You still didn't answer my question.'

'Everything's fine,' I replied. 'Actually, better than fine. I have news.'

'Alpha Geoffrey is no longer an Alpha?' Solon guessed.

'That would be a miracle, but no, Nolan and I are expecting our pup,' I responded.

There was a pause, then a wave of joy hit me through the link. 'That's amazing! Leslie's going to freak out. How far along are you?'

'Two months,' I said.

'And is it...?'

'Twins,' I said, cutting him off. 'Still no clue about the genders.'

Solon's laughter echoed through the link, bright and loud. 'You really outdid us, little sister. Let me guess. Nolan's already bought out the baby store?'

I couldn't help but laugh. 'He's bought so much, I have no idea where we're going to put it all. The manager promised everything would be delivered tomorrow.'

'He's even more over-the-top than I was,' Solon teased. 'But hey, I get it. You want everything perfect for your kids.'

'How are you and Leslie doing?' I asked.

'Leslie's good. She says the baby's kicking nonstop, day and night, our daughter apparently has opinions about everyone's sleep schedule. I think this kid's ready to take on the world before she's even born,' Solon replied, sounding half-amused, half-exhausted.

'A daughter who already runs the house before she's arrived. That sounds about right for this family,' I said.

'Don't I know it.' I could hear the smile in his voice. 'Leslie says she can already tell she's going to be just as stubborn as her, and I've stopped arguing with her about it, because she's usually right.'

'And you? How are you holding up?'

'I'm healing. Slower than I'd like, some days. There's still a lot I can't do yet, things I used to take for granted, but I'm getting there. Leslie's been amazing through all of it. With her support, I'm feeling stronger every day,' Solon said.

The image of Solon and Leslie, their little family growing, made me smile. 'Are you two coming to my birthday party?'

Solon hesitated, his regret clear even over the link. 'We might not make it, Talia. It's a long trip and, with Leslie being so far along...'

'I get it,' I said softly. 'Just knowing you're both okay is enough for me. But I'm still expecting that present you promised.'

He chuckled. 'Deal. I'll send something epic. Take care of yourself, Talia.'

I let the mind link fade, but Solon's happiness stayed with me, warm and steady in my chest.

"I'm assuming it was a good chat," Nolan said.

"He's thrilled," I told Nolan. "And apparently, you're way more dramatic than he ever was when he found out that Leslie was pregnant."

Nolan tried to suppress a smile. "I find that hard to believe."

Nolan started the car. Exhaustion and accomplishment settled over us as we pulled away from the baby store. The bags rustled in the backseat, a quiet promise of what was coming.

Nolan broke the silence. "I am not going back to work until after the birthday party. There's still the nursery to finish, and I'll drown in paperwork if I don't go back to work soon."

"Why are you acting like this will take forever? Will all your excitement, you're going to be three-quarters done with the nursery by tomorrow," I said. Nolan opened his mouth to argue, but I continued. "You know I'm right."

"I have no idea what you're talking about," he said, entirely serious, which made me laugh.

"You know, Marco probably never thought you'd actually take a full break."

Nolan shrugged. "If he didn't want me to, he shouldn't have offered," he said. "Marco's my Beta. Helping me is literally his job. And honestly, we need all the help we can get to prepare for the birthday party."

I groaned, rubbing my temples. "Honestly, just thinking about this party makes me tired. Can't we keep it simple? Having our pack there is enough."

"You're not just Luna now, Talia. You're the Alpha Queen. Other Alphas are going to want to show up, pay their respects, make alliances stronger, you know how it goes," Nolan said.

I sighed. "Yeah, I know. I wish things could be simple for once. One party where I don't have to think about who's watching who, or who's testing who."

"Things will be. We just have to get through a few more hurdles." He reached over and squeezed my hand. "This one included."

I nodded, grateful for Nolan's support, but unease twisted in my stomach. Geoffrey would show up, especially now that I was pregnant. He would cause drama, probably claim that I'm unfit to be Alpha Queen due to the pregnancy.

'Then, we kick him out before he causes any problems,' my wolf suggested. 'One look and he goes home.'

I wished it was that easy. Geoffrey was conniving. He would have a plan. I could only hope he'd behave this time, but even as I thought it, I didn't believe it.

Chapter 408

Talia's POV

A week later, I woke up to find Nolan not in bed, but in the nursery, switching out the crib blankets for even softer ones. He was focused, smoothing a pale blanket over the mattress. I stopped in the doorway, arms crossed, just watching him fuss over every corner and adjust the pillow. There was something so sweet about how careful he was. I wondered how long he'd been at it.

'Before sunrise,' my wolf yawned. 'He's been at this for days. You'd think he was the one who's pregnant, the way he keeps getting the den ready.'

The nursery was already so organized it could have been in a magazine. Every piece of furniture was in place. A rocking chair was placed by the window, and a small bookshelf held picture books and stuffed animals. The dresser drawers were full of neatly folded baby clothes, and the shelves above the changing table were arranged with diapers and lotions.

"How many blankets do you think one pup needs?" I teased.

He spun around, holding the old blanket to his chest as if he'd been caught. "These feel nicer," he said, a little defensive. "The store just got them in, so I wanted to switch out the ones we bought before."

"Nolan, that's the fifth time this week. If you bring home another blanket, we'll have to start giving them away as party favors."

"I just want everything to be ready," Nolan said.

"We already have enough supplies. If you keep going, the nursery will start to look like a store."

Nolan looked sheepish, glancing from the blanket to me. "You never know what we'll need."

I entered the nursery and took the blanket out of his hands. I folded it and placed it back in the crib.

"I appreciate how thoughtful you are, but you're not allowed to shop for our pups again until after they're born," I said.

"I'll try to restrain myself until then."

"Thank you," I said, and couldn't help hugging him.

'You know he's still going to go,' my wolf said, amused. She was right. Nolan kept looking at the crib, probably thinking about what else he could fix. I'd have to warn the manager not to let him buy anything else.

After breakfast, Nolan and I went out for our usual walk in the rose garden.

"What do you want to do today?" Nolan asked.

"Just enjoying the quiet is enough for me. We haven't had time to relax lately. I want to enjoy every minute," I said.

We walked in silence, just enjoying the morning.

Everything was peaceful until loud arguing broke the silence somewhere up the path.

"I'm not wearing that! That's ridiculous," Arya shouted. "Do you know what the pack will say if I wear this?"

Della didn't back down. She stood in front of Arya, holding up a dress. "They're going to say you look hot."

"No! I look like a harlot!" Arya countered.

"Look, you need to wear something nice for Luna's birthday. Armor just isn't going to work, Arya!"

Arya scowled, arms crossed. "I have no idea what to wear to a formal event, but I know what not to wear." She pointed at the dress in Della's hand with disgust. "That barely counts as a dress. If I tripped or the wind blew, everyone would see my ass!"

"You haven't even tried it on yet," Della argued.

"I don't need to because I'm not wearing it!" Arya shot back.

Nolan was already struggling not to laugh. "This should be good," he said and I bit back a laugh of my own.

By the time we actually reached them, Arya and Della were practically screaming at each other. "You're not going to the party in workout clothes. That's final!"

"That's not fair!"

"Oh well. You're going to wear a dress if I have to shove you into it myself!"

Arya spotted us first and relief washed over her face, "Luna, Alpha, look at what she is trying to make me wear. She's trying to embarrass me at your birthday party."

The dress was orange, off the shoulder, and ended a little above mid-thigh, shorter and more revealing than anything I'd ever seen Arya so much as glance at, let alone

wear.

"Couldn't you have found something a bit longer than this?" I asked. “The dress is a bit much even for you, Della."

"Hey, you got the wrong idea here," Della said. "She's the one who came to me asking for help. I gave her options, but I can't help her if she rejects everything before it's even on."

"Your options can't even be considered dresses. They're lingerie!" Arya countered.

Della rolled her eyes, flipping her hair over her shoulder. "Arya, you know nothing about attracting a mate. You have to learn to show off your assets. How else will anyone notice you?"

Arya's cheeks turned red. "Maybe I don't want to attract anyone. Just because you think wearing something revealing works doesn't mean it's right for me."

Della huffed. “Alpha, settle this for us. Don't you think women need to dress more revealingly to attract others?"

Nolan froze, looking like he wanted to disappear behind a rose bush. “I... I don't know," he stuttered. "I think people should just wear what they like."

Della didn't let him off the hook. “That's not an answer. You're just saying that because Arya is here. Come on, be honest!"

Nolan shot me a desperate look, his face turning red as he silently begged for help.

I started laughing. "I'm serious," Della pouted.

"Della, don't bully him. Nolan's smart enough not to answer that," I said.

Della rolled her eyes and turned back to Arya. "If you don't want to wear the dress I picked, fine. But you still need to wear a dress. You can't wear training clothes to a party."

"Why can't I?" Arya argued. "My mate won't care what I have on if I end up meeting him at the party."

"That's not the point!" Della said in exasperation.

"Arya, you don't have to wear something revealing to look nice. The point is to let your personality shine. I know you usually dress simply, and that's fine. But since this is a special occasion, maybe you could try something a little different this time," I suggested.

Arya looked down, uncertain. "I really don't know what looks good on me. I've never picked out a dress for something like this before."

"If you're not sure what to wear, you can pick something from my wardrobe first," I suggested. "What do you think?"

Chapter 409

Talia's POV

Arya's whole face lit up at that. "Really? You'd let me borrow from you?"

"Of course. You'll be a lot more comfortable in something that isn't trying to fall off you," I replied.

"Thank you, Luna," she said sheepishly.

"Thank the Goddess," Della sighed. "I thought I really was going to have to fight you to get a dress on you."

"Since it's only two days away," Arya continued, already moving toward the door, all business now that she'd decided something, "we should go pick out a dress right now."

Della gave an offended snort. "A teenager with zero sense of romance. It's honestly impressive. Most girls your age have a whole drawer of things they've never even had an occasion to wear, just in case."

"I've had occasions," Arya said, defensive. "Sparring matches. Drills. Award ceremonies. A drawer full of dresses doesn't win you anything out there, last I checked."

"She grew up on the training grounds," I told Della, though she already knew it as well as I did. "She's spent most of her life fighting alongside warriors twice her size instead of sitting around talking about boys. It's not surprising she never built a collection."

"That's the problem. She has no hope in finding her mate like this," Della said.

"Don't be pessimistic," I scolded.

"I'm not. She's completed her shift and everything," Della said, "and still hasn't found her mate in this whole pack. That means her mate is not in the pack and she needs to be able to catch her mate's eye."

"Maybe she'll meet him at the party," I said. "New Alphas, new faces, it's exactly the kind of environment to find a mate."

"That would be something to see," Nolan commented. "It would be interesting to see who the Moon Goddess chose for her."

"Her future mate," Della said, grinning, "is going to have his hands full for the rest of his life."

"I can hear all of you," Arya said, "I'm standing right here."

We laughed and made our way back to the pack house. Nolan took one look at the three of us heading for my room and said, "I know when I'm not wanted. Enjoy your girl talk." He kissed my temple and headed off toward the nursery.

I brought Arya and Della to my closet, and both of them stopped dead in the doorway.

"Talia," Della said slowly, taking in the sheer number of gowns lining the walls, "I'm proud of you, but this is too much. How many dresses does one woman need?"

"Most of these aren't mine by choice," I admitted. "Nolan sees a style in a window and decides I'll love it, and then it just appears in here. I've stopped trying to keep track."

"That's disgustingly sweet. I'll have to remind Marco he needs to work harder as our Alpha is outdoing him with the affection," Della said, and I laughed. “Can I pick one too? Please tell me I can pick one too!"

"Of course you can."

Della didn't hesitate. She went straight to a deep green spaghetti-strap dress, sleek and a little dangerous, and held it up against herself with a look of pure satisfaction. "Oh, this is the one."

"It's yours," I said. "It's yours. Consider it a gift."

"You're the best Luna ever," Della said, already stripping off her shirt to try it on properly.

Arya's search took considerably longer.

We tried a pink halter dress first. It was way too small. The straps cut into Arya's shoulders, the top didn't fit right, and the seams looked ready to pop when she moved. She kept clutching the straps to keep them up. "Absolutely not," she said, and I agreed before she even turned all the way around.

Then we tried a dark lace dress with a deep back and a slit almost to her hip. The lace hung loose on her shoulders, showing off her sports bra, and the slit kept falling open, flashing the faded claw scar on her thigh. She kept a hand over the slit so it wouldn't show too much.

"You can't stand like that," Della said. "You look like you're about to pee on yourself."

"It's that, or I am going to flash you when I walk," Arya said.

"This dress is too big for you," Della said, circling her once, tugging at the gap across her shoulder blades. "It's practically hanging off of you. I don't even think it'd fit you, Luna."

"Let's try another one. We have so many to choose from," I said.

By the fourth or fifth dress, Arya's patience had worn down to almost nothing, her jaw tight, arms crossed while she waited by the mirror for the next attempt to be handed to her.

"I don't think I want to go anymore," she mumbled. "I can just be on a guard patrol."

"No, there has to be a dress in here that fits you," Della said as she searched.

I started digging through the dresses myself and spotted a red one at the back. It had wide straps and a strong, structured top. The material was thick, made for someone with real muscle.

"Try this one," I told her. "Promise, it's the last."

Arya hesitated, took the dress from me, and walked into the dressing room. When she came out, Della whistled, "Now that's what I'm talking about."

The dress fit her perfectly, hugging her shoulders with no weird gaps, and the deep red looked amazing on her. When she moved, the dress moved with her, not against her. Even her training braid looked right with it.

"That dress is going to have the whole pack turning heads, mate or not. You look incredible," Della said.

Arya blushed as she admired herself in the mirror. "You really think so?"

"This dress was made for you, Arya," I said.

Chapter 410

Talia's POV

On my birthday morning, I put on the dress Nolan picked out weeks ago and hid from me until now. It was a deep blue, simple but cool, with just a bit of shine when the light hit it. The neckline was both classic and a little daring as it revealed more cleavage that I was normally comfortable with.

Nolan emerged from the closet in a charcoal gray suit that fit him perfectly. He looked so good, I nearly forgot I was supposed to be annoyed at him for keeping tonight's plans a secret.

'We have time for a quickie,' my wolf said and I blushed, shutting her out, but I could hear laughing in my mind.

"You're really not going to tell me where we're going."

"Not a chance." He offered his arm, entirely too pleased with himself. "I planned everything myself. You're not ruining my surprise an hour before it happens."

We drove out toward the southern border, and when the car finally stopped at the edge of a wide meadow, I understood why he'd been so smug about it. The whole field had been transformed, string lights woven between poles that hadn't been there a week ago, long tables set with more care than I'd seen outside a formal court dinner, the grass underfoot still soft and green in the fading light, the whole thing glowing gold in the late afternoon.

Della and Clara were already at the food and drink tables, busy setting things up and playfully arguing about where to put the trays. Off to the side, Annie was fighting with a huge bunch of balloons that kept pulling her across the grass. A few early guests spotted us right away and hurried over with gifts before I even made it into the meadow.

“Della,” I called, “can you help me collect all of this before it becomes an avalanche? I can't hold gifts and hug people at the same time.”

She jogged over, already laughing, waving off the guest she'd been talking to. "You're going to want to see this one first, before anything else." She pointed off toward the tree line, where an enormous children's swing stood half-assembled.

"Did you get this for me?" I asked.

"It's from Solon and Leslie. They even sent thornless rose vines from your mother's garden to wrap around the wood as a reminder of home," Della replied.

I stared at it for a long moment, thinking of the roses back at Silverfang and the ones I'd planted here at Bloodmoon in my parents' memory. Now I actually had Silverfang roses. I fought back the tears and reached through the mind line, 'Solon, Leslie, thank you so much.'

'You are more than welcome, sis,' Solon responded. 'Enjoy your night.'

"Have Marco help you move it closer to Talia's rose garden later," Nolan told Della. “Somewhere it'll actually get used once it's needed, not just sitting out here in a

field."

"Of course," Della said, and went off to find him, already calling his name across the meadow.

"Thank you," I told Nolan. "This is perfect. I genuinely don't know how you managed any of this without me noticing."

"I had help. A lot of help, honestly." He looked pleased with himself in the way he only got when a plan had actually worked. "And I picked this spot on purpose. It's close enough that packs from every direction could make the trip without it being a whole ordeal for anyone." He checked the time on his phone. "The ceremony starts at five. I'm announcing the twins during it, if that's still all right with you."

"More than all right."

More guests kept arriving as the sky shifted from gold to orange as the sun began to set. Marco and Walden were deep in some conversation that broke off the moment they saw us.

"Happy Birthday, Luna!" they told us.

"We already delivered your gifts to your room," Marco said.

"Thank you both," I said.

Colin arrived with a gift wrapped badly enough that I suspected he'd done it himself, then Landon, then Henry, each of them finding us in turn with gifts and warm words.

When five o'clock came, Nolan led me up onto the small stage at the center of the meadow, his hand warm around mine, and the crowd quieted on its own before either of us said a word, faces turning toward us in the golden light.

"Thank you all for coming," I said, my voice carrying further than I expected across the open field. "Please, eat, drink, dance, enjoy yourselves properly. And if anyone drinks a little too much in the process, we've got guest rooms ready, so there's no excuse at all not to let loose tonight."

That got a laugh, and a cheer.

Before we cut the cake, Nolan pulled me against him, his arm looping around my waist, and I could feel the excitement running through him like a current.

"One more thing, before the cake," he said, raising his voice over the crowd, and the meadow settled again, sensing something was coming. "Bloodmoon is going to have an heir."

The cheer that went up was enormous, warm and immediate, rolling across the whole field.

"Twins," Nolan added, and the noise that followed made the first cheer sound small by comparison, applause and blessings rolling over us from every direction at once, warriors pounding each other on the back, someone starting up a cheer that spread. I was laughing, a little overwhelmed by the noise and the joy of it, cutting the first slice of cake and starting to hand pieces out to the closest guests, still catching my breath, when a voice I recognized cut easily through the crowd, unmistakable even from a distance.

"Sorry, my queen. I'm late."