Barren Luna 461

Chapter 461

Talia's POV

The excitement that had danced across his face faded, replaced by a cloud of worry and disappointment. "Talia, I'm your mate. I'm Alpha Nolan of the Bloodmoon Pack."

Mate? He couldn't be serious. I just rejected Jason. There was no way he was my mate.

I stepped back, folding my arms tight against my chest. "You think I would fall for that?"

"Talia, I'm telling the truth. You're my mate," he repeated. "We've been mated for six years. We have two children."

"I've never seen you before in my life." I backed up another step. "Do you know what this looks like from where I'm standing? I woke up an hour ago in a hospital bed in your territory with a needle in my arm. Somebody brought me here from Silverfang. And now the Alpha of Bloodmoon is telling me we're mated."

"That isn't what happened."

"Then start with the hospital. Why was I there? Did you drug me?"

"I just need you to trust me. This is going to take a while to explain."

I scoffed. He was buying time. "I'm going home." I started walking backward toward the trees again. "And you should know my father is the Alpha King. If you took me out of Silverfang, he'll come for you, and you won't like it when he does."

I had expected anger. That was what I was braced for, and I knew what to do with it. Instead, he looked like I'd hit him, and he didn't say anything for a moment.

"Please," he begged. "Give me ten minutes. Then if you still want to go, I won't stop you. I'll walk you to the border myself."

Hearing him beg made my heart ache. I didn't know this man. He had no right to be able to do that to me, and my throat had gone tight looking at him anyway.

'He is telling the truth,' my wolf said.

'You can't know that.'

'I do know it.' She sounded stronger now. 'He is ours, Talia. I can feel him. Whatever else has happened to us, whatever we can't remember, he is a part of it. He's telling the truth.'

"Ten minutes," I agreed. "And you walk on that side of the path away from me." "Whatever you want. Just please don't run."

It was a long walk back. I had run further than I realized, and by the time we came around the open ground and past the wall, my legs were shaking again, and I had to stop twice. Nolan didn't offer to carry me, and he didn't crowd me either. He just slowed down every time I did and waited without saying anything.

Nolan didn't take me to the party. There was a smaller room further down the same corridor, a quiet one with couches in it and a long window looking out at the gardens, and he took me in there instead.

"Sit down," he offered. "Please. There are people here who want to see you."

"What people?"

"People who've been waiting five years for you to wake up." He stopped at the door. "You'll know a couple of them. I'm sorry in advance about the rest."

Nolan went quiet, the way people do when they're talking through a link, and I watched him do it and

wondered how many people.ne

he was

calling and how far back it was t that tree fe.

Then the door banged open hard enough to hit the wall.

A woman came through it faster than anyone that pregnant should be able to move,

and she had her arms around me before I could get out of the chair.

"You're awake." She was sobbing into my shoulder. "Talia. You're awake, you're actually awake. I knew it would happen one day; I've been saying it for years, and nobody believed me."

I knew that scent. “Della?” I said, surprised, before hugging her back. “What are you doing here? How are you pregnant?"

"You've been in a coma for five years." She pulled back and took my face in both hands, and her cheeks were soaking. "Goddess, I have missed you."

More people came in behind her until the room was full. Somebody said, "Thank the Moon Goddess," out loud, and then everyone said it, and half of them were crying as they said it.

I didn't know any of them.

Then I saw Solon.

My brother stood near the door; he looked older, thinner in the face. He looked at me as if he couldn't believe it was really me. A woman stood next to him, trying to hold back tears and he had one arm looped around her waist. Colin

WI

Moonbrook was standing next to him with a hand on his shoulder. Why was he there?

Apart from Della, those two were the only faces in that room I knew.

"I am so confused right now," I said.

"Probably from being asleep for so long," Della said. "We need to get you proper food and a bath."

Before I could respond, something hit both of my legs at once.

Two children had run across the room and wrapped themselves around me, one on each side, gripping hard enough that I had to, put a hand on the back of a chair to keep my balance. They were a girl and a boy, about the same size, both with dark hair.

"Mom!" the girl said into my hip. "You're awake!"

"You're awake, you're awake, you're awake," the boy chanted, bouncing.

"Let me get to my sister," Solon finally said and the two children stepped away. He pulled me into a hug but I could barely hug him back. “You made us so worried."

"Solon, what is going on? Why am I here? Why are YOU here? Why is Della pregnant and why are these children calling me Mom?" I blurted out.

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The room fell silent.

"Talia, what do you remember last?" Solon asked.

"Dinner. Last night, at home with you and Father. Father wanted to celebrate my return from Shadowclaw," I answered.

Nobody answered. Solon went pale, and Della covered her mouth with both hands.

"Why is everyone looking at me like that?"

"That was five years ago," Solon said.

"What? What do you mean? That can't be true," I said.

"You don't remember fighting the Rogue King? Or why I'm still recovering?" Solon asked.

"The Rogue King? We never fought the Rogue King," I said, confused. The way he said it made it sound real, but when would that have happened? Had I really been in a coma for five years?

Solon turned to Nolan, angry. "You said she'd be okay."

"She is," Nolan said.

"You call this okay? She's lost five years of memories!" Solon snapped.

"It's the ritual," Nolan said. "Camilla warned us there'd be a price. We waited five years to see what it would be. This is it."

The happiness in the room vanished. They'd just been crying and hugging, but now everyone was silent, frowning, and close to tears.

"Stop," Della said, breaking the silence. "She's awake. That's what matters. We'll figure out the rest later."

“What ritual?” I asked. "Can someone explain what happened from the start?"

Nolan looked at me for a long time. "The twins are our kids," he said. "Nyla and Elian. Today's their fifth birthday. You're their mom, the Luna of Bloodmoon, and Queen of the Werewolves."

"I'm not the Queen of anything." I shook my head. "My father is the Alpha King. If I'm Queen, something must have happened to him."

No one answered. Solon looked like he was about to tell me something terrible. My heart sank. I felt my wolf reach out to our father through the mind link, but there was no response.

"Where is he, Solon?" I asked.

"He died," Solon said, his voice breaking. "Five years ago."

His words hit me. I covered my face with my hands. He'd been gone for five years, and yet I'd just had dinner with him last night. I could still hear his voice. I sobbed into my hands.

Solon knelt in front of me, hugging me and letting me cry on his shoulder, just like when we were kids.

"I'm sorry,” he kept saying. “You've had to relive this twice. It's not fair.”

"How did he die?" I asked.

"Not today. I'll tell you everything, I promise," he said, his hand on the back of my head. “For now, just know you fought hard to save him. You fought so hard, and he loved you."

I don't know how long I sat there. When I finally looked up, most of the room was empty.

Nolan was still crouched next to my chair. He hadn't touched me or said anything. My wolf whined as she yearned for him to comfort us, and part of me actually wanted him to.

"Tell me the rest," I said.

"It can wait."

"No. At least tell me about the ritual," I insisted.

"When you were pregnant with the twins, something went wrong. They grew too fast, and it started hurting you. Every healer said giving birth would kill you."

"So what did you do?"

"I asked you to give them up, but you refused. So we went to the witches. They gave us one way to keep all three of you alive, but warned it was dangerous."

"What was it?"

"They took a part of your wolf spirit out and kept it safe. You gave birth to the twins and died doing it. They

brought you back by putting be

wolf back in you, he said his flat, like he was reading from a

script. "It worked. Your heart started again, but you were in a coma."

"Five years," I said.

"Who took care of them?" I asked.

Nolan blinked. "What?"

"The twins. If I've been in a coma, someone had to take care of them. Was it a nanny or Solon?" I asked.

Nolan flinched at my words, like I'd slapped him. "I took care of them myself."

Guilt hit me. Asking that was cruel. Of course, Nolan would take care of his kids. It was just strange to think that an Alpha with his reputation would actually raise his own children.

The little girl

leaned on my chair,

close enough for me to smell her. Something inside me shifted. I didn't recognize her, but my body went calm a way couldn't explain When the boy leaned on the other side, it happened again, even stronger.

"I'm Nyla," the girl said. "That's Elian. He's younger than me."

"By four minutes," Elian said.

"The witches said our blood could wake you up," Nyla said quickly. "So every birthday, the doctor takes some of our blood and gives it to you. We've done it five

times, and this year it finally worked—so it must've been me.”

"Mine was first," Elian said, nudging his sister. "I went first this morning."

"No, you weren't."

"Yes, I was. I always go first."

"Enough," Nolan said firmly, and both of them stopped arguing. "Not today." He looked at me. "You need a healer right now. We need to make sure that you're actually okay. You

shouldn't be able to even walk after

being in a coma for so long."

I nodded, wiping tears from my face. "I want Solon to come with me,” I said. "And

Colin, too."

I saw the look on Nolan's face. He didn't argue, but again he looked like I had slapped him. I didn't know him, and I wanted my brother and closest friend with me. "Of course," Nolan said.

Solon walked out with me, and Colin walked on my other side. "So, is he really my mate?" I asked.

"Yes," Solon confirmed.

"But he kills people for small transgressions," I argued. "And he doesn't like Father."

"Father ended up liking him. There was a misunderstanding between them," Solon said. "He really loves you."

“He'd never hurt you," Colin added. “He has hurt himself more times than I can count to make sure you were safe."

“He never stopped watching over you since you were in a coma,” Solon continued.

The hospital was just two buildings away. When we walked in, the woman at the front desk looked up and stood so fast her chair fell over.

"Luna!" she exclaimed, her face paling with panic.

"Hi," I said, unsure what else to say.

Her eyes immediately filled with tears. She covered her mouth, trembling with relief,

then hurried out from behind the desk.

"I'm so sorry," she choked out.

"It's okay," I said.

"No, it's not. Alpha, I have to apologize. No one saw her wake up and leave. She

just disappeared. We've been looking for her for an hour."

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The nurse's hands shook as she apologized. I shook my head and forced a smile. Everyone looked tense, waiting to see what Nolan would do. He was known for being strict. I didn't want anyone to get in

trouble because of me. "Thank you. You've all taken care of me for years. Please don't blame them, Nolan."

Solon looked at me and gave a small nod, showing he approved. Colin squeezed my hand to reassure me. Nolan stared at me for a moment, then nodded. "No one will be punished," he said, sounding gentle for once. "Doctor, check her first. Then everyone can go back to the party."

Everyone relaxed a little. The doctor, a middle-aged woman whose name I couldn't remember, led me to an exam room. Solon and Colin followed, staying close. Solon leaned in and whispered, "Don't worry about Nolan. He gets protective." Colin nudged my arm and grinned. "Yeah, and he needs to learn to relax."

I felt the pack's mind links buzzing with worry and questions, but I pushed them away and focused on the exam. The table was cold under me. The doctor checked my pulse, temperature, and reflexes. She looked at me. "How do you feel, Luna? Any dizziness, pain, or strange feelings?"

"Just tired. And hungry," I admitted.

"We'll get you something good to eat soon. Promise," Nolan said.

The doctor checked my blood pressure, vision, and strength. She even asked me to try shifting to make sure my wolf was alright. At one point, she said, "Can you feel your wolf? Try to reach her."

I closed my eyes and focused. "She's there. A little restless, but she's still with me."

She nodded. "That's a very good sign."

I caught my reflection in the mirror. I looked pale and thinner than I remembered. My eyes were wide and tired. My wolf felt a little different, but she was still mine.

Solon stood nearby, arms crossed, watching the doctor. Nolan waited patiently outside, giving me space. I hated how it made me feel terrible that he wasn't in here with us.

'You need to accept he's our mate,' my wolf said.

'No,' I said. 'After Jason, we have to be more careful.'

'I think we're beyond that. We have pups with him. We chose him. He is safe,' my wolf said, but I wasn't too sure. We also thought Jason was safe, and that turned out bad for us.

After two hours, the doctor finally finished. He took off his glasses and smiled. "Physically, you're doing well, Luna," he said, clearly relieved. "You're a bit weak and underfed from all those years on nutrition fluids, but there's no real damage. Your wolf is healthy and strong. With some rest and solid food, you'll recover soon."

Colin let out a loud sigh. "See? What did I tell you? I knew you were going to be fine."

"Will I get my memories back?" I asked.

The doctor hesitated before saying, "I'm sorry, Luna. There's nothing physically wrong with your mind. Maybe your memories will come back over time, but I can't promise anything."

Disappointment hit me hard. I nodded and tried to look grateful, but inside I felt empty. It was like I had lost a part of myself. Years of my life were missing. My kids, my father, my own story. All of it was locked away somewhere I couldn't reach.

Solon put a hand on my shoulder, sending comfort through our mind link. 'I'm here, Talia. You're not alone.'

Colin nodded. "You'll get back to yourself. Just give it time."

Solon finally spoke up. "Don't worry. We're all here for you, no matter what. Perhaps we can reach out to the coven again."

"I would rather not," I interjected. "Who knows what I might lose to fix this?"

Colin nodded. "Yeah. Well, we'll remind you what you missed, including all the embarrassing incidents."

I managed a small smile. “Some things should stay forgotten."

Solon laughed and said, "You won't be able to determine that unless you know, so no luck. We're telling you EVERYTHING."

The doctor left, and Nolan looked in, his face hard to read. "Ready to go back?"

"Yeah," I said, sliding off the table. My legs shook, but Solon steadied me. We walked back to the packhouse together Music laughter, and the smell of food filled the night. Life kept moving, even if I felt stuck.

When we walked in, everyone greeted me, rejoicing that their Luna had recovered. Shadowclaw had never treated me with this much gratitude or kindness. My wolf beamed at the attention.

"Enough. Let's get back to celebrating who really matters today," I said. Plates clattered, and people went back to the party. The twins' birthday filled the house with faces I wished I remembered.

I found a quiet spot near the window. Solon and Colin stood with me.

Solon leaned down and whispered, "You don't have to talk to anyone if you don't want to.” I nodded, but I thought maybe I should. It could help bring my memories back. I

Nolan sat with Elian, his arm around our son. I watched Nyla laugh with her friends, and Elian trying to sneak a cake slice but someone caught him before he could. It hurt, wanting to remember more about them. I felt like an outsider creeping in on private moments.

Finally, I couldn't hold it in. "What happened while I was out?" I asked quietly. "And...how did my father die?"

The laughter died. Solon wouldn't meet my eyes, and I saw him swallow hard. Colin's shoulders slumped as he rubbed his face. I realized just how much everyone was still hurting.

Before things got more awkward, a little girl ran over and hugged me. "Aunt Talia, I'm starving!"

“Aunt? Aunt?!” I exclaimed. “You have a mate and a pup?" Solon nodded. “When did this happen?"

“A little after you gave birth,” Solon explained. “Her name is Kaya."

Before I could answer, Elian and Nyla ran over and tugged my sleeves. "Some on, Mom! We havez to eat dinner before cake. Let's eat!” Their happy faces made things feef lighter. I let myself enjoy it for moment.

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Nolan met my eyes, sending gratitude through the mind link. He smiled a little. “Let's

eat first. We can talk later."

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Talia's POV

"Yeah, I'm hungry," I said, and the kids cheered.

Nolan smiled and walked me to the dining room. “Clara went all out. She made your favorite foods as soon as she heard you were up."

Clara. The name caught me off guard. For a second, I remembered a girl from my past. My maid in Shadowclaw was also named Clara. It was probably just a coincidence. Clara was a common name, but it still made me uneasy. The Clara I knew had betrayed me, so it couldn't be her.

I watched kids run around as more guests arrived in small groups. Some walked in and looked right at me. They already knew. Others didn't, and I saw it happen: someone whispered in their ear, and then they'd turn to stare at me.

People kept whispering and glancing at me, but when I looked back, they'd quickly look away. I couldn't shake the feeling that everyone knew something about me that I didn't. It wasn't lying. It was just something everyone else knew except me.

I tried to remember. It was like poking a bruise to see how much it hurt. I searched

for anything: something after that dinner with my father, a familiar face, or any reason I'd be here.

Nothing came. Instead, a sharp headache hit me so fast I grabbed a chair. I winced and rubbed my forehead, trying to breathe through it.

A woman I didn't know came over, looking worried but calm. “Hey, are you okay?” she asked. "Don't force it. Your headache will get worse."

I blinked, confused. "Do I know you?"

She smiled softly. "Not right now. But you did."

Della, standing nearby, jumped in. “Talia, this is Leslie."

“Leslie?” I repeated. The name didn't ring any bells.

"Leslie is the Luna of Silverfang and Solon's mate," Della explained.

I stared at Della, then looked at Solon. "Really? When? How...?”

"Let Nolan explain everything when you're ready. You don't have to prove anything," Della said.

"This...this is a lot to take in," I said. "I have missed so much."

"It's okay. We'll help you get your memories back," Della said.

I managed a small, thankful smile. Della looked at me kindly. "You really don't remember Leslie?"

I shook my head. "Sorry, it's all blank."

Leslie grinned. "If you want, I can give you a massage. You used to come to me for help every time you got into trouble. Tonight you're so polite. It's like meeting someone new."

I laughed nervously. "I hope I wasn't a handful."

Della laughed. "You were, but we loved you for it."

I nodded, a bit embarrassed. "Thanks, Leslie. I'd like that."

Leslie stepped behind me and started massaging my shoulders, her touch gentle but confident. She found a knot right away, like she already knew where to look. "See? Still the same, Talia."

I closed my eyes and focused on her hands. "You're really good at this," I muttered. My headache started to fade.

Leslie smiled. "It's my thing. I'm glad I can help, even if you don't remember me yet."

Della teased Leslie, "I keep telling everyone she's the best healer in the pack. She's Solon's mate and one of your best friends, even if you forgot all your bad habits."

Leslie blushed and rolled her eyes. "Della, don't embarrass her on her first night back."

Even with the jokes, I felt a pang of regret for all the memories I'd lost: the laughter, the stories, the sensez of belonging, Leslie's hands worked out the knots in my shoulders and neck My headache faded, replaced by a gentle tingling.

I opened my eyes and looked up at her. "Della wasn't exaggerating. You really are good at this."

She smiled. "Told you."

A bell rang from the dining room. Suddenly, everyone started moving again. Two women came out of the kitchen carrying trays of steaming food, and for a second the rest of the room faded away, because I knew one of them.

Clara.

My Clara, who had looked after me at Shadowclaw, was always gentle, always watching over me in the hardest times. She was older now, a few lines on her face and her hair

pulled back, but it was the same

warm smile, and her eyes found mine before she'd even set the tray down.

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My wolf growled within me, 'She shouldn't be here. She betrayed us.' The last time

we saw Clara, she lied for Viki, and that ultimately led us to reject Jason.

'We must have made up. We can't hold the past against her just because we can't remember,' I said and my wolf huffed, still unsure.

She set the tray down, came straight around the table, and hugged me tightly.

"I am so glad you're awake. You don't know how I have been praying for this day," Clara cried. "I couldn't I thought

believe it at first, but the to be."

about how hungry you

She pulled back and wiped her face with the back of her wrist. "So, I started cooking. We have to put weight back on you. Try the stew, Luna, it's the way you like it."

"We even made your favorite rolls, Luna," the young woman next to her added. I had no idea who she was, and she clearly knew me well. And Clara had no idea that she was the last person in this room I could still remember.

I felt both grateful and sad, not sure what to say. Nolan seemed to understand. He took a spoon, scooped up some stew, and held it out to me. His eyes were gentle and patient, as if telling me it was okay.

"Here," he said quietly, bringing the spoon to my lips. "Try it."

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Talia's POV

Everyone at the table was watching as I took a bite.

No one tried to hide it. Clara stood with her hands folded, the girl next to her froze, and even Della stopped talking, which was always a rarity.

I took the spoon from Nolan and then placed it in my mouth. The stew tasted great.

"Clara, this is amazing," I said, and everyone visibly relaxed.

Clara sighed in relief. "Thank the Goddess your taste buds aren't ruined." She then hurried back to the kitchen, with the girl following. They returned with drinks for everyone and a plate of sweets. After that, they kept refilling drinks any time my cup was half empty.

The room became noisy again as everyone talked to each other instead of just focusing on me. I finally felt like I could eat in peace even though I still noticed a few people staring at me. All I had to do was keep it together until I could get to my

room.

"Henry's not here tonight. He left with Arya earlier," Nolan said as he started up a conversation.

"Henry? Alpha Jason's beta? Why would he be visiting me?" I asked.

"He didn't agree with what Jason did and left Jason," Nolan explained as he put some food on my plate. "You made him Alpha there when you became Queen. It's been going well for him for four years now."

The last I remember, Henry looked so guilty when I walked out of Shadowclaw. I never would have thought he would side with me over his best friend. 'Henry always did what was right,' my wolf said. 'It isn't that hard to believe.'

"And he found a mate?"

"Yes, to Luna Arya. You two had a rough start, but you helped him with her," Nolan said. "She used to be Bloodmoon's deputy chief warrior. Now she's Luna of Doomfur."

"How does a deputy chief warrior end up running Doomfur?" I asked. Doomfur had been chaotic for some time and hadn't had a Luna in years.

"That is a long and messy story. I will tell you about it another time," Nolan replied.

Nolan kept things easy and told me funny stories about our twins. He mentioned that Alpha Landon from Lonefur gave me a special gemstone when I was pregnant, claiming it would protect the baby, and then wouldn't stop bragging about it for a year. He also joked that Colin still hadn't found a mate and was now acting like he didn't even care.

“It has been painful to watch. He's even considering taking a chosen mate," Nolan added. “I told him to wait a little longer. It took me years to find you, and it was well worth the wait."

I couldn't help but blush at his compliment. Nolan continued to surprise me. Everything I'd ever heard about the Alpha of Bloodmoon made him sound cold and unapproachable. But this man had spent the whole meal serving the twins and me before himself, and was carefully explaining five years of my life in small, manageable pieces so I wouldn't feel overwhelmed.

Why hadn't I met him first instead of Jason?

Elian reached across to me for bread, and Nolan gently moved his hand back to his plate without pausing his conversation before giving Elian the piece he wanted. Nyla held out her cup, and he filled it, not missing a beat.

As I watched him, I got this strange, warm feeling I couldn't explain. It was like being in a place you've never seen before, but somehow knowing it's where you're supposed to be.

People started leaving after an hour. Solon and Leslie went first, and then Della hugged me so hard it hurt, promising to explain everything in the morning. I watched as her mate escorted her out of the dining hall. Soon, only a few staff were clearing the table.

I stopped Clara as she walked by with a stack of bowls.

"Thanks for dinner," I said. "Both of you. It was wonderful, and I know it was a lot of work."

Clara just stared at me with a confused expression. “Luna, you don't need to thank us."

"She's thanking us like we're strangers," the girl said.

Clara waved her off and said, "Don't be so formal. Nothing has changed between

us. Five years asleep and you come back polite. Perhaps we should get the witches to put Annie in a coma."

"Hey! Don't joke like that!" the girl exclaimed, and Clara laughed.

"I'm only teasing," Clara said.

They kept joking about it as they went back into the kitchen.

I waited until they were gone.

"The girl with Clara," I said to Nolan. "I don't know her."

"That's Annie."

"Should I know her?"

"Yes, you brought her here from Silverfang," he said, putting down the dish towel. "Her father died, and you gave her a home. She practically worships you." Hearing that made my chest feel heavy. I'd meant so much to her, but I had no memory of it, which made me feel both sad and guilty.

"And you haven't told her I don't remember her," I said. "No."

"Why not?"

"Because she'd take it harder than anyone here," Nolan said. He glanced at the kitchen. "If she found out you don't remember her, it would break her heart."

I thought about how she'd been

watching me all night as if she was expecting more from me It made me feel guilty. There's nothing you can do right now. We will getour memories back,' my wolf said.

"I agree. Let's not tell anyone other than those who already know," I said.

"As you wish, my queen," Nolan said, causing me to blush.

"I don't think I'm going to get used to that," I said.

"You used to say that before the coma," Nolan said.

I yawned before I could stop myself.

Suddenly, exhaustion hit me, and everything felt blurry. I realized I'd been awake for nine hours after five years asleep, and most of that time was spent learning my life wasn't what I remembered.

Nolan stood up and tried to pick me up, one arm behind my back and one under my

knees. His touch sparked desire through me, which caught me off guard.

"What are you doing?" I demanded.

"Carrying you upstairs to bed," Nolan said, and I felt desire coiling in my stomach.

My wolf whined, but I couldn't do this. I didn't know him.

"I can walk," I protested, pushing against his chest. "Put me down. I'm fine."

He stopped immediately. He always did, which somehow made it worse. I put space between us and cleared my throat. “I think we should sleep in separate rooms for the time being."

That's when I saw both kids standing in the doorway, watching us.

Nyla's forehead was all wrinkled with worry.

"Mom," she asked, "aren't you going to bed with Dad?"

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Talia's POV

I opened my mouth, but no words came out.

I couldn't tell a five-year-old the truth. I don't know your father. I just met him this morning. He's a stranger who's been kind to me, but I can't be alone in a room with him at night.

Nolan got there first.

"Your mum's been asleep for a long time," he said. "She needs peace and quiet to get better. It's easier to rest when she's alone."

"Oh," Nyla said.

I nodded like it was obvious.

Elian wasn't having it.

"But that's not fair," he said. "When I can't sleep, you lie down with me, and then I fall asleep."

"That's different," Nolan said.

"How is it different?" Elian asked. "She can't remember anything. If she's with you, maybe she'll remember sooner. You're her mate. That's how it works."

He stood there looking up at me, waiting for me to agree with him, because he had worked it out and it was obvious and all I had to do was say yes.

"I still get bad headaches," I told him. "I need some time to get used to everything, and then we'll see. Okay?"

Elian considered this for a long moment. "All right," he said, clearly not satisfied. "But I still think I'm right."

"Bedtime," Nolan said to both of them. "Now. You've been up five hours longer than you should."

"But we're not sleepy!" Elian whined as Nyla tugged him out of the room. "Come on before he grounds you again," Nyla said. Nolan walked them out to make sure they went to their rooms.

I tried to follow you, but I almost fell. Nolan caught me and said, "I think you've done too much tonight."

"You're probably right."

"Let me help you."

A moment ago, I had pushed him away. Now, I was so tired I couldn't feel my feet, so when he picked me up, I just let him. Desire still coiled in my stomach, but I was too exhausted to act on it. If Nolan noticed, he didn't say anything.

The bedroom he brought me to was big and warm and smelled faintly of roses. I could tell almost immediately that this was our room, as it was very rose-themed but still gender-neutral. Nolan set me on the edge of the bed.

"This was our room," he said. "I've moved my things out, so there's nothing of mine in here to make it strange for you."

"You didn't have to do that," I said. "This is your room too."

Nolan smiled faintly. "You're not comfortable with me."

"I'm sorry. I just..."

"I'll be in the guest room at the end of the hall," Nolan continued, not letting me finish. "If you need anything at all during the night, just knock."

"Thank you," I said. I twisted the blanket in my hands, unable to look at him. "I hope I remember soon. I really do."

Nolan paused at the door. "I've waited five years. I can wait a little longer for you." He came back across the room, bent down, and kissed my forehead.

"Goodnight, Talia."

Nolan didn't wait for me to answer and left.

I lasted about four seconds after the door closed.

got angry

Then I finally broke down, the way I couldn't all day with everyone watching, cried until my face hurt and screamed into a pillow saying things I'm glad nobody heard, before launching it across the room with enough force to knock over a chair.

Why was this happening? Why did I always keep having bad luck? What did I do to deserve this?

My father was dead. My kids were strangers. I had a mate that was so deeply in love with me, and couldn't even remember him. All I could remember was that bastard Jason.

Eventually I ran out of energy, and all I could do was lie down on top of the blankets.

'You could have let him sleep with us,' my wolf said.

'Don't start.'

'I am only saying what you are already thinking.'

'Sleeping with a stranger is not an option.'

'He is NOT a stranger.'

'We can't remember him.'

'Just because we can't remember him doesn't mean he's a stranger,' my wolf snapped. 'Five years, Talia He waited for us for five years. He never left our side and raised our pups on his own. Then we woke up and didn't even know his name. Imagine how he felt being rejected by his mate.'

'I am not rejecting him,' I muttered. 'I just need time.'

'He must be heartbroken,' she said.

'I know. And what about me, us? Life moved on without us,' I argued.

'That's true. We can't get the time back, but we can make the most of it now,' my wolf said.

I lay there for a long time. The house grew quiet around me except for my sobs. I didn't know when I fell asleep, but Solon's voice woke me in my mind.

'I hope I didn't wake you,' Solon said.

'No, I've slept long enough. What's going on?' I said.

'I wanted to tell you we're heading home in the morning,' Solon said.

'I'll see you off,' I said, getting up.

Solon was going back to Silverfang, which was the last place I remembered.

If anything could help me recover my memories, it would be going back to Silverfang.

I decided to go with him before sunrise.

Chapter 467

Talia's POV

After breakfast, we walked to the border to say goodbye to everyone.

The cars were packed and most of the Alphas had already said goodbye. I waited until Solon came over before I spoke.

"I want to come with you."

Everything stopped.

"To Silverfang," I said, since nobody else spoke. "I missed his funeral. I think going to his grave might help me remember. Silverfang is the only place I can recall. All my other memories are blurred or gone. If my memories come back, it'll be there."

Solon looked at Leslie. "It wasn't...it wasn't like that, Talia. I don't think..."

"Then what happened to him? How did he die? Why does no one want to tell me?" I asked.

"Not yet," Solon said, then sighed and rubbed the back of his neck. "You need to stay here in Bloodmoon."

"Why?"

"Because you're taking things too fast," Solon replied. "I know you want to get your life back on track, but I'm worried about what will happen if you rush things. You need to take it slow and not overexert yourself."

"I'm not asking your permission," I said firmly.

Solon chuckled. “I missed your stubbornness."

"I'm serious, Solon."

"I'm not ordering you, Talia. I'm asking you to wait. When you're well enough to travel, I will come and collect you myself," Solon said.

"No, I really feel like I need to go now," I said.

“Talia, think about what that would look like," Della added. “I know you want your memories back, but you're going about this all wrong."

Della's serious tone surprised me. She didn't often get serious with me and made me doubt my decision. I was still trying to think of what to say when something bumped into my legs.

The twins had come in under my arms and latched on, one on each side.

"Don't go," Nyla said into my hip. "Please don't go."

"It would only be for a few days," I said.

"You just woke up." Elian had his whole face pressed into my leg. "You just woke up, and now you're leaving again!"

Both of them were crying, not making a scene, just hugging me with tears streaming down their faces. I looked at their dark heads and realized how selfish I'd been. I couldn't leave them.

I knelt and hugged them. "All right. All right. I'll stay."

Elian nodded, wiping the tears from his face before wrapping his arm around Nyla, who was still crying. The way he comforted her reminded me so much of Solon and me when we were younger. 'Our son kind of acts like Solon too,' my wolf commented, and I agreed.

I looked up and saw Nolan's face before he could hide it. He'd let me argue the whole time without saying a word to Solon, and I finally understood he meant it when he said he wouldn't stop me. Still, he looked relieved, and I almost felt guilty for wanting to leave.

Leslie walked over and said, "I can't wait to get to know you all over again." She hugged me and whispered in my ear, "Give Nolan a chance. He's a good man."

Then, Leslie took Kaya and got into the car. Solon hugged me and kissed my forehead. "Safe travels," I told him.

We stood and watched the cars go, and then we walked back up to the packhouse together, the twins holding a hand each.

Clara and Annie were waiting at the front door with two school bags. "Time for school," Clara said.

"Will you be here when we get back?" Nyla asked.

"Of course, I'll be here," I said.

"Will you come and get us?" Nyla asked.

"If your father says I can," I answered.

"She can," Nolan said.

Elian stopped halfway out the door and turned around.

"Both of you have to come," Elian insisted. "Not just her. Dad, you come too."

"Both of us will come and get you at the end of school," I said.

That seemed to satisfy him. Annie got them out the door Clara went after them with a forgotten bags and then it was just the two of us deft in the hallway, not saying anything.

I hadn't been alone with him since the bedroom last night.

"Tell me how he died," I said.

"Not today," Nolan said.

"You said that yesterday."

"And I'm saying it again today," he replied gently, not budging.

"It's my father."

“I know,” he said, pausing for a second. "I'll tell you. I'm not going to keep it from you

or make you beg. But not when you're just getting your bearings."

I wanted to yell at him, but I didn't have the energy.

Honestly, everything had been so

exhausting Reople had expectations

of me for things I don't re

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happening five years ago. I was determined not to let it get to me. I cried last night. There was no need to cry anymore, but the anxiety kept building every time they refused to tell me what happened.

Did I cause my father's death? Was I to blame for it? It would make sense as to why they weren't telling me.

“Talia,” Nolan said carefully. “You're letting your anxiety get the best of you. Just breathe."

"How? No one will tell me anything," I snapped, and that's when I finally lost it. I crumbled to the floor and started sobbing.

Nolan sat next to me. He didn't say it

would be okay or tell me to stop. He

wrapped his arms around me and

puffed me tight against him. "L

out. l'here," he said, and could feel him trying to soothe me with his

aura through the mate bond. It only

made me cry harder.

I cried until there was nothing left; my eyes were swollen, and my head hurt.

"Come on," Nolan said eventually. "Let me show you around the pack house to get you familiar with it again."

Chapter 468

Talia's POV

The first thing I noticed was that I liked it here.

It felt strange. Every room looked like I had chosen it myself. The colors, the heavy curtains, the low furniture, and the reading chair in the sunny corner were all things I would pick. Even the hallways felt right. I waited for something to feel wrong, but everything fit.

"Who decorated?" I asked, glancing around the room.

"You chose the main rooms, the colors, where everything goes. You spent your first year here rearranging everything," Nolan explained. "You said it was no longer a lonely bachelor's pad."

"Was it?" I asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Yes, you were right," Nolan agreed, giving me a small smile.

He led me out the back and into the rose garden. This was where I had hidden when I first woke up.

"This too?" I asked, looking at the garden.

"Yes," Nolan confirmed, staying back and letting me walk ahead. "You once told me your father's garden at Silverfang was the only place you could really think. You wanted to make something like that here."

I walked between the rows of roses until I found the deep purple ones. Those were his favorites, the kind he used to grow. I stood in the middle of the garden I had planted for him, knelt down, and picked a rose.

Holding it, I whispered, “I miss you, Father. I wish I could remember more. I feel so lost without you."

For a moment, it was just me and the flowers. I let myself cry.

'Enough now,' my wolf said gently. 'He wouldn't want you lost in sadness. You have two pups and a mate who need you right now. We'll have time to grieve later. For now, let's be strong.'

She was right. I wiped my face and walked back up the path.

Nolan showed me the rest of the house, then led me upstairs to a room with two beds, a window seat, and a mess everywhere.

"This is theirs," Nolan announced, gesturing to the room.

It was a good room. One side was crowded with weapons, training gear, and a map pinned up crooked. The other side had a shelf of books and nine stuffed animals lined up in a careful row. Someone had painted a tree up the wall between the beds, so it felt like it belonged to both of them.

“Did you do this?" I asked, pointing at the painted tree.

"There wasn't anyone else to do it," Nolan admitted, his voice soft.

"You did an amazing job," I said, looking at the tree. "You're a great dad, Nolan. The twins are happy because of you. I'm really grateful for everything you've done for them."

“I didn't do it alone. Clara, Annie, and Della helped me,” Nolan added, glancing away for a moment.

"I'm sorry, Nolan. That must have been so hard. I'm sorry I wasn't here I missed everything."

"You're here now. All the waiting was worth it. I'd do it all again if it meant having you back. There's nothing to apologize for," Nolan reassured, reaching for my hand.

He brought me to the library, then across the hall to the Alpha's office.

Some books Looked familiar, but

most didn't ring any bells. A little spot in the corner had a faded cushion and a lamp that looked like it had been turned on a thousand. times. I caught myself thinking maybe I used to sit there, losing myself in stories when I wanted to disappear for a while.

When we stepped into the Alpha's office, two desks faced each other. The one covered in stacks of papers was clearly Nolan's, while mine only had a cup and a pen. It was as if Nolan hadn't moved anything since I fell into a coma.

"We worked here together," he reminisced. "Both of us. You did the pack and the territories; I did everything that needed shouting at."

I stopped at the door, feeling like a guest in my own life. Nolan waited, letting me look around. I visualized us here, working late sometimes arguing, sometimes laughing. Jason never allowed me to handle pack affairs in his office or when he was

around. Nolan was so different from

him.

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"I can help again," I said. "I can be Luna and Queen, do my part. You've done this all alone, and I want to help."

"No," Nolan insisted.

"Nolan."

"Not yet," Nolan replied. He put a hand flat on the nearest pile of paper. "A few more days isn't going to kill me."

The pile was huge. More stacks sat behind it and on the floor. Looking at the mess, I finally understood what it meant for five years of work meant for two people to fall on just one.

"You've been drowning."

"It's been managed," he muttered, straightening the top sheet, which didn't need it. "Can I say something you won't like?"

"Go on," I replied, bracing myself.

"A lot of good things happened in

those five years you don't remember. But honestly, some of it was really hard. Some parts were awful Nolan admitted, looking

away. "I watched you deal with

things that almost broke you if you

don't remember all of it, maybe

that's not such a bad thing."

"That's not yours to decide," I snapped.

"I know," Nolan murmured.

"I don't feel whole like this," I said, my voice shaking. "There's a gap where my life should be. Even if some memories hurt, I want them. They're mine."

"I understand that," Nolan replied softly.

"And I want to remember you, Nolan. I want to know everything about you. How we met, what we felt, all the little things. I want to remember loving you, not just be told about it," I confessed.

Nolan gently reached out, his hand finding my cheek. I leaned into his touch, wishing I could remember more, wishing I could give him the memories he deserved.

A knock at the door broke the soft moment, and a man I didn't know poked his head

into the room.

Chapter 469

Talia's POV

Nolan let go of my face, and I jumped back so quickly I bumped into the desk.

The guy standing in the doorway was already trying to leave.

"Marco," Nolan said. "Stay where you are."

He stepped back in, staring at the floor. "Sorry. I should've knocked."

"Nothing was happening," I said too fast and too loud, instantly embarrassed.

They both looked at me. Nolan was two feet in front of me, his hands still half up, and I held onto my desk like it was going somewhere, and I heard how that sounded about a second too late.

He was Nolan's second-in-command and Della's mate. Someone told me that yesterday. I couldn't remember anything else about him, which frustrated me.

"What did you come up for?" Nolan asked him.

"This." Marco reached into his jacket and took out an envelope. "It came up from the gate an hour ago. I nearly left it on your desk, and then I thought better of it."

Nolan looked at the front of the envelope. His whole expression changed. Nolan looked suddenly hopeful, but nervous too.

"Camilla," he said.

I knew the name. He'd used it when he was telling me about the ritual, and it had gone straight past me.

"She's the witch, the coven leader, right?"

"Yes," Nolan said as he showed me the envelope. Her handwriting looked old- fashioned.

"How did we manage to become allies with the coven?" I asked curiously.

"Well, you made it happen," Marco replied.

I stared at him in surprise. How could I have done that? Father had always told Solon and me to stay as far away from witches as possible. He was tolerant of them, but he also didn't underestimate them.

Before I could ask more questions, Nolan said, “Leslie contacted Camilla when she couldn't help you. Nyla and Elian are alive because of her and you as well."

"Why would she randomly write to you now?" I asked.

"I wrote first. I didn't expect her to respond so quickly, as you just woke up," Nolan answered. "I asked her whether there was anything more she could do for you."

I couldn't help but feel hopeful. If anyone could restore my memories, it would be the powerful witch who conducted the ritual.

Since I woke up, I'd wanted nothing more than to remember. It was like I was watching someone else's life, and I didn't want to look on the outside anymore.

"Well, open it. Let's see what she has to say," I said.

Nolan opened the envelope and started reading.

"Alpha Nolan, it is good to hear from you. I'm glad she's awake. You probably want me to say I can bring her memories back, but I can't. They're not gone, just locked away, and can't open that door. What will help is already in your house. Let her spend time with people and places She knows. Give her the things she used to like. Her memories will come back when they're ready. Be patient. Camilla."

No one said anything. My hope disappeared, replaced by emptiness. I wished someone would say something, anything, to break the awkward silence.

"So I just wait," I said, forcing a laugh that didn't sound right. "That's what she's telling me. Walk around my own house touching things and hope something comes back."

"Yes," Nolan nodded.

"And what happens when that doesn't work and my memories don't come back?" I asked.

Nolan came and crouched down in front of the chair, so I wasn't looking up at him. "You have everything you need to make sure it comes back."

"Then what do I need?"

"Me," Nolan said, placing a hand on my knee. "A minute ago you told me you wanted to find out whether you love me. So let me start again with you. From the beginning, the same way we did it the first time."

"And how did we do it the first time?"

"Slowly, at first." He wasn't quite smiling. "And then not slowly at all."

Heat coiled in my stomach, and the flirting wasn't what got me. It was that he'd already decided. He wasn't waiting to find out whether I came back to him; he was going to start again and have me either way.

'And this is what we want in a mate. He is serious about us,' my wolf said. 'If his Beta hadn't walked in, we probably would've already been renewing the mate bond now.'

'Stop it.'

'You were thinking it before I said it.'

I blushed and cleared my throat,

trying to compose myself. With both of them there, all I could do was force a smile and nod Nolan

me a sly smile that made me plate

squeeze my legs tighter together as he stood up.

"Anything else, Marco?" Nolan asked.

"Just one more thing," Marco replied. "Walden's got his final three candidates. Tomorrow's the last round. He's testing them to choose his new deputy. He wants both of you there."

Nolan looked at me and waited, which I was starting to notice he did instead of deciding for me.

"I want to go," I said.

"Then tell Walden two o'clock tomorrow afternoon," Nolan said.

Marco got to the door and put a hand on it. "I'll keep out of this end of the house the

rest of the day. You two can get back to...well, whatever I didn't just walk in on." He winked, grinning shamelessly.

"We weren't doing anything!"

"Of course not."

Before I even realized it, I had jumped up from the chair, the need to escape overwhelming. "I

promised Della I'd see her. Sheet

seven months pregnant, and we

need to catch up

blurted, voice

higher than usual.

"Talia," Nolan started.

"I'll see you at dinner," I said, not letting him finish. I hurried out of the room, not

looking back at either of them.

Chapter 470

Nolan's POV

I waited until Talia was out of earshot before laughing, and even then I tried to keep

it quiet.

"She's different," Marco said.

"No," I said, sitting down at my desk. "She always used to leave the room like that whenever I brought up something she didn't want to talk about. She'd just walk out mid-sentence and pretend she had something to do."

"Where did she sleep last night?" Marco asked.

"Our room," I replied. "I'm staying in the guest room down the hall."

Marco frowned and said, "I'm sorry. I know that was difficult to accept."

"That was my decision, not hers. I want her to be comfortable and not feel pressured," I explained.

Marco considered that for a moment, his gaze softening. "I get it. It's just... I saw what it did to you, all those years waiting. And now she's here, you're still holding back. Aren't you scared she'll never remember if you don't push at all?"

The question hit a sore spot because, of course, I was scared. I was terrified that Talia wouldn't ever truly remember me, that she'd play along out of duty or guilt. But I'd rather wait forever than force her into something she didn't choose.

"She met me yesterday."

"She's your mate."

"She doesn't know that," I said. "To her, I'm just the guy she's been told is her mate"

"She'll come round to it."

"Maybe she will. But if I go into her room tonight just because I'm supposed to, I'd be asking for something she's not ready for. She'd probably go along with it because she feels like she owes me for the last five years. I don't want that."

"I can understand that."

"I waited five years. I can wait a bit longer."

"Just promise me you won't do what you did last time," Marco added. "Your whole journey to get to know her and to win her over was stressful. Be upfront and honest about how you feel this time."

"I know," I said. I didn't need to be reminded that it was a miracle that Talia hadn't rejected me for how I acted before.

But I did wonder: if she met me for the first time all over again, would she choose me now?

'Of course she will choose us,' my wolf huffed. 'She is our mate, and you will not deny the mate bond this time. The pull between true mates is impossible to ignore. Even if she can't remember me, the bond is still there, waiting, just beneath the surface.

'I said I was sorry about that.'

'We wasted so much time on your foolish decision,' my wolf said. 'We won't do it again.'

"So, Camilla advised she needs familiar people and things around her," Marco said, changing the subject. "Then, I think you do need to move back into your room with her."

"I told you I won't pressure her."

"You're not going to jump her bones

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by sleeping in the same room with her. I believe you have more restraint than that, Alpha," Marco added. "Spend time with her. Talk to her, do things together. The more time she spends with you, the more likely she'll remember. Sitting in separate rooms being polite won't help anyone."

"Okay, I'll do that starting this afternoon. The twins want us to pick them up from

school together, and Elian wouldn't leave until I promised."

Marco laughed. "That kid doesn't miss anything, does he?"

"No, nothing," I said. "He's worse than when I was a kid."

"He and his sister," Marco chuckled. "With those two alone, I bet Talia gets her memories back faster than anyone expects."

I thought about the twins and how easily they accepted everything. They acted as if Talia had been away on a trip. Their adaptability made things seem possible.

"I hope so," I said.

That evening Talia and I went down to the school in Fangvale to pick the twins up. It was a better school than the one within Bloodmoon, only because in the safe zone, children would be allowed to interact from. other packs' without fear of being attacked.

When we got there, the yard was full when we came through the gate. Children everywhere, most of their parents waiting along the fence, and the noise thinned as people worked out who was standing next to me. had made that walk on my own every time until tonight, and nobody had looked up once. I let them look now.

Nyla saw her first. She came across the yard at a flat run with her bag swinging off one shoulder and hit her mother at the waist hard enough to move her back a step.

Talia got both arms around her and kept her upright by about an inch.

Then Nyla turned round with a fistful of her mother's coat still in her hand.

"This is my mother," she told the whole yard. "She's awake now."

Elian came up behind her at a walk, put his arms around Talia's waist, then turned

and delivered his own news with his chin up.

"She'll be picking us up from school from now on," he said.

Talia smiled and said, "Most days."

The other children closed in around her. Their parents were watching from afar.

Seeing the Alpha Queen was an honor for them.

"You're so beautiful," one of the small ones said.

"She looks like the Moon Goddess," said another.

"No, she doesn't. She looks prettier," a girl at the front corrected him.

The tall boy standing behind the others, who'd been building up to it since we

walked in, finally said, "No wonder you are the Sleeping Beauty Queen!"