Barren Luna 61

CHAPTER 61

Nolan's POV

I didn't answer Marco's question. I walked past him back to my room. While I walked, I replayed every second of the encounter earlier in the garden. The way Jason clawed at Talia like a desperate animal, the way she fought him, and the way my own wolf nearly tore through me to intervene.

I didn't like how much I felt out of control. I didn't like seeing Jason on Talia like that. The urge to hunt him down

to teach him a lesson was almost unbearable.

I slung my door open and sat down at my desk, rubbing my hand over my face. Marco followed me in and closed the door behind him. "Alpha, what's going on?" he asked.

"You should have told me," I said coldly, not bothering to look up at him.

Marco frowned. "Told you what?"

"That Talia and Jason were mates once!" I snapped.

His brows lifted slightly, and then laughed, "Wait. Hold on. Did it matter now?"

"No. But you should tell me they were fated mates before," I argued.

"You said the alliance was the priority. That's why I didn't bring it up. I didn't think you'd want to waste time digging into her past when you'd already called her the enemy's daughter," Marco explained.

My jaw clenched. “You don’t get to decide what details matter and what don’t.”

Marco’s gaze hardened. He wasn’t intimidated by me, not completely. That was part of why I kept him. “And you were dismissive of anything I said about her, so why do you care now?”

“Because I need to know EVERYTHING about the enemy’s daughter. That was important, Marco,” I growled.

“Alpha, what happened? Why do you care so much now?” Marco asked with confusion.

“He tried to force himself on Talia,” I bit out, heat rising in my chest. “Had the audacity to say he wanted her back as his Luna.”

Marco’s gaze hardened for a moment. Abuse of she-wolves was always something that enraged him. “That ungrateful bastard,” Marco growled.

“What else? Marco,” I pressed.

“Alpha King refused to acknowledge Jason as her fated mate, so Princess Talia disguised herself as an omega just to become his mate and the Luna of Shadowclaw back then.” Marco let out a rough breath..

“She did that? For him?” I asked in disbelief.

Marco nodded once. “Yes. That’s how much the mate bond can push someone. She gave up her standing, her title, and her family all for him.”

I had always believed she and Solon were just like their father. Arrogant, driven by power and pride. To think she had willingly cast it aside for Jason of all people, it was unheard of.

“The bond means more than pride and power,’ my wolf added. ‘You know it. That’s why you wear the pendant to resist the pull.’

“She was a fool,” I muttered.

“One could say so are you,” Marco countered. “You think you can keep this under control. You wear that pendant to suppress it, but it won’t last forever. You’re her second chance mate but she’s your fated mate. The longer you ignore the bond, the worse it’ll be for you.”

“I said I would reject her!” I growled it loud as I fighted with my wolf. 13

Marco rolled his eyes and said, “And you would be as stupid as Jason.” I growled at him and Marco raised his hands in defense. “I’m saying YOU WOULD BE not that you are. Your mate is your other half. They make you stronger. If not, then why do you think Jason is so desperate to get Talia back?”

“I don’t need her to be strong,” I retorted. “She is a liability that I will get rid of once I have accomplished what I came here for.”

“Nolan, don’t kid yourself,” Marco scoffed. “I’ve seen what the fated mate bonds do to wolves. You can claim all you want that you’ll resist, and I have no doubt you will for a while, but you will give in eventually. Everyone does.”

My wolf snarled inside me, pacing hard against my chest. ‘If you let her slip away, you’ll regret it for the rest of your life. I mean it!’

“Enough,” I snapped inwardly, pushing his voice back. The pendant against my skin warmed as I willed the bond into silence.

I rose from my chair and walked toward the window, resting my hand against the cold frame. Beyond the glass, fog covered the Silverfang gardens. Somewhere out there, she was moving through the halls, probably trying to forget the way Jason clawed at her.

Marco’s voice pulled me back. “You need to decide soon, Nolan. Either reject her or accept her as your mate before the decision is taken from you.”

I turned to him slowly. “You presume too much, Marco.”

“No. We’ve been friends since we were kids. I know you, Nolan, just like you know me. You feel for her even with the pendant on and it’s only going to get worse.”

“I said enough,” I growled, letting a fraction of my aura bleed into the room.

Finally, I exhaled and pulled it back. “If you’re so eager to keep me on task, then do your job. Jason claims he’s here to study some warrior training.”

“You want me to find out the real reason he’s here?” Marco confirmed.

“Yes,” I said coldly. “I want every detail. If he has other intentions for this so-called alliance, I’ll know it before he even sets anything in motion. And if he dares to doublecross me, I’ll rip his throat out.”

Marco smirked as he stood up and said, “Finally, something that sounds like you. I’ll handle it. But you can’t ignore the bond forever, Nolan.”

When the door shut behind him, my wolf pressed forward one last time. ‘Don’t reject her. Don’t make Jason’s mistake. She is ours. If you lose her, you lose everything.’

I pressed a hand to my chest where the pendant rested, the heat of it biting against my skin as I forced his voice down again.

“No,” I said quietly. “I will not be ruled by a stupid bond. Not now. Not ever.”

CHAPTER 62

Talia’s POV

The training grounds were alive with movement and noise. Warriors ran drills in staggered lines. Shields thudded as they met practice strikes. I stood with Beta Logan at the edge with a clipboard in my hands and a roster clipped at the top. With the Hunting Rite approaching, we needed to tighten our security.

Logan looked at the candidates sparring in the nearest ring. “We need speed and experienced trackers, not just muscle.”

“I agree,” I said. I marked two names on the roster. “And they must be calm under pressure, so someone experienced.”

Logan grunted approval. He nodded toward a dark-haired warrior weaving through a pair of opponents. “Kade, he’s a good prospect. He listens.”

“Kade goes,” I said, circling his name. “I think Rhea would be a perfect match for him.”

“Rhea?” Logan repeated.

“She grew up near the marsh. She knows how to move quickly without making a sound,” I explained.

Beta Logan smiled and I raised an eyebrow. “What?”

“You’re doing well, Princess. I am happy you’re back,” Beta Logan replied.

“Thank you, Beta Logan,” I said, blushing lightly. I cleared my throat before saying, “We need to make sure we have a few more. We can’t afford to not be too careful. The Hunting Rite brings in spectators and opportunists.”

He nodded once. “Then pick four more, Princess.”

We continued on like this for a few more minutes before we had settled on four more warriors. Logan took the roster, reviewed the names again, and handed it back. “That puts two full patrols on rotation and one reserve. This is good coverage. Anything else, Princess?”

“Rotate them in twelve-hour shifts until the Rite begins,” I said. “We don’t want anyone exhausted. If anyone looks tired, I want them replaced before they start making mistakes.”

“As you command,” he said. Then his gaze sharpened beyond my shoulder. “Della.”

I barely had time to turn before Della rushed up, braid swinging, and the scent of clean linen trailing after her. She slowed when she saw her father, adjusted her shoulders, and tried for a dignified walk. It lasted for three steps.

“Princess,” she said, beaming at me. “I came to steal you. We’re going shopping.”

Logan frowned and he scolded, “You do not ‘steal’ the Princess from a security inspection. This is an important task that you will be taking over in the future.”

Della’s smile faltered. “I know, but my….”

“It’s fine,” I said, turning to Beta Logan. “We’ve chosen enough people for today.” I handed the clipboard to Logan. “Have the captains brief them and assign them to their areas. I want the shifts posted by nightfall.”

Logan accepted with a short nod. “Consider it done.” He turned to Della, stern again. “I agreed to your birthday party, but you will not turn it into a spectacle. No fights. No staging pranks. No dragging the kitchen staff into last -minute requests.”

Della pouted and said, “I won’t cause trouble, father, I promise.”

“Do not worry, Beta Logan. I’ll make sure she keeps her word,” I said before leading Della away.

“When is your birthday?” I asked.

She blinked. “Are you joking? It’s next Wednesday.”

Guilt tugged at me. I had been so deep in preparations, meetings, and border reports that I had completely forgotten her birthday. “I should have remembered,” I said quietly.

Della waved it off, but her eyes softened. “You’re doing Princess work. I’m not mad. I just wanted to pull you away for an hour. You need new clothes. The shops will reserve pieces if you go in person.”

“What do you want for your birthday?” I asked.

Her grin returned. “Whatever you think. You always know what I like.”

We started toward the exit path that cut between the archery yard and the equipment storehouse.

“We need a formal dress for you,” Della said, thinking out loud as we walked. “Something light with a hidden inner pocket for your dagger. And a day dress that doesn’t have a thousand buttons.”

“No feathers, no sequins, and no colors that make me look like a flag,” I laughed.

“You always say that,” she sighed. “One day I’m going to get you to try blue,”

“There are other colors to choose from,” I said. “Purple, pink, orange, green…pick from those and I’ll try them on.”

Della rolled her eyes, but she was grinning with excitement. “Fine. I’ll be reasonable. For my birthday, you can at least try one dress I pick without arguing.”

“Deal,” I smiled.

We rounded the corner, and I stopped short. Jason and Henry stood near the gate that opened toward the training lanes. They began walking over to us.

“Talia, Della,” Henry greeted.

“Hello Beta Henry,” I said with a smile as Henry had always been nice to me. My smile disappeared when I focused on Jason. “Alpha Jason.”

Jason stepped forward to reach for my wrist. Della moved at once, stepping in front of me. “What do you want?” she demanded. Her Beta aura flaring.

Jason gestured to the yard and Beta Logan behind us. “I came to watch the warrior training and happened to run into you. I wanted to offer an apology for what happened between us recently.”

My wolf stirred at the sound of his voice and began growling within me. ‘Keep him at a distance. He is not to be trusted.’

“Your apology is noted.” I turned to the nearest Silverfang warrior posted along the path. “Escort Alpha Jason. Make sure he has a clear view of the drills and nothing more.”

“Yes, ma’am,” the warrior said. He stepped forward, gesturing toward the sparring rings. “This way, Alpha.”

I shifted to go with Della, but Jason’s voice cut in again. “Talia, wait.”

I stopped. Della took a half step back toward me, ready to plant herself between us again.

“What?” she snapped. “What do you want now?

Jason kept the polite tone, but his jaw was tight. “I’d like a word. It won’t take long.”

Henry said nothing. He said with his eyes that he would see everything. Della crossed her arms over her chest and shook her head.

“No. You don’t get private words anymore. You don’t get anything. Not after how you treated Talia,” Della stated.

“Della,” I said quietly. “It’s fine.” 2)

I glanced at Logan. He gave a short nod and shifted his stance so that anyone approaching from the yard would have to pass him first. Della stood side by side with Henry.

“I’ll be right here if he tries anything,” Della said.

“There’s no need for that. I just want to talk,” Jason stated.

“Sure,” Della responded with an eye roll.

I stepped three feet aside with Jason. I wasn’t far. I was still within sight of Logan’s steady stare and the warrior escort who had not yet moved.

“What do you want to say?”

CHAPTER 63

Talia’s POV

Jason did not waste time and said, “Listen to me, Talia. Stay away from Nolan. He is ruthless. He did not come to Silverfang with good intentions.”

“And you did? What were your intentions again?” I asked.

“You’re defending him,” Jason said in surprise.

“No, I am pointing out how ridiculous you sound,” I countered.

Jason’s face became flushed. He tried to hold my gaze, then glanced away and forced a thin smile. “I came to make things right with you,” he said. “I’m trying to win you back.”

I scoffed, “By forcibly marking me that day? Let’s be serious. You did not come here for me.”

“Talia, believe me, I did,” Jason pleaded.

“No, I remembered what you said. You came here for the Alpha King’s daughter. Let me guess. You plan to win the Hunting Rite and ask the Alpha King to allow you to marry the princess. Is that it?”

Jason’s eyes widened in surprise before he composed himself. “Everything I do is for Shadowclaw,” he said quickly. “And for you. Yes, I put my pack first, but I never stopped loving you.”

“Stop,” I said. “I don’t want to hear it.”

“Talia, just believe me about Nolan, ok? It’s for your sake!” He snapped.

“You’re so quick to talk bad about him. What do you know about him that I don’t already know?”

Jason seized the opening like a drowning man reaching for a rope. “He breaks negotiations without warning. He killed an Alpha who already submitted. He does not forgive insults. People disappear when he visits. Alphas watch their words when he is in the room.” He leaned in, lowering his voice. “Being near a wolf like that brings trouble. I am telling you to be careful.”

My wolf huffed, ‘He’s not wrong that Nolan is dangerous, but so is he.

“I hate Nolan,” I said plainly. “And I hate you. It would be better if both of you stayed far away from me.”

Della walked over to me, clearly annoyed with how long our conversation had been. “Are you done?” she asked Jason, not bothering to hide her contempt.

“I apologized,” Jason said, as if the effort should have bought him something. “I am trying.”

“You tried to force a mark on me in a garden,” I said. My voice stayed calm. “I will not forget that.”

“He did what?” Della exclaimed looking between us.

Jason’s eyes twitched in frustration. “I lost control for a moment,” he said. “It will not happen again.”

“It will not,” I declared, “because you will not get another chance.”

I turned away. Della fell into step with me at once. Beta Logan’s gaze met mine from across the lane. I gave him a small nod to show I was fine. He returned it and resumed issuing orders to the warriors.

We cleared the gate and took the stone path toward the inner court. Della exhaled like she had been holding her

breath.

“He is unbearable,” she muttered. “I don’t know how you haven’t thrown him in the dungeon yet.”

“I have to remain diplomatic,” I said.

She cut a quick glance at me. “Did he really try to force à mark?”

“Yes,” I said. “He tried.” The thought of it made a shiver go up my spine. I didn’t want to think about what would have happened if Nolan hadn’t intervened.

Della stopped walking and grabbed my arm. She looked shocked and worried. “I know you want to be independent, strong, and all that. But you need to tell your father or at least Solon,” she said. “Just because he apologized doesn’t mean he won’t try again.”

I shook my head. “I will, but right now isn’t the time. They have enough to manage with the Rite approaching. I will not add this to their list.”

Della bristled. “You are not a problem they need to solve; you are their family. Family comes first. Hell, just tell my father.”

“I know,” I sighted. “I am not hiding it to protect him. I am choosing when to speak because timing matters.”

Della groaned in frustration. “Fine,” she relented, unhappy but accepting my logic. “Then promise me you will tell them.”

“I will,” I said. “If he tries again, I will say it the same day.”

The drive to the bazaar was quick. The bazaar’s bright lights reflected off polished tiles as Della tugged me into one boutique after another, her excitement overflowing.

“Dresses,” she announced like it was an official order. “You need at least two-one for the ceremony and one for the after-party. And shoes, obviously.”

I sighed, already regretting letting her drag me along. “You sound like Solon when he’s telling me what to wear for banquets.”

“That’s because you’re hopeless,” Della teased, holding a sequined red dress against me before immediately wrinkling her nose.

“I’m not wearing that,” I said.

“Of course not this. You need something that says elegant, not desperate,” Della stated.

I rolled my eyes but allowed her to shove hanger after hanger into my hands. My fingers brushed over a deep forest -green dress. It was simple, sleek, and far less overdone than what she kept pushing at me. The fabric flowed without clinging, light enough to move in but still refined.

“This one,” I said, holding it up.

Della inspected it and then grinned. “You know what? That’s not bad. See you’re learning. You’ll look like you know how to behave in public for once.”

I elbowed her lightly, pretending offense. “I always behave.”

“Please,” she snorted. “You are about as bad as me most of the time.”

She turned to another rack, pulling out a silver-grey cocktail dress with beadwork at the neckline. “And this one,

she declared. “Perfect for photos. You’ll thank me later.”

I sighed but let her add it to the growing pile.

We moved toward the shoes, Della already pointing out a pair of strappy heels that matched her own dress. I quickly found shoes to match both of my dresses.

“Look at you. You didn’t even need my help with this,” Della linked her arm through mine and steered me toward the exit. “Now we pay before I bankrupt us both.”

“This will be wrapped for you within two minutes, Princess,” the attendant said. “Would you like delivery?”

“We will carry them,” I said. “How much is the…”

“I’ll take care of it,” a familiar voice said behind me.

I turned. Nolan stood an arm’s length away, calm as if he had been standing there the entire time.

CHAPTER 64

Talia's POV

"No, thanks," I said, keeping my voice steady. "I'll cover it, Alpha Nolan."

Nolan didn't acknowledge the refusal. He gave the attendant a small nod to continue, as if my words were background noise.

"Did you not hear me?" I asked sternly, pushing Nolan's hand out of the way.

"It is a gift," Nolan said, finally acknowledging me. "For Della's upcoming birthday. And a courtesy to Beta Logan for his hospitality."

His words annoyed me. He should be thanking my father for his hospitality, since he was the reason Nolan was even allowed to be in Silverfang. Everyone else was against it.

"I don't want your gift," I replied.

"Shouldn't the birthday girl be making that decision?" Nolan sneered.

"Thank you, Alpha Nolan," Della cut in quickly. "That is very kind of you!"

"Della," I warned under my breath.

She shot me a look that said not here. The attendant finished packing everything as if she wanted us out of the shop as quickly as possible.

I gathered the bags before Della could reach for them. "We are heading home," I said to Della. "Let's go."

We turned away from the counter. Nolan stepped aside to allow us to leave, which somehow irritated me more. Why was he being nice all of a sudden?

“Thank you again,” Della said over her shoulder. “Alpha Nolan! You should come to my party next week.”

I whipped my head around and hissed through our mindlink, ‘What the hell are you doing? Don’t invite him!’

“I will come,” Nolan said without hesitation. “Please inform Beta Logan of my attendance.”

“Uh, sure,” Della stammered, surprised at his willingness. “I will let him know.”

I continued walking, practically stomping out of the store. Della hurried to match my pace. The store’s music faded as we stepped back into the mall.

“Talia, slow down!” Della called after me when I was five stores away.

“What was that?” I asked as soon as she caught up.

“Uh, it was just a gift,” Della said with a shrug.

“I refused it,” I said with a frown.

“Well, technically it was for me,” she answered with a laugh. “You heard him.”

“He overstepped. I don’t need… We don’t need him buying anything for us,” I argued.

Della hugged one of the dress boxes closer to her chest. “It wasn’t worth a scene at the counter. He paid. He didn’t ask for anything in return.”

“You don’t know that yet,” I retorted.

We took the escalator down, then cut through the crowd toward the exit. The evening sky showed through the glass doors. I kept walking until we were outside.

Our driver pulled the car from the parking space and rolled to a stop in front of us. He stepped out and took our bags from us. I opened the rear door and slid in. Della climbed in after me.

As the car eased into traffic, Della glanced at me. “You are really upset,” she said.

“Of course, I am. I’m the Princess. He doesn’t get to override me,” I explained. I didn’t understand why she didn’t understand why I was upset. I opted to not say anything else to keep from getting into an argument with her.

The driver merged and took the main road. Lights slid across the windows. We passed a cluster of street vendors, then a row of storefronts with closed signs already flipped.

“Do not invite him like that again,” I said after a while. “Not without clearing it with me or your father first.”

“Sorry, I know,” Della apologized. “I decided in the moment.”

“Do not decide like that again,” I said. “He is dangerous. Remember you told me that.”

“I remember what I said, but I also know what I have seen since he moved to Silverfang,” Della replied.

“What have you seen?” I asked.

“He keeps a low profile,” she replied. “He trains. He reads. He doesn’t undermine our warriors. He doesn’t throw his weight around.”

“Keeping a low profile doesn’t make him safe,” I said.

“It makes him easier to handle because he’s predictable,” Della said.

My wolf huffed. ‘Until he isn’t.’

“So, what’s the plan with him being at the party?” I asked.

“I’ll treat him like any other guest. If he acts up, he’ll be kicked out. Remember your father told him to be on his best behavior,” Della answered.

“Why do I feel like you invited him for another reason?” I asked. “For instance using him against Jason.”

“If Jason tries to show up and he will try, I would rather have Nolan standing in the room ensuring Jason is on his best behavior instead of being stuck policing Jason alone,” Della rationalized.

“That is not your job,” I said. “You can just say they both can’t go.”

Della exhaled. “Look, I don’t know why you’re against this. He saved you from Jason.”

“And he also said he wanted me to be his maid,” I countered.

“He probably only said that to make Jason back down,” Della explained. “You know better than anyone else that Jason is persistent. Nolan isn’t like that.”

I hated to admit that she was right. Nolan, majority of the time, was indifferent. It was only recently that he started engaging more.

“Compared to Jason, he is less trouble to have nearby. He doesn’t hound you. He doesn’t pretend you still belong to him. He doesn’t shove you against benches in public gardens and claim it’s love.”

My jaw tightened. The memory of the situation still bothered me. “Right,” I muttered.

We fell quiet for a block.

“You still should have asked your father before inviting him,” I said.

“I will tell him tonight that I invited Nolan and that Nolan accepted. If he says no, I will rescind it.”

“Do not argue if he says no,” I said.

“I won’t,” she said. “I will be unhappy in the kitchen and cut cake with too much force, but I won’t argue.”

I couldn’t help but laugh.

CHAPTER 65

Talia’s POV

The week passed uneventfully. No Jason stalking me and no Nolan being condescending. Before I knew it, the night of Della’s party arrived. I walked into the hall with a wrapped box tucked under one arm and a bottle of Rosefall wine held carefully in my other hand. Convincing Father to part with one had been relatively easy.

I could hear the music blasting before I reached the hall. Upbeat pop music pulsed through the speakers. Colored lights spun across the ceiling casting the room in shifting patterns of red, green, and gold. A group of younger pack members were already dancing.

Della stood out among them. She looked radiant in her new gold dress. Della looked like a firefly on the dance floor as the light caught the sequins on her dress. She danced close to a young man who was equally intrigued and flustered by her attention.

'Della, ease up on him. I think you'll give him a heart attack if you keep dancing like that with him,' I teased Della through our mindlink.

'Where are you?' Della asked as she pulled away from the young man who looked relieved but also disappointed.

'Over here at the entrance,' I responded. When she saw me, she squealed and rushed across the room. Della threw her arms around me.

"You came!" she said, beaming.

"Careful! You're going to make me drop your gifts!" I warned her and she pulled back.

"Sorry, sorry," Della stated.

"Of course I came. I missed too many of your birthdays. I wasn't going to miss this one," I said, smiling back." Happy birthday."

I handed her the box first. She tore it open without hesitation. Inside was a delicate white gold necklace with a small rose-shaped pendant.

"Talia, it's beautiful. I love it!" She immediately clasped it around her neck. "I'm not taking this off, ever."

I offered her the bottle of wine next. "And this is Rosefall. My father made it."

Her mouth fell open. "You actually brought Rosefall?! I've always wanted to try this. Thank you!"

As Della hurried off to show her father the bottle of Rosefall, I let my eyes sweep the room. No Jason lurking around, trying to win me back. No Nolan standing around looking indifferent. Just music, laughter, and my best friend enjoying her night. Good.

Someone shouted over the music. “Come dance, Beta Della!”

“In a second!” Della answered after giving her father the Rosefall for safe keeping. “Cake first. We have all night to dance.”

Della clapped her hands to get everyone’s attention and the volume of the music lowered. “Alright, everyone, over here! Cake time!”

I followed her to the long table where the towering birthday cake waited with candles already lit and glowing. The crowd pressed in close, and we all began singing.

“Happy Birthday to you!”

“Don’t sing so loud, you’re off-key!” someone teased. Everyone laughed. The song continued and at the end was when the door to the hall opened.

Nolan stepped inside first with Marco at his side. Marco carried neatly wrapped gifts. Behind them followed Jason and Henry.

The smile on my face quickly dropped. So much for hoping that they wouldn’t show up. “Ok, everyone, back to dancing! The night isn’t over yet,” I said, and the guests warily went back to their seats with cake or back to dancing on the dance floor.

“Happy Birthday, Della,” Nolan said smoothly as he approached.

“Yes, Happy Birthday, Della,” Jason chimed in, but Della didn’t even look at him.

Marco stepped forward and said, “Where would you like your gifts?”

Della froze as if she had seen a ghost. It lasted only a second before she forced a polite smile.

Della cleared her throat and said, “Thank you for coming, Alpha Nolan and Beta Marco.” She gestured to the opposite end of the table. “Right over there is fine.”

Marco and Henry set the gifts down, stepping back behind their respective Alpha. Everything in me screamed for me to send them away. Della was acting weird and I didn’t want anything to happen to ruin her night.

“You’ve delivered your gifts,” I said evenly, forcing calm into my voice. “You should go.”

Nolan’s eyes met mine. He looked amused at my irritation. “Why rush? Della is the princess’s good friend. I was hoping to meet her. I wonder where she is tonight.”

My wolf bristled instantly. He was baiting me. If he revealed that I am the Princess, Jason would never leave me alone.

Della, quick as ever, stepped in. “The Princess wasn’t feeling well. She came earlier,” she said.

“A shame. Maybe next time,” Nolan replied, faking a disappointed look.

Jason took the opportunity to insert himself into the conversation. “Della, thank you for allowing us to celebrate with you.”

Della’s smile vanished. She crossed her arms. “I didn’t invite you, Jason.”

“I know, but…”

“If you know that, why are you here?” Della asked, interrupting him.

“I think we got off on the wrong foot in the past. Tonight, I’d like to make things right,” Jason replied and forced

a smile.

Della snorted, unimpressed. “Right. Convenient for you to do that at my birthday party. How selfless of you.” She turned her head toward me. “What do you think, Talia? Should we let him stay?”

All eyes shifted to me. Jason looked hopeful. Nolan, in contrast, looked indifferent as if he already knew how I would answer.

For the moment, Nolan wasn’t going to expose me. That much was clear. But Jason was ready to twist my decision either way.

If I denied him publicly, Jason would cause a scene and ruin Della’s birthday. If I allowed him, it would make him

feel like he could continue to push boundaries. There was no good choice, only damage control.

“If Jason stays,” I said firmly. “It will be under one condition.

CHAPTER 66

Talia’s POV

“Any condition,” Jason said, smiling as if he already knew what I was going to say. “Name it.”

“Stay out of trouble,” I said. “Don’t bother anyone. Celebrate Della’s birthday quietly. Then leave.” My tone was calm, but my eyes were watching him carefully.

“Done. I can do that. Thanks Talia,” Jason stated like it was no effort at all.

I frowned and rolled my eyes.

Della clapped once to pull the attention back on her. “Alright, cake slices are coming. Then drinks. Be nice, or I’ll throw you out myself.”

Servers brought out the glasses, and Della grabbed the rose-gold bottle of Rosefall from the bar. She uncorked it and began pouring in a steady rhythm.

“Finally. Rosefall!” Della cheered.

She moved down the line, filling half a glass for each guest. When she reached Nolan, he immediately took a sip.

“Nice wine. It tastes familiar,” he commented.

Jason heard it from three feet away and turned, eager to insert himself. “Of course it’s good,” he announced, voice a little too loud. “Rosefall is one of Silverfang’s premium wines. You only see it at the Alpha King’s gatherings.” He angled his head toward Nolan, his face smug. “Not that you’d know. You’ve never been to one.”

Nolan didn’t respond to his bait. He took another small drink and turned his attention back to me, “I wonder if I would be allowed a bottle.”

“You liked it that much?” I asked in surprise. “I’m sure the Alpha King would have no problem providing a case.”

Seeing that he was being left out of the conversation, Jason tossed back his entire pour in one swallow.” Another,” he said, shoving his glass toward me. I wanted to warn him that even though the wine was sweet, it packed a punch but deep down I wanted him to mess up so I could kick him out.

I poured him another glass. He downed it in one gulp, then pivoted toward Della. “I have to say… you look amazing tonight,” he said, words just a fraction slower than they should have been. “Gold dress suits you. Your favorite color, isn’t it? You and the Princess are close, I heard it.”

“You’re barking up the wrong tree, Jason,” Della warned him. “Your flattery won’t get you anywhere with me.”

“No flattery,” Jason insisted, downing his second pour. “I just think it’s amazing that you’re good friends with Talia and the Princess. Maybe you could introduce me properly.”

“To whom?” Della asked, already bored with the conversation,

“The princess of course,” he smiled, his words slurring more now. “I want to get to know her.”

Della frowned and stepped back from him. “She already knows who you are.”

Jason grinned like an idiot and said, “Great. Then you can tell her-”

“And she isn’t interested,” Della snapped, her disgust clear. “She knows you rejected your fated mate.”

His smile dropped. “That’s…that’s not the full story.” He looked at me in desperation. “Talia, tell her. Tell them

all. You know how it was.”

“I’m not explaining anything for you,” I said, rolling my eyes.

Jason stepped closer, glass hanging from his fingers. “Please,” he begged. “You can fix this.”

“No.” I snapped, backing away.

Jason reached out and clamped his hand around my wrist. His claws dug into my wrist. “Talia…”

A sharp cracking noise interrupted Jason. Nolan stood next to me cracking his knuckles. “Remove your hand, Jason. You’ve had your fun. Now leave.” he ordered. Jason flinched and dropped my wrist immediately.

Color climbed Jason’s neck as humiliation sank in. He squared his shoulders and glanced around. Some of the guests had started to watch.

“Jason,” Della warned.

“Jason, just leave,” I added, trying to keep my voice steady despite my racing heart.

“Listen!” He slurred, “No one takes Talia from me,” he said, louder. “Not even you.”

Nolan smirked but it looked more feral. “You’re going to stop me? Try it.”

Marco stepped closer to Nolan, ready for whatever happened. Henry moved in from the side, laying a hand on Jason’s shoulder. “Alpha,” he said, his voice low and calm, “don’t.”

Jason shook him off with a drunken sway. “I agreed to her condition,” he snapped. He jabbed a finger toward me and almost poked my shoulder. “I’m celebrating. Quietly. See? Quiet.” He laughed at his own lie and raised his empty glass. “Another.”

“You’ve had enough,” I said.

“I’ll decide that,” he shot back, and swung the glass toward the table to set it down. He missed the edge, the glass smacked the wood, and it shattered.

“Enough! I will put you out myself,” Nolan said as he stepped forward.

“Alpha Nolan, please stand down. I’ll get him out,” Henry stated and he reached for Jason again.

Jason turned away from Henry, brandishing the broken glass. “What are you doing Henry? I am having fun. Just leave me alone. This is between me and Nolan.”

He turned his attention back to Nolan. “Everyone thinks you’re a monster,” he slurred. “Let’s see it.” Nolan didn’t respond. He just watched Jason.

I stepped in front of Nolan and said, “Jason, that is enough. Put it down now.”

Jason raised his hands dramatically, but he didn’t drop the broken glass shard. “Oh look at you. I’m so scared,” he taunted. “You’re defending him again! I am done with this,”

Without another word, Jason lunged at me. Nolan’s hand shot out, gripping my arm and yanking me aside just in time. Broken glass shredded across his forearm with a harsh scrape.

Nolan’s hand locked onto Jason’s throat. It wasn’t a full squeeze, but just enough pressure to make Jason panic. Jason’s feet scrambled for purchase. The entire party froze.

Della stiffened at my side. “Stop,” she pleaded with Nolan. “You don’t have to kill him.” Marco rushed forward,

trying to separate them, but Nolan was unyielding.

I stepped closer, placing a hand on Nolan’s forearm. I could feel the low growl rumbling within him. His Alpha aura flaring out making the surrounding air oppressive.

“Let him go,” I said, clear and even. “You can’t kill him. If you do, the Alpha King will have to punish you and banish you from Silverfang. Please just let him go. He’s not worth the trouble.”

For a moment, I thought Nolan would snap his neck, but he finally released him. Jason dropped to his knees, gasping for air like a drowning man.

“Get out NOW!” Nolan growled.

CHAPTER 67

Nolan's POV

Henry positioned himself in front of Jason. He raised one hand in a quiet signal of restraint.

"Alpha Nolan," he said, voice low and respectful. "I apologize for my Alpha. He has been drinking. I will take him out and make sure he does not return tonight."

Jason swayed behind him, jaw set like he had something to say. He stared at the floor rather than meet my eyes.

I nodded once. "See that you do."

Henry gave a short nod back. He caught Jason by the arm and steered him toward the exit. Jason muttered something about being fine and tried to pull free, but his feet betrayed him. Guests pretended not to stare as they passed.

Della moved to the front of the cake table and cleared her throat. "This cake will not go to waste. Everyone come get a slice," she called. Her smile held, but when she turned toward me it faltered. Her gaze dropped to my arm. My blood had started to pool on the floor.

"Talia," she exclaimed, eyes still on my arm. "Please take him to the lounge and bandage his arm. Marco and I will handle the room."

Talia stepped in without hesitation. She lifted my arm gently, examining the slash, then said, "Come with me."

I followed her out of the hall. The music faded as we walked down the corridor. The lounge door stood open. She pointed at a chair, and I sat. She crossed to a cabinet, pulled a small med kit from a neatly stacked row, and set it on the low table.

“Hold still,” Talia said, peeling open a packet of wipes.

I did as I was told. The antiseptic burned as she cleaned the wound, but I didn’t flinch. My eyes stayed on her instead-on the little crease between her brows, the way she bit her plump lips in concentration. My mind wandered.

If her father were not my enemy, this would be ordinary. We would have crossed paths a hundred times as children. We would have learned each other’s preferences, watched each other grow up. I wondered if the mate bond would have activated for Jason. Maybe Jason would never have gotten a chance to be near her.

“Have you forgiven Jason for his rejection?” I asked, unable to stop myself. My anger bled into the words as I studied her face. “Is that why you stopped me?”

Talia frowned and snapped, “Just because I don’t want you to murder him at Della’s birthday party doesn’t mean I forgave him. You need to mind your own business.”

“You keep making it my business by allowing him to remain here to throw tantrums when he doesn’t get what he wants,” I retorted.

Her head rose like I had thrown something, and she slammed the gauze hard over my wound causing me to flinch. “I didn’t ask you to intervene. I didn’t ask you to save me, so don’t act like I owe you anything,” Talia hissed.” Finish whatever investigation you have in Silverfang and leave. Soon.”

‘I told you, she would know it’.My wolf barked. Good, I did not bother to pretend then.

“You understand why I am here,” I said. “And you still think you can order me out?”

“I am not ordering you,” Talia said. She tore the tape clean and pressed it down over the gauze. She began cleaning up. “I am warning you. This is not your territory. Do what you came to do and go.”

I leaned forward. “What if your father really is the killer?”

Her hands stilled over the medical kit. Slowly, she turned to face me. “He was not,” she said firmly.

The certainty in her voice caused me to laugh bitterly. “Your blind faith will be your downfall, Princess.”

Talia closed the tin and put it back in the cabinet. “Believe what you want. I do not owe you an explanation.” She stood. “You are bandaged. We are done.” She walked out of the lounge.

The room went quiet after she left. I flexed my arm and the gauze held. My wolf was silent for once but fuming at

I left the lounge and found Marco posted in the corridor. He took one look at the bandage and then at my face. “I am surprised she didn’t make the wound worse,” Marco stated.

I glared at him before saying, “Walk.”

“Not going back to the party?” Marco asked.

“No,” I replied, and he looked disappointed for a second.

We didn’t say anything as we walked back to our quarters.

“Marco,” I said, keeping my voice low. “What if the Alpha King was not the one?”

His steps faltered. “You doubt what we saw?”

“I remember the black wolf,” I said quietly. “I remember my father falling. The blood.”

Marco stopped and turned to face me. “We saw a black wolf kill Alpha Ryker. That wasn’t a dream.. After that, we found the Alpha King in the forest. His clothes were soaked with your father’s blood. Intentional or not, that makes him responsible.”

“He could have stumbled on the body,” I muttered. The words tasted wrong the moment they left my mouth. I must have lost my mind.

“Did the Princess say something to make you feel this way?” Marco pressed, staring at me as if I’d grown another

head.

I did not answer him right away. I thought about the laugh that had not been a laugh, and the way Talia’s voice had not trembled when she said her father was not the killer.

“No,” I said at last, forcing steel into my tone. “I’m just… thinking that maybe we misread the situation.”

Marco’s gaze hardened. “Do not doubt yourself, Nolan. We saw what we saw. Do not let the mate bond shake you. Not now.”

“Right. The stupid mate bond,” I scoffed, ignoring my wolf’s snarl of protest. I came here for revenge, and I won’t leave until it’s done.

CHAPTER 68

Nolan’s POV

The dream returned more intensely than ever.

I was in the forest. Moonlight cut through the branches in thin bands. My father called my name once, and his voice was replaced with a low snarl. The black wolf stepped out of the brush. It was massive. Its muzzle was wet with blood. Across its forehead I saw three white streaks in the shape of claw marks. Its eyes were not red. They were clear and focused. My father was running towards me when the black wolf pounced. It tore my father apart. When it lifted its head, it leaped for me.

I snarled awake and sat up. Sweat soaked my shirt and my chest heaved.

‘It was just a dream,’ my wolf reassured me. ‘Breath Nolan.’

The door opened at once and Marco rushed in with his claws ready. His eyes swept the room before fixating on me. Marco relaxed and closed the door.

“The nightmare again?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said as I got out of bed. “I saw it clearer this time. The black wolf that killed my father had three white streaks on its forehead. They looked like claw marks. Its eyes were not red. It was not feral.”

“What do you think triggered you to remember that? Are you sure it wasn’t just a dream?” Marco asked.

“It was a memory. I am sure of it,” I replied firmly. “Perhaps being here is making my memory come back clearer.”

“That does happen with memories that were repressed,” Marco said.

“Bring the blood,” I ordered.

“From the rogues we caught?”

“Yes.” I confirmed as I retrieved a bottle of water. I drank half of the bottle before continuing, “I want it detoxified so we can test it out.”

“Are you sure about this? If we don’t do this, we could kill someone.’

“Then, do it right. The Hunting Rite is the perfect chance. The Alpha King has not shifted in public for years. If he shifts during the Rite, and if what I saw in my dream is correct, we will see the truth. If he matches the wolf I remember, I will kill him in front of every Alpha present.”

Marco’s jaw tightened. “That’s risky. The other Alpha could unite against us.”

“That’s a risk I’m willing to take. I am done waiting.” I hissed.

“Are you sure about this? Innocents could get hurt. If the blood triggers a frenzy in someone else- or if we miscalculate the dose and the Alpha King dies before we even know the truth-that’s on us,” Marco snapped.

“We won’t miscalculate,” I said firmly. “You’ll keep it stable until the poison is cleared. I just need him to lose control and shift right there. Make sure it’s ready before the Rite.”

Marco exhaled sharply, rubbing his temples in frustration. After a long pause, he muttered, “I’ll prepare it.”

He turned for the door. His hand was on the handle when a knock sounded from the other side. Marco opened it and stepped back to let the warrior in.

“Alpha Nolan,” the warrior said with a bow. “Alpha Jason of Shadowclaw requests an audience.”

Marco shot me a look that said he did not like the timing. I did not like it either. What the hell did this idiot want this early?

“Send him in,” I said.

Jason entered with Henry behind him. His eyes were red. His skin was sickly pale and grey.

“State your business and then get out,” I said.

“Alpha Nolan,” he said. The stench of vomit was on his breath, and it made me grimace. “I came to apologize for last night.”

Jason moved like a man who wanted to seem steady and could not trust his legs to do the work for him. Henry kept a half step to the rear, ready to catch his shoulder if he stumbled.

‘He can’t hold his liquor,’ Marco said through our mindlink. ‘Utterly pathetic.’

“You should apologize to Beta Della and Talia,” I said.

“Of course,” he said quickly. “I plan to. I wanted to start with you.”

Marco closed the door and stood to the side. He did not hide his impatience,

Jason continued, “Last night got out of hand. I lost my temper. I am not normally like that.” He gestured vaguely with one hand. “Rosefall is strong…”

“It was not Rosefall that was the problem,” I said. It didn’t matter if he was sober or drunk. He would have still caused a scene for being denied.

“Right,” he said, ignoring me. “It was stronger than I expected.”

“I thought you had it before,” I mocked. “Isn’t that what you told me? I would have known about it if I showed up at the events.”

Jason cleared his throat and tried another smile. “Look, I am not here to cause more trouble. We are allies. I do not want a small misunderstanding to harm that.”

He flicked a glance toward Marco and then to Henry, as if he wanted witnesses for his show of submission. Henry’s face did not change. Marco’s did not either. Both looked at him with confusion.

“You put a shard of glass across my arm,” I said. “That is not a small misunderstanding.”

Jason’s eyes dipped to the bandage at my forearm. He bowed his head in fake humility. “I was wrong. I admit it. I drank too much. I let my pride get the better of me.”

My wolf huffed, ‘Let me sink my fangs into him. Give him an injury and then we’ll be even.’

‘Patience,’ I told my wolf. I planned on getting Jason back, but not before I made use of him.

“You’re wasting my time. So you are here to apologize or what?” I barked.

“Yes, I apologize, Alpha Nolan. I want to keep the alliance on track,” he said. “We both want the same things. We both have a problem with the Alpha King. We can work together. We should.”

I did not answer.

He kept going. “Last night was a mistake. It will not happen again. I will make sure of it. Henry will make sure of

it.”

Henry gave a single nod. He did not look at me when he did it. He looked at Jason, as if to remind him of the promise he had just made.

“I do not want this to become something it is not. Talia is not the point. She is a distraction. She is a lowly omega. She is not worth throwing away an alliance over. You agree, don’t you?” He forced that hated smile, waiting for

my answer.

CHAPTER 69

Nolan's POV

I laughed, and that gave Jason what he wanted to hear without giving him anything at all. He thought he had scored a point. He thought I agreed that Talia was beneath the cost of an alliance. He had no idea that his words were the loudest kind of stupidity.

'You should rip his tongue out for insulting our mate,' my wolf growled.

'In time. Be patient,' I hushed him.

"Fair point," I finally said. "An alliance is worth more than a low-ranked she-wolf."

Jason's smile grew wider. He stepped closer. "That is what I respect about you," he said, laying it on thick. "You are a strategist. You know when to focus on the bigger picture. I have been thinking about that bigger picture lately. I guessed you were investigating your father's death. Everyone knows you are not here for the scenery. I want to help."

I did not respond. 'Maybe he's smarter than we thought,' Marco growled through our mindlink.

'Don't be fooled. He is still an arrogant idiot,' I responded.

Jason took my silence as permission to continue. "The Alpha King has a private library in the northern wing. It holds sealed archives and case records from years back. Investigations. Internal reports. All the files that he doesn't want 'the commoners' to see. The Alpha King keeps them under lock and key. You will not find anything in the public halls, but that room is different."

"Why are you telling me this?" I asked.

"This is my way to make up for what I did last night," Jason answered quickly. "The King left early this morning to inspect the hunting grounds again. He will not return until late tomorrow. When he is gone, the palace guards will slack off. It is the perfect window to get a look without raising suspicion."

Jason made it sound like he was helping me. He was not helping anyone but himself. He was hoping I would take the bait. If caught, the Alpha King and I would be at odds. Then Jason would reap the benefits from the chaos.

“Thanks for the information,” I said, and then gestured to the door.

“Wait, there’s more,” Jason stated. “There is a mechanism in the shelves. It is easy to miss if you do not know where to look. The King’s crest on the third row hides a release. Press the center fang, then slide the book beside it out by two inches and it will open to the archives.”

“I appreciate the tip,” I said.

“You’re welcome, Alpha Nolan. I’ll let you get on with your morning,” Jason said. He left with Henry at his back. When their footsteps faded, Marco turned to me.

“The fool thinks he can trick us,” Marco scoffed.

“I know,” I replied.

“You’re still going to go, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” I said.

“This could be a trap. This feels too easy,” Marco argued.

“You’re probably right; however, if there is proof the Alpha King colluded with rogues, it will be in the archive,” I responded.

I spent the day in plain sight. I ate with the warriors and watched a training rotation. I spoke to Beta Logan about patrol assignments for the southern border. When the sun went down and the corridors settled, I left my room without sound. I masked my scent with a clean, sharp cologne that burned my eyes.

I was disappointed at how easy it was for me to get into the King's study, as I only needed a lockpick. There were no guards around. I slipped into the King's study and closed it softly behind me.

'This is too easy. Be careful,' my wolf warned.

The room smelled of leather and polished wood, bookshelves lined the walls, and a map of the territories loomed over the desk. I scanned the shelves until I found the silver wolf emblem Jason had described. Pressing its fang released a hidden panel, and cold air swept out from the space beyond. I slid inside, and the wall closed behind me, leaving me in a narrow hallway.

I walked to the end of the hallway and ended up in a small library. Its shelves were stacked with ledgers and sealed boxes. There was a single lamp providing just enough light.

It was smaller than I expected, narrow and deep, with a single lamp on a timer casting a low ring of light over a central table. The shelves held ledger books, sealed boxes with numbered tags, and narrow binders with typed labels.

'Be quick. We do not know if the guards do check this archive or not,' my wolf warned.

I started at the nearest shelf. The binders were arranged by year. I pulled one and flipped past indexes to the body of the file, which covered patrol reports, incident logs, and medical summaries from the royal clinic. Names were redacted with black ink in some places and left open in others. I read quickly, looking for anything about my father or rabid rogues.

My wolf paced restlessly within me. 'We have been here too long. Just take the files with us.'

"That is too much of a hassle. Calm down. No one is coming in here,' I responded.

I kept going. I looked for anything that said collusion. I found a ledger with entries tracking seizures from rogue dens. Redbone Flower seized from one raid. A note that the plant was banned. A hospital requisition for samples for study.

Then a cold voice cut through the quiet, freezing me mid-page turn, “Who are you, and how did you get in here?”

I froze. It was Talia.

CHAPTER 70

Talia’s POV

My muscles were tense as I waited for the man to turn around. He was masking his scent, which was concerning, but all I had to do was mindlink the warriors and they would be here in seconds.

‘You should’ve done that before we came in here,’ my wolf scolded.

‘If we can’t defend our territory on our end, how do we expect Solon to rely on us?’ I countered.

When the man finally turned, I froze. It was Nolan. He didn’t look startled at being caught. He looked like he had planned it all along, as if being discovered was part of his design.

“How did you get in here?” I asked.

Nolan set the binder in his hand on the table as though he were a polite guest. “I am here to read,” he responded smoothly.

Did he think this was a game? His smirk suggested he did.

“This is my father’s private library, Alpha Nolan,” I said through gritted teeth. “No outsider is allowed in here. You didn’t come to read.”

“It is still a library,” he countered.

“Cute,” I said. “Try again. What are you really doing here?”

For a moment, Nolan said nothing. His eyes flicked over the ledgers on the shelves as though he was debating what he should reveal. Then he looked back at me.

“I am looking for records about my father’s death,” Nolan admitted at last. “Once I find what I need, I will leave. Do not get in my way.”

My wolf bristled at the warning. ‘He thinks he can walk in here, threaten us, and get away with it,’ she growled.

“Who do you think you’re talking to, Nolan?” I demanded. “You are in the Alpha King’s private room. You don’t get to make threats. You shouldn’t be here at all.”

He stepped closer, closing the distance between us. In the narrow space of the library, I noticed how tall he really was. His shadow seemed to swallow mine. His closeness made me very aware of him. His scent was amber and pine. I didn’t expect something so alluring from him.

How had I not noticed it before? Weird.

I hated that part of me that was automatically comparing him to Jason. Compared to Jason, Nolan was built like a God. I could see his muscles straining against his shirt.

“Do not test my patience, Princess,” Nolan warned, bringing me out of my thoughts,

“Then don’t disrespect me, Alpha,” I snapped back. “And anyway, you are looking in the wrong place.”

I brushed past him, my shoulder grazing his arm, Heat rushed to my skin at the contact, but I ignored it, Pulling a thick record book from the shelf, I set it on the table between us.

“This is what you came for. I have already reviewed it, My father was cleared of all wrongdoing,” I said.

Nolan did not look down on the book. “That is convenient. Do you expect me to believe that?”

“I don’t care what you believe. It is the truth,” I said firmly. “Reports, witness statements, and medical summaries are in this book. The black wolf who tore into your father was not my father nor a wolf of Silverfang.”

“How would you know that? You were a child when it happened,” Nolan retorted. “You weren’t in the forest. I was. I saw it with my own eyes.”

“Then you should be looking for the black wolf who did it and not attempting to bait my father into an altercation,” I countered, pushing the book closer to him. “Read it. Hopefully, you’ll stop this foolish agenda of trying to get my father to admit to a crime he didn’t commit.”

Nolan frowned, then gave a humorless laugh. “You’re too pretty to be this stupid.”

“Excuse me?”

“You think stamped pages and redacted names will clear him?” Nolan questioned. “You could’ve easily tampered with this.”

“Do you really think my father and I fabricated an entire report on the off chance you would sneak into Silverfang?” I shot back. “You are not that important. And the statements came from wolves outside this pack as well.”

That silenced him briefly. He finally looked down and picked up the book.

“This changes nothing,” Nolan muttered.

“I am investigating as well,” I said before he could continue. His head snapped up in surprise, though he masked it quickly. “Don’t misunderstand. I am doing this for my family, not for you. I will not let you continue to paint my father as a murderer to fuel your grudge. And I expect a formal apology when I find out the truth.”

“I can agree that facts matter,” Nolan said coldly. “Don’t hold your breath on that apology, Princess. I will keep finding the truth without the assistance of someone biased like yourself.”

“You will do it with respect for this house and this territory,” I warned. “You will not break into rooms that are not yours anymore. Dest ME, Nolan. You don’t scare me. I’ll have you thrown into the dungeon with the snap of my fingers

“Of

tand?”

wish, Princess,” Nolan said mockingly. I sneered as he walked past me to the exit.

et not reporting you,” I told him, but he didn’t respond.

Solve the conflict between him and my father soon, Silverfang would be in danger. The guards eported back that Nolan allowed Jason to enter his room, as if last night’s fight at Della’s party had never pened, to talk about Goddess knows what. If those two started working together, there’s no telling what type of chaos they could stir up,

A loud thud brought me out of my thoughts.

“What was that?” I asked.

Nolan didn’t respond. He pressed the release panel again and there was the dull thud again. Nolan slammed his hand into the panel again. The loud thud came again.

going on, Nolan?” I repeated.

nnot be happening,” Nolan muttered under his breath. Then, he said louder, “The door is jammed. We get out!”