Barren Luna 71

CHAPTER 71

Talia's POV

"Damn it!"

Nolan's curse echoed in the cramped library. He shoved at the shelf again, but the panel didn't budge. The jam was obvious now. Whatever mechanism kept the wall moving had slipped out of place.

"Slamming into it isn't going to fix it," I said.

"Do you have any other ideas?" Nolan snapped.

"Hey, don't let me stop you. Keep trying to brute force it. I'm sure that will work," I shrugged.

"Sarcasm isn't becoming of you, Princess," Nolan stated and turned his attention back on the shelf.

Nolan tried again, pressing against the crest with deliberate force, but the wood shuddered and locked with the same dull thud. He continued muttering curses under his voice.

I exhaled and turned away. "I'll reach Solon."

I opened the mindlink and reached out, but there was only silence. I tried again, but still nothing. I reached out to Della, but I was still met with silence..

"Nothing?" Nolan asked flatly.

"Nothing," I admitted.

“Solon is out patrolling. He probably has up a mental block to focus,” Nolan suggested. It irritated me that he knew so much about how Silverfang operated.

Nolan’s frown deepened as his eyes glazed over for a second before saying, “Marco isn’t answering. What time is it?”

“I don’t know. There isn’t a clock in here,” I answered.

“You didn’t bring your phone?” Nolan asked.

“No. Why would I need it?” I replied as I rolled my eyes.

“What is the point of having a phone if you’re not going to have it on you?” Nolan snapped.

“I could ask you the same thing. I wasn’t expecting someone to be in the library,” I replied.

Nolan let out a frustrated sigh. He looked out of the small window of the library to see the full moon. “Great, it’s a full moon night. It must be midnight. Just our luck.”

On full moon nights our abilities as wolves became fickle. No one knew why but certain abilities worked better than others and clearly mindlinking had been negatively affected this full moon night. 4

So, neither of us had help coming.

“I guess we’re spending the night here then,” I said.

“You want to try getting down from the window?” Nolan suggested.

“At this height, the fall may actually kill me. No, thank you,” I said as I sat down at the table.

Nolan lingered by the exit before pulling a chair to a corner. He sat down and opened the record book I'd given him. His fingers flipped through the pages slowly before he looked at me.

I continued to try to mindlink anyone as he read. We sat in silence for a moment before Nolan asked, "Did you alter this?"

I snapped my head toward him. "What kind of question is that?"

"It's a simple question, Princess. Did you or did you not alter this record book?"

"That book was compiled by wolf elders, years before either of us stood in this room. So, no, Nolan, I did not alter it," I stated firmly.

Nolan scoffed, "You say elders like I should respect them. They bury the truth when it's favorable for them."

"I gave you the evidence you've been looking for, and when you don't like what the evidence says, you call it lies. How mature of you, Alpha."

Nolan snorted and closed the book. "I'll find my answers somewhere else."

"You won't find anything, but what you already refuse to admit," I warned.

Nolan's eyes locked on mine, dark and unyielding before he smiled. "I can see why Jason wants you back."

I was surprised by this statement. "What do you mean?"

Nolan smirked at my confusion. "You got the drive for a Luna. You don't back down even when you should," Nolan explained.

I frowned. What kind of compliment was that? Nolan chuckled and opened the record book again.

I couldn't take my eyes off him for some reason. I noticed how calm, almost pleasant he looked while he read. The light showed the faint shadow of stubble tracing his mouth. I noticed how his right peck lifted slightly as he turned a page. Goddess, he was an asshole, but he was so handsome.

And then there was his scent. His scent reached me again. It made my pulse race in a way that had not happened in a long time. My mind began to wonder about how he would have looked if I had seen him at Fangvale.

My wolf hummed with her approval, 'He smells delicious.' I couldn't help but agree.

I shook my head. No, we shouldn't be thinking about him like that. This jerk was trying to pin a murder on my father.

I forced myself to stop looking at him. The full moon sat heavy in the sky. I stood up and walked over to the window to get fresh air. As soon as I stepped into the moonlight, my body reacted. I immediately felt a rush of heat.

I felt as if I was burning up. The cool air did nothing to relieve the heat building up in me. I slipped my shirt off but it didn't help. I needed to take more clothes off,

"Why are you taking your clothes off? What's wrong with you?" Nolan's voice cut in, sharp with disbelief.

The sound of him made me pause, my fingers frozen at the button of my pants. "Nothing," I lied. "I'm just… hot."

Too hot. I could feel my wolf pacing, pressing against the fragile control I had left. What was happening to me? My body screamed for cool air. I quickly tore my pants off and hid it beneath me. The air hitting my legs helped only for a second.

I heard Nolan put the book down and walk over to me. “I’m fine,” I told him as I sat down on the ground hoping the cool stone would help. I closed my eyes trying to focus on my breathing that was now too quick.

“No, you’re not.” His voice was closer now, low but firm. “Open your eyes and look at me.”

I forced my eyes open. He was right there, crouched in front of me, studying my face. “Your pupils are dilated,” he muttered. Then his hand pressed against my forehead.

I flinched at the contact. His skin was so much cooler than mine and I leaned into his hand before I knew it. Nolan’s frown deepened.

“Damn it,” he breathed, rough with disbelief. His eyes locked on mine.

“You’re in heat.”

CHAPTER 72

Nolan’s POV

“Nolan,” Talia’s voice cracked as she leaned into me, her warmth pressing against mine. “Please… help me.”

I attempted to pull my hand back, but her hand snatched open. She held on to me desperately. Her touch brought a shiver down my spine. I should have pulled away. Instead, I stayed and allowed her to move closer to me.

All I could smell was her sweet rose scent tainted with the tangy sharpness of heat. My cock hardened almost instantly. I had never wanted a she-wolf as bad as I wanted Talia.

My fangs began to lengthen as the instinct to mark her became stronger. My hands twitched with the urge to drag her closer and remove the rest of her clothes. Goddess, I wanted to taste the sweet nectar between her legs that had her scent so thick in this room.

‘She acknowledges us! We must claim her as ours,’ my wolf said triumphantly.

“No,” I snapped back at him in my mind. “Not like this. She doesn’t even understand what’s happening.”

‘She doesn’t need to understand,’ my wolf countered. ‘It is our responsibility to relieve her pain.’

‘How is it our responsibility?’ I asked.

‘If a she-wolf remains unmarked when the bond awakens, she will go through heat on a full moon night. She will continue to go through it until she is claimed,’ my wolf explained. ‘You caused this by denying the bond. She needs us!’

“Why won’t you help me? Do you hate me?” Talia whimpered, clutching my shirt and pulling me closer. Her fingers traced the buttons, parting the fabric just enough to press soft kisses to my skin. She tilted her head, baring her neck and said, “Take me now, please…”

My control faltered as I leaned forward, my tongue ran across her neck earning a moan from Talia. I felt my cock strain against my jeans.

“Please, Nolan. What are you waiting for?” She whispered, fidgeting beside me.

Her voice brought me back to my senses and I pulled back. This was wrong. Talia deserved more than this.

“No, don’t go,” Talia begged as she grabbed my hand again to keep me from standing. She dragged my hand across her face before she dragged it along her neck. “Don’t you want to feel me?” she purred as she began leading my hand down. When my hand hovered over her breasts, I quickly snatched my hand away and stood.

Talia whimpered at the loss of my hand. “So hot, I’m so hot,” Talia moaned as she began twisting restlessly. Her skin glistened with sweat, her body arching. “Please, make it stop,”

My wolf growled with satisfaction, prowling against the edges of my control. ‘She is begging for us. Stop holding back.’

“She doesn’t know what she’s saying,” I argued even though I wasn’t starting to not believe that, “She’s delirious.”

‘She doesn’t need words. Her body has already chosen us. Claim her now or would you want another male claim her,’ my wolf retorted.

The thought of Jason touching her, claiming her caused a violent surge of possessiveness roared through me. Jason had lost his chance, and I refused to allow him to sully her any further. Only I could touch her.

“Talia,” I said roughly. “You need to focus. This is not what you want. Remember, you hate me.”

‘You can’t resist this forever,’ my wolf sneered. ‘The pendant is weakening. When it breaks, I will claim her, and you will thank me.’

‘Like hell you will,’ I growled back at him.

I was brought out of my thoughts as Talia’s hands began fumbling with my pants. I couldn’t bring myself to stop her. I watched her struggling to free me.

“Nolan, I need this. Please. Just please make it stop,” she pleaded with me.

Goddess if only she knew how much I would love to surrender to the bond. I would love to have her straddling me, sliding up and down my length screaming my name. But I made a promise to myself that I would not be ruled by the mate bond. I couldn’t risk this.

“Talia, stop. You’re not in your right mind. You don’t know what you’re doing,” I warned her again, but she didn’t stop.

“I know exactly what I am doing,” Talia said as she gave up on my pants.

Her hand slid over my groin, earning a moan from me. “I know you want me too. Please, Nolan,” she pleaded again. Her hand slid over my stomach, up my chest as she stood. Her fingers curled around the chain at my neck.

“Don’t,” I growled, but she didn’t listen.

Talia yanked hard and the chain snapped. The pendant fell to the floor with a sharp clink. My wolf surged free, snatching control from me. He pulled her closer to him, inhaling her scent before pulling back.

My wolf gripped her chin, forcing Talia to meet his gaze. “You’re mine,” he growled and then kissed her hard.

CHAPTER 73

Nolan’s POV

My hands slid down the curve of her body. I cupped her breasts, earning a gasp. I nipped at her neck, and she arched into me.

‘This is what we were supposed to be doing. Do not deny it,’ my wolf growled.

Talia clutched at me. She deepened the kiss. One of her legs was already wrapped around my waist. I sucked on her neck as I grinded into her. “Mark me. Please, mark me,” she begged me.

For a brief second, I almost listened to her. All it would take was one bite, but clarity snapped me out of my lustful haze.

If I marked her now, she’d wake up tomorrow with regret. She was in heat, half-lost to the bond, If I was to mark her, I wanted her to truly want me not to be driven by instinct because of the mate bond.

“No!” I roared as I took control again. My Alpha aura flaring as I used the Alpha command against my wolf. He snarled as I shoved him back down. My body shook from the efforts.

Talia flinched as my Alpha aura slammed into her, but then her eyes burned with anger. “I wouldn’t regret it,” she snapped. “I can smell you. I know your scent. You’re my mate!”

The pendant had been off for only a minute, and the bond had snapped into place almost immediately. “No! The heat has you confused,” I said.

“Why won’t you admit it?” she demanded as tears welled up in her eyes. “What are you waiting for? Are you going to reject me, too?”

“It’s not that simple, Talia,” I told her. She didn’t know how close I was to losing everything right now, how close I was to breaking every promise I’d made to myself. Talia had no idea how bad I wanted to mark her.

“How is it not? We are mates. We should claim each other,” Talia retorted.

“You don’t understand,” I said as I looked past her for anything that could help with the situation. My eyes caught on a coil of rope tied to a stack of books along the wall.

“Then, make me understand, Nolan,” Talia said as she cupped my face. I stepped away from her and in a few quick strides, I grabbed the rope, dragged a chair into place, and tied her down. Talia thrashed, snarling, “Let me go!” The heat had stolen her strength, so she couldn’t free herself.

“You bastard!” she shouted, yanking at the ropes. “First Jason rejected me, and now you? You think I can’t handle being your mate? You think I don’t deserve it? You think I’m beneath you, too?”

I picked the pendant back up and tied the chain as best as I could around my neck. The runes on it activated and reduced the need to claim her significantly. My wolf snarled within me but could do nothing about it. My body still ached with need, but I had enough control to think.

Talia's tears finally spilled. Her voice trembled as she said, "Do you know what it feels like to not be wanted? Jason rejected me. He told me I wasn't good enough and I was barren. And now you sit here, knowing you're my mate, knowing I'm in pain, and you do the same thing. Do you have any idea what that feels like?"

I stood still, unable to answer. My wolf whimpered inside me, 'You're hurting her. Please stop hurting our mate.'

"I'm not Jason," I said at last, my voice rougher than I intended. "But if I give in now, you'll regret it tomorrow."

Talia shook her head. "You're wrong," she sobbed. "You're so wrong. Why is the Moon Goddess so cruel? I get a second chance, and you don't want me either."

I walked over to the window and shoved it fully open. Dark clouds now covered the moon as it had started raining. The cool mist from the wind entered the room. Talia gasped at the chill. Her heat slowly easing as her face didn't look as flushed.

I dragged a chair over and sat beside Talia. For a while, I said nothing. I just listened to her as she continued to sob and complain.

Finally, I spoke. "There is someone out there for you, Talia. Someone that will love you the way you deserve.'

"That's easy for you to say! You're not the one who was rejected twice," Talia snapped, her voice cracking under the weight of her pain.

I stayed silent. Anything I said now would only make her feel worse.

Talia struggled for a few more minutes until exhaustion consumed her. Her body sagged against the chair. Her breaths evened out. She had fallen into a deep, restless sleep as she muttered incoherently.

I stared at her for a long time, torn between relief and guilt. She looked so fragile like this. Without meaning to, I reached out to hug her carefully, and wiped away the last tear on her cheek.

“Damn it,” I muttered softly, my chest tight. “Why did it have to be you?”

CHAPTER 74

Nolan’s POV

I hadn’t slept at all.

Part of me did not feel right about sleeping while Talia was bound to the chair while the other part of me was fearful that she would break free and I would wake up to find myself deep inside of her.

The night seemed to drag on forever. My wolf stalked inside me, restless and unsatisfied. He berated me, working on my resolve to push me to claim Talia, but I had more honor than that. I focused on calling out to Marco all night through the mindlink.

When sunlight entered the room, Marco’s voice flooded my mind. ‘Alpha! I hear you. I’m on the way.’

‘Hurry!’

Marco burst in minutes later. His eyes swept the room and landed on her instantly. “What the hell happened?”

“Did anyone see you?” I asked.

“No,” Marco replied. “What happened? Why did she take off clothes?”

“Look away,” I snarled at him and Marco turned away as I pulled my shirt off. I slipped it on her and said, “She went into heat. It was the full moon.”

Marco turned back around. His eyes darted from me to her and back. Then, he noticed the rope on the floor and the rope burning on her wrists. “Nolan, I didn’t think you had a fetish.”

“Cut the crap, Marco,” I snapped. “I didn’t touch her. We need to get her to the infirmary before she wakes.”

Marco nodded and moved to pick up Talia. I couldn’t help but growl at him. The urge to maul him hit me instantly. Marco immediately sat Talia back down. “You need to carry her, Alpha.”

I picked up Talia. Her head slumped weakly against my shoulder. The scent of her heat lingered, making my wolf push against my control again. I shoved it down and carried her out the Alpha King’s library.

By the time we reached the pack infirmary, Solon was rushing towards us. His scent was laced with anger and fear. His Alpha aura flared against mine as he saw me carrying Talia.

“What did you do to her?” Solon roared as I laid Talia down on an empty stretcher.

Marco stepped forward to explain, but Solon shoved him aside without hesitation. “Get out of my way!”

Marco stumbled, caught himself, and bared his teeth. “Prince Solon! It’s not what you saw. Just calm down!”

“You don’t get to tell me what to do in my territory, in my home!” Solon snarled and then shoved Marco again out of his way. This time I glared at Marco signaling for him to not engage Solon again.

“What the hell did you do to my sister?!” Solon demanded.

“She collapsed,” I said coldly, ignoring Marco’s growl. “I’m bringing her here because she needs treatment.”

“Collapsed?” Solon snarled. “Or did you put her in this state yourself? Did you assault her?”

“Watch your mouth, Prince. I am many things, but I will never take advantage of a she-wolf,” I warned, my wolf pressing hard against my skin.

“Then, explain why she is half naked!” Solon barked, ready to attack me.

Before the tension could boil over, the doctor rushed out from a side room and pushed between us. “That’s enough! Both of you! You are disturbing her.”

The doctor rushed over to Talia to check her pulse. He opened one of her eye lids to check her eye before straightening. “Other than minor bruising, she is fine, Prince Solon.”

“Then, why is she not awake?” Solon questioned.

“She went into heat during last night’s full moon. Of course, you would not be able to detect it from her scent as you are her brother. The heat puts strain on the body. She needs rest and will wake when ready.”

Solon’s anger and worry turned into shock. “She’s… in heat?”

The doctor nodded. “It will pass.” He turned Talia’s head from side to side to check her neck. “There is no mark on her. See? Whoever stayed with her last night did not take advantage of our Princess.”

I felt Solon’s eyes return to me and he was relieved with a deep breath. He studied me for a long moment before finally speaking. “Nolan, a word.”

Solon led me into an empty room, and I closed the door behind me. “Speak,” I growled.

“I apologize for my behavior, I was worried as she’s my sister, I think you can understand it,” Solon stated.

I gave him a curt nod. “It was to be expected. You care about your sister,” I said flatly.

Solon continued, “But stay away from my sister from now on. You are not suitable for her.”

I snorted. “Listen. I have no interest in your sister,” I lied and turned on my heel and left the hospital.

Marco followed. When we reached my room, I kicked my shoes off and collapsed into my bed. “Close all the curtains,” I ordered.

As Marco was closing the curtains, he asked, “Did you at least find anything in the archives?”

“Nothing that proves the Alpha King’s guilt. Nothing that clears him either,” I responded before yawning.

Marco exhaled, rubbing the back of his neck. “So, we’re back where we started.”

“Yes, and I realized how close I was to losing control,” I cursed. “I need you to make a sedative from Nightveil ASAP. It needs to be strong enough to put the Princess’ wolf to sleep.”

Marco’s eyes widened. “Nightveil? Nolan, that could cause severe side effects. And if anyone found out, we dosed the Princess…”

“No one will,” I cut him off sharply, “I’m not asking you to kill her wolf. Just put it to sleep. I can’t risk her coming into heat again, not during the Hunting Rite. Prepare it in secret.”

Marco hesitated, then nodded grimly. “As you command.”

I closed my eyes. The image of Talia kissing me, and her sobbing that I was rejecting her replayed again and again in my mind.

And no matter how many times I told myself I didn’t care, my chest tightened all the same.

CHAPTER 75

Jason's POV

I paced in my room waiting for Henry to return to give me an update. My thoughts had been chaotic all night. I had given Henry the order to sabotage the mechanism in the Alpha King's private library. It was the perfect trap. Nolan wouldn't be able to resist sneaking in. Then he would be stuck until someone found him, preferably the

Alpha King himself or Solon.

But he hadn't been caught.

Instead, all I'd heard was that Nolan had sent Talia to the hospital. There had been no violent clash with Solon. By all logic, if he had been discovered in that library, Solon would have arrested him and sent him to the dungeon. So why was Nolan walking around as if he hadn't overstepped boundaries?

My thoughts circled back to the one detail that kept bothering me. Talia had been in the library as well. The library wasn't a place for common wolves. It was the Alpha King's domain. No outsiders were allowed.

So why had she been there? Was Solon actually taking her seriously as a potential mate? No. No, that was absurd.

Talia was an omega, a nobody. Maybe it was all a coincidence. Her best friend was Della. Maybe the Princess requested something from the library and Talia was just carrying out the request like a servant. That had to be it. Still, that meant Talia had been alone with Nolan all night. I didn't like the thought of that either.

Finally, Henry entered the room. His eyes shifted uneasily and that put me on edge. Henry rarely looked unsettled.

"Well?" I demanded. "What did you find out? What was Talia doing in the library?"

"You may want to sit down for this," Henry suggested.

Just tell me what you found out," I snapped.

"Talia went into heat last night. Nolan sent her to the hospital," Henry responded.

I scoffed, relieved for a moment. "So that's all it was. Just her wolf acting up?"

"It wouldn't be acting up if you hadn't rejected her," Henry retorted.

"Don't start that again, Henry. I told you I was going to win her back."

Henry's mouth pressed into a thin line. "That's not all I saw," he admitted.

I narrowed my eyes. "Go on."

"I stayed back, as you ordered, I didn't interfere. But when I followed quietly, I saw Beta Marco with her. He injected her with something smelt like Nightveil." Henry's voice lowered, his tone edged with disgust.

I stiffened. Why would Nolan order Marco to inject her with a sedative? The sedative was strong enough to force someone's wolf into sleep. And worse, if overused, it could strip a wolf of its ability to shift entirely.

"Are you certain?" I asked.

Henry nodded. "I saw it with my own eyes. I am familiar with the herb. Your father had my father administer it to rogues as punishment depending on their crime."

I sat on the edge of the table, tapping my fingers against the wood. "Why would Marco drug her?" I muttered, more to myself than to him. "What possible reason could Nolan have to subdue her wolf?"

“Your plan may have worked, Jason,” Henry suggested.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Solon was angry with Nolan when he saw Talia with Nolan. Nolan may be using Talia to get to Solon,” Henry explained.

Henry did have a point. Even though Talia was a plaything to Solon, Solon was very possessive of her. I could use this against Nolan if he attempted to doublecross me.

“Do you want me to tell her?” Henry asked cautiously. “Do you want Talia to know?”

I looked up sharply, shaking my head. “No. Not yet.'”

Henry frowned. “She should know what they’re doing to her.”

Henry had always been loyal to Talia since she was my Luna before. I remember how he scolded me when he found out that I rejected Talia for Viki. “You’re going to regret this, Henry. She was the best thing that ever happened to you,” Henry told me.

“She will know when it benefits me,” I corrected, my voice cold. “Think, Henry. If I tell her now, she runs straight to Solon. Solon will demand answers, and Silverfang descends into chaos. And what happens to me? Nothing. I gain nothing from telling her right now.”

Henry clenched his jaw, clearly unhappy with my reasoning, but he didn’t argue.

“This way,” I continued, “I hold the leverage. Nolan has secrets. He thinks he’s clever, that no one notices the shady things that he does. But I know now. He drugged her wolf. Whether he plans to kill it or bind it to himself, I don’t care. What matters is that it gives me a weapon to use against him whenever I choose.”

Henry crossed his arms, still frowning. “It’s dangerous to let it go on.”

“All the better,” I said. “The more dangerous it is, the more valuable the knowledge becomes. And when the opportunity presents itself, I’ll use it.”

CHAPTER 76

Talia’s POV

When I finally awoke, I felt as though I had been struck by a truck. My body ached as if I had spent all night sparring. I blinked several times, waiting for my vision to adjust to the light.

“You’re awake!” Solon said. He sat in the chair at my bedside and immediately grabbed my hand. “How do you feel?”

“Like I have been run over,” I admitted with a faint groan. I looked around and noticed I wasn’t in my lovely room. “Where am I? Am I in the infirmary?”

Della was sitting by the window, balancing a tray across her lap. The moment she heard my voice, she jumped to her feet, nearly dropping the tray to the floor.

“Thank the Goddess you’re awake. You frightened us half to death!” she said. “You have been unconscious for two days, Talia.”

My eyes widened. “Two days?” I balked.

“Yes,” Solon said grimly. “When they brought you in, I thought…”

I squeezed his hand and smiled weakly. “I am alright, Solon. Do not dwell on it.”

Della hurried forward. She sat the tray on my lap before pouring me a glass of water. “Drink and eat first. Then, we can talk.” She removed the lid from the tray, revealing chicken noodle soup, crackers, and a cup filled with cut

fruit.

The scent of warm broth made my stomach growl. I gulped down the water. I could feel the water rush down into me, activating my hunger even more. Once I began the soup, I could not stop myself. I finished it quickly before moving on to the fruit.

“You worried us so much,” Della stated after a while. “We weren’t sure you would wake up.”

I gave her a faint smile, though the weight of Solon’s gaze drew my attention again.

“What happened that night?” Solon asked suddenly. His voice carried both protectiveness and suspicion. “Nolan carried you in, and you were wearing only his shirt.”

The spoon in my hand froze halfway to my mouth. I remembered Nolan’s intoxicating scent surrounding me, and the intensity of his eyes when I begged him to mark me. I couldn’t help blushing at the memory.

No… it had to be a dream. There was no way I’d have done that. And calling Nolan my mate? Absolutely impossible,

“I’m not sure. Everything is fragmented,” I responded, “I just remember we got trapped in the library,”

“Did Nolan harm you?” Solon asked.

Della threw her hands up in exasperation. “What kind of question is that, Solon?”

“I have to ask,” Solon argued. “I need to know she’s okay.”

Della frowned and said, “I know you refuse to believe it but Nolan nor the doctor lied to you. The doctor said she was untouched.”

“The doctor’s right. Nolan did not harm me,” I confirmed.

Solon's eyes narrowed. "Did Nolan force you into the library?"

I shook my head. "No. He only wanted to look for records about rogues. I let him in." It wasn't a complete lie. I did give him permission to review the records.

"Reckless," Solon snapped, his voice sharp. "Why would you allow that?"

I flinched at his tone but answered firmly. "Would you have preferred that he tore Father's library apart instead?"

"Yes, I would," Solon shot back. "Do you realize what could have happened? If he had marked you while you were in heat…" He broke off as he attempted to calm himself.

My eyes widened in surprise. "What…what do you mean?" I stammered.

"You put yourself in a dangerous position where Nolan could have used you against us because of a mate bond," Solon continued. "I am sure he knows how loyal you are to the mate bond."

"I went into heat?" I asked in disbelief.

"Yes," Solon answered, his tone harsh. "Your wolf reacted to the full moon. You should have been more careful. You could've…"

Della interrupted Solon, "Nolan tied you to a chair so you would not harm yourself. He did not touch you, Talia. He stayed with you all night and kept you safe. If anything, he acted like a gentleman."

Her words only worsened my shame. It meant that it had been real. I begged him. How was I supposed to look him in the eyes now?

Solon gave a bitter snort. "Do not make him sound noble, Della. He held back only because he feared Father's punishment, not because of any sense of honor. He probably planned all of this."

I didn't respond. I would have believed that Solon was correct except for two details. There was no way that Nolan would have known I was going into heat, so he couldn't have planned this ahead of time. Also, Nolan's expression when the library's mechanism jammed had been genuine rage.

"Nolan didn't look guilty when he couldn't get the door open," I finally said. "He was very angry about it."

"What are you saying? You think someone else must have tampered with it?" Della asked.

"That's exactly what I'm saying," I nodded. "Someone wanted us trapped together. But who and why?"

No one said anything for a moment as I finished off the rest of the food on the tray. Then Della suddenly gasped, seizing my wrist. "What happened? Why isn't this healed?"

I looked down at my wrist. There was an ugly bruise from where I assumed Nolan tied my wrist. It should have healed a long time ago. Two days had passed, and yet it was still there and tender to the touch.

"That is not normal," Solon muttered. "Your wolf should have healed that within hours."

I closed my eyes and reached inward, searching for the presence that had always been there,

'Where are you?' I asked internally, but there was nothing,

'Please, answer me,' I tried again, calling louder. I received no response which caused panic to set in.

'Are you angry with me? Please, say something,' I called out again. But, again, there was still no response.

My eyes flew open in shock. "She is not there.

Solon looked at me in concern. “What did you say?”

Della gasped, covering her mouth with both hands.

“My wolf… has disappeared,” I choked out, the words breaking as panic seized me.

CHAPTER 77

Talia’s POV

Solon and Della stared at me, both clearly shaken. Della was the first to recover, rushing out to call the doctor. Solon stayed at my bedside.

The doctor arrived quickly and said, “How are we feeling, Princess?”

“Tired, doctor. I can’t feel my wolf,” I whispered, my voice cracking.

The doctor looked surprised and said, “I felt your wolf earlier. Your wolf was also weakened by the heat. Maybe you just overlooked her.”

He checked my pulse, studied my breathing, and pressed his palm against my chest. His brow furrowed as he searched for my wolf.

Finally, he leaned back with a furrowed brow. “Your wolf has indeed gone silent,” he said.

“Do you know what caused this? Was it the heat?” Solon asked.

“I cannot tell whether her wolf has disappeared or is in a deep dormant state,” the doctor explained. “The Princess going into heat should not have caused her wolf to go dormant; however, it did happen on a full moon night. So, it could potentially be the cause.”

This could not be happening. My wolf had been with me since I was a child. I never knew a moment without her. Now, not hearing or feeling her, made me feel so empty.

“What is the remedy for this? How do we bring her wolf back?” Solon asked.

“Because I don’t know the cause, it makes it harder for me to prescribe a treatment,” the doctor explained. “In most cases, extreme danger will force a dormant wolf to reappear or awaken to protect her.”

“I am not about to put my sister in a dangerous situation. What is the other option?” Solon pressed.

“She needs to be marked by a true mate. Beyond that, there is no method I can promise,” the doctor answered.

“So, we wait until she returns on her own,” I said firmly. I was not about to allow Jason anywhere near me. I would never allow him to mark me again.

The doctor nodded and added, “And rest. The Princess may leave the infirmary now; however, I recommend light activities until further notice. Your senses will be dulled, and your healing factor will be significantly reduced. Please avoid stressful situations to keep from worsening your condition.”

Solon nodded. “Thank you, doctor. I expect your utmost discretion with this information.”

“Of course, Prince Solon. No one but those in this room will know about the Princess’ condition,” the doctor said before leaving the room.

Solon let out an exasperated sigh as he rubbed his temples. “This has to be the worst time for this to happen. You’re going to need someone with you at all times.”

“I’ll be with her,” Della volunteered. “Don’t you worry, Talia. We will figure out how to bring your wolf back.”

“Father may know of a way. We can always get a second opinion,” Solon suggested,

“Please don’t tell Father. He has enough to worry about.” I murmured.

“He will want to know what is going on with his daughter, Talia.”

“Just not yet. I don’t want to be treated like I am useless again.”

Solon frowned. “You are never useless, Talia. Don’t ever think that.”

“Just please don’t tell him.”

Solon gave me a long look, then finally agreed. “Very well. But only for now. Get some rest, and we will be back later to take you to your room.”

Della adjusted my blanket, whispering, “I’ll be right outside.” She took the tray from my lap and closed the curtains before following Solon out.

The room felt so quiet. I reached inward for my wolf one more time, hoping I could feel her, but still nothing. I sighed and closed my eyes in frustration.

I must have dozed off, because when I opened my eyes again, I noticed someone at the end of my bed.

I groaned, “Solon, just give me a few more minutes and I’ll get up.” I closed my eyes and curled back up to go back to sleep.

“Talia, you take all the time you need.”

This voice was not Solon's. My eyes snapped back open, and I leaned up to see Jason standing at the foot of my bed.

"Jason?" I asked as I rubbed the sleep from my eyes.

"Yes, it is me," Jason answered. "Go back to sleep. We can talk later. I'll watch over you."

"How did you get in my room?" I demanded angrily.

He raised his hands in what he must have thought was a gentle gesture, but it only put me on edge. The last time he had tried to appear harmless, he attempted to forcibly mark me. And now I couldn't even mindlink anyone for help. His timing didn't feel like a coincidence.

"I came to see you. I wanted to apologize for what happened at Della's party. I was drunk. I lost control," Jason explained.

I scoffed. "It was exactly you, Jason. You can't fool me. Now, get out. I am trying to get some rest."

He winced but pressed on. "You don't have to suffer like this, Talia. You don't have to go through heat."

My eyes narrowed. How did he know I had gone into heat? I didn't answer, only glared at him.

"If you let me, if you accept my mark again, you wouldn't have to endure it. We can restore what we had," he continued.

"I would rather fall down stairs headfirst," I snapped.

Jason's eyes darkened, "Then tell me, was it Nolan? Did he touch you last night? Did he mark you?"

"That is none of your business." I snapped.

Jason's voice rose, jealousy spilling into every word. "It is my business. You're my fated mate. Tell me the truth, Talia!"

"I told you to leave," I said, sitting straighter. "You are not welcome here."

CHAPTER 78

Talia's POV

Jason's question echoed in my mind: "You… You are the Princess? You're the Alpha King's daughter?" I forced myself to keep my expression composed. If I panicked now, everything would fall apart.

"Answer me!" Jason snapped, pulling me out of my thoughts.

The guards looked at me in confusion. They were waiting for me to tell them what to do. I had to think of a way to get out of this situation without revealing to Jason I was the Princess.

One of the guards noticed my discomfort, assessing the situation, and said, "Royal Guest Talia, how can we assist you?"

I straightened my posture against the pillows and narrowed my eyes at the guards. "The Princess left earlier and told you not to let anyone disturb my rest. Are you incapable of following a simple order?"

"We thought you would have wanted to see him," The guard responded quickly before the others could question why I was acting as if I wasn't the princess.

"You thought wrong," I snapped. "All I want is peace and quiet. Is that too much to ask?"

The guards quickly turned their attention to Jason. "Apologies. Alpha Jason, on our Princess' orders, please leave."

Jason still looked at me with suspicion. His mouth opened as if he wanted to argue, but one of the guards took a step toward him and cleared his throat.

“Alpha Jason, we have our orders to remove you by any means necessary,” he said firmly. “We do not wish to do that, so we would appreciate your cooperation.”

Jason hesitated. I braced for him to resist, but then he exhaled slowly. “We can continue this conversation another time. You rest, Talia,” he said.

I didn’t respond. I turned my back to him as I slid back down under the blanket. I could hear him exiting the room with the guards following him out, closing the door behind them. When I heard the door close, I released the breath I had been holding and pressed a trembling hand against my chest. That was too close.

If Jason had found out the truth, that I was really the Alpha King’s daughter, he would have marked me. I knew he had no good intentions of being here, and he would have used me to get at my father. I couldn’t let him find out.

Damn it, I wish I was able to mindlink Della.

Jason’s POV

Henry was waiting for me outside of the infirmary, He looked up at me and frowned.

“Did she kick you out? You look terrible,” he said.

“She’s hiding something,” I told him. “Things aren’t adding up.

“What do you mean?” Henry asked.

“When Talia called for the guards, they came rushing in as if she was royalty. They didn’t hesitate,” I explained.

“I think you may be overthinking it. She is Prince Solon’s girlfriend, and she just collapsed. He may have requested extra security,” Henry suggested.

“No, I think there’s more to it. I just don’t know what,” I pondered.

“Do you want me to watch her to see if I can figure out her secret?” Henry asked.

“Yes, but be careful. All eyes are on her right now,” I said. “If she is hiding something, I want to know what it is. Do not let her out of your sight.”

Henry gave a curt nod. “Consider it done.”

With that matter handled, I turned to my next problem: Nolan. I found him waiting at the location we had agreed upon: the café in Fangvale. There was clearly something important that he wanted to tell me that he didn’t want to risk being heard by any of the Silverfang guards.

Nolan sat at one of the outside tables, drinking a latte and reading a book. He did not even look at me right away, as if my arrival was beneath his notice.

“Alpha Nolan,” I said, forcing respect into my tone.

“You are late,” he said flatly.

“I was delayed,” I replied quickly. “But I am here now.”

Nolan set his book down and studied me for a moment before saying, “During the Hunting Rite, I will make my move. I need you to ensure all the Alphas attend, no exceptions.”

“What do you mean by act? What do you plan on doing?” I pressed, though caution edged my voice.

“Do not ask questions you do not need answered.”

“I am your partner in this, aren’t I? I should know the plan,” I countered.

“Knowing too much will only make you a liability,” Nolan stated firmly, leaving no room for me to ask more questions.

Did he suspect me? Did he know I had ordered the library mechanism sabotaged? There was no way he could have

known.

‘He’s just testing you,’ my wolf reassured me. ‘Stay calm.’

“Understood,” I said carefully. “I will make sure every Alpha attends.”

Nolan nodded and then picked his book back up. He started reading again, making the silence between us awkward.

I cleared my throat, eager to redirect. “Have you seen the Princess?”

That got his attention. He looked up from his book. His eyes gleamed with curiosity. “Why do you care about the Princess?”

“I have not seen her since I arrived in Silverfang,” I said smoothly. “I intend to win the Hunting Rite. Once I do, I will ask the Alpha King to grant her to be my Luna.”

Nolan’s smirk widened. “So, you have given up on Talia.”

“I can’t continue to beg and plead with her. The Princess will be a better option for me,” I explained.

Nolan laughed and then his expression became serious. His voice was cold and absolute as he said, “Do not waste your hopes. She is mine. She is the daughter of my enemy, destined to die by my hand. Do not even think about

CHAPTER 79

Talia’s POV

The infirmary walls had begun to feel like a cage. For days I had been watched over by doctors, healers, and the occasional guard, while my father and Solon remained consumed by the endless wave of visiting Alphas. Due to the altercation with Jason, the doctor had changed his diagnosis and ordered me to remain in the infirmary for a few more days. Because of that, I was missing everything.

Silverfang had become crowded overnight. High-ranking wolves from nearly every pack had arrived, each bringing gifts, entourages, and the heavy weight of politics. My father received them in the great hall, Solon shadowed him constantly, and I was left behind, expected to recover quietly.

The truth was that I already felt fine. The soreness from my collapse had faded, the dizziness passed. The only thing missing was my wolf, and even that silence had become something I tried not to dwell on. I longed for movement, for training, for the rhythm of sparring to ground me. Staying in bed only made me restless.

Della visited often, sometimes carrying gossip, sometimes with nothing but a grin and a plate of food. She was my only company when the corridors outside filled with footsteps and laughter from the delegations. If not for her, I might have clawed my way out of the hospital out of sheer boredom.

On the morning of the day before the Hunting Rite, Solon came to see me. “You have clearance to leave today.”

My heart leapt. “Really?”

“Yes. But do not push yourself,” he warned. “Remember what the doctor said: light activity. If anything happens, you get Della to get me or let Della handle it.”

“Okay, you don’t have to worry about me,” I agreed.

“Tonight, I will host a gathering for the young Alphas. A chance for them to relax before the Hunting Rite.”

Della practically squealed. “Finally! A party worth dressing up for. You’re coming with me, Talia.”

I hesitated. I did want to leave the infirmary; however, that didn’t mean I wanted to go to a party full of Alphas. I already knew Della would be trying to hook me up with one of them all night and I was not in the mood for any additional chaos.

“If Father approves, I will help,” I said.

“He already approved,” Solon said with a bright smile.

By evening, Silverfang’s great hall was alive with music and laughter. Solon stood at the front, giving a short welcome speech. His voice was calm but commanding respect. When he finished, he shook a few hands and left, giving the younger Alphas freedom to enjoy themselves.

The mood changed right away. Wolves from different packs mixed together. The music changed to more lively music that drew them to the dance floor. However, I wish I had left with Solon.

I stood near the bar, tugging self-consciously at the hem of my dress, Della had insisted I wear it. It was a camisole -style slip of black silk that felt far too revealing. I had fought against wearing it until I had no choice. Della had taken and hidden all my dresses.

“This is ridiculous,” I muttered, running a finger along the edge of my glass. “I feel exposed.”

Della laughed, tossing her curls back. “That is the point. You need a mate, Talia. You can’t be in heat every full moon. So, I’m saving you from yourself.”

I glared at her. “This is your idea of saving me?”

“You should be thanking me,” she teased.

“I do not need a mate hunt staged for me,” I said.

“You might not think so, but someone else does,” Della stated.

My eyes narrowed. “What are you talking about?”

Della leaned closer and whispered, “There’s a rumor going around that the Alpha King is using the Hunting Rite to choose a mate for his daughter.”

My stomach tightened. “You’re joking?”

“Not at all,” Della said, clearly enjoying my discomfort. “Potentially every Alpha here is trying to win just for YOU.”

I was unsure how to answer. Was it really just a rumor? Or had Solon finally told our father, and this was how he was handling the situation? I didn’t like being left out of the loop.

“Do not make that face,” Della chided. “Stop sulking. I’m sure your father won’t force you to do anything that you don’t want, but you need to be prepared that one of these Alphas could ask for you as a reward. As the Alpha King, he would have no choice but to honor that request.”

“That is not making me feel any better,” I told her.

“I know, so why don’t you make the decision for yourself. Pick an Alpha to talk to,” Della suggested. She gestured toward the dance floor, where a tall Alpha stood with his packmates, laughing easily. “Go talk to him. He has been looking at you all night.”

“I doubt that,” I said quickly.

“Take him a drink,” she insisted, pushing two glasses into my hands before I could argue. “Go. At least pretend or do you want someone else to decide your fate.”

I took a deep breath as I stepped away from the bar. The Alpha Della had pointed out glanced my way again, his eyes warm, expectant. My grip tightened on the glasses. Perhaps she was right. Perhaps speaking to him wouldn’t

hurt.

But before I reached him, a hand plucked one of the glasses from my hold with easy confidence. “It has been a long time,” a familiar voice said.

My pulse quickened instantly. I looked to my right and found Nolan standing there at my side. He stepped in front of me, blocking my path.

“It has been,” I responded, my voice sounding weaker than I intended.

Nolan wore black trousers and a fitted red shirt that clung to his frame. He looked more relaxed than I had ever seen him. I didn’t know how Nolan had become so handsome to me.

The memory of the night in the library crossed my mind.

I blushed and forced myself to not turn away.

Nolan stared at me intently and then smirked as if he knew what I was thinking.

CHAPTER 80

Talia’s POV

Nolan lifted the glass in his hand to toast me. Then, he tilted his head toward the bar and said, “Come. We can talk where it’s quieter.” Without waiting for my agreement, he started walking back and I followed.

Della winked at me as we walked back to the bar. Inwardly, I groaned. I knew she wasn’t going to behave and pester me about this after the party was over. I sat back down next to her and Nolan took a seat a stool away from

“Thank you,” I said quietly. “For taking me to the hospital last time.”

I hated that I owed him anything, least of all gratitude. Worse still was the fragmented memories of that night kept returning at the worst time. I still couldn’t believe I begged him to mark me.

“It was nothing,” Nolan responded.

What?

The last time I thanked him he had been rude to me. Why was his response different this time?

“You clean up well, Alpha Nolan,” Della chimed in, leaning around me. She gave him a bold once-over. “Very handsome. You almost look like a gentleman tonight.”

I groaned and hissed, “Don’t embarrass him.”

“What? I’m just stating the obvious. You agree with me, right? He looks good tonight,” Della continued, and I tried to hide my face behind my drink.

Nolan didn’t react, but his Beta did. Marco scowled. “You should know better than to parade yourself around in that dress. It’s indecent. Miss Della.”

Della gasped as if he had struck her. “Indecent?” she scoffed. “This is a camisole dress. It’s elegant and trendy, not that you’d know the difference.”

Marco's ears darkened as he walked over to her. He grabbed her by the wrist and pulled off the stool. "It's too short. It shows too much." He pulled off his jacket to give it to her, but Della slapped his hand away.

"It shows exactly as much as I want it to," Della shot back. "If you have such an issue with it, don't look."

Their argument drew curious glances. I didn't understand why she was getting so worked up. "Della, take it easy. I don't think Beta Marco meant any harm."

"No, Talia. He doesn't get to tell me what I can and can't wear."

"You're impossible!" Marco snapped. "Beta Logan raised you better than to flaunt yourself like this!"

Della's eyes widened in anger. "Oh, thank you, Father Marco. Next time I'll remember to ask you how I should breathe too," she mocked.

"Della, I don't mean-" Marco started.

"No, I don't want to hear it," Della said before walking toward the dance floor. She grabbed the first willing partner and began dancing.

Marco pinched the bridge of his nose and cursed under his breath before following her onto the dance floor.

"What was that about?" I said to myself. The tension between them was strange. Had I missed something while I was recovering?

When I turned back to the bar, I noticed Nolan had slid onto the stool beside me. He was staring at the row of bottles.

"Thinking of ordering another drink?" I asked.

Nolan shook his head. “No, I just need to focus on something. I hate noisy occasions,” he said flatly.

Before I could ask Nolan why he was here tonight if he didn’t like coming to these kinds of occasions, I felt someone staring at me. Even with my dulled senses, I already knew who it was and knew I was too late to flee.

Jason dropped onto the stool on my other side, grinning broadly, already too comfortable.

“Now this is a party,” Jason declared, his voice carrying across the bar. Several wolves turned to look.

I fought the urge to cringe. I didn’t know how I had ever tolerated his arrogance when we were mated. Love truly blinded me.

Jason leaned closer, his gaze sliding down the length of my body. “Talia, you look… incredible. Sexy. Just like when you used to dance back at Shadowclaw.”

His words made my skin crawl. His eyes lingered on me for too long. “That is nice of you to say,” I said blandly and then, finished my drink.

Before I could excuse myself, Jason leaned in further, placing his hand over mine. “Dance with me for old times’ sake.”

Before I could speak, Nolan growled, “Leave.”

Jason froze. The grin faltered, arrogance slipping from his face. He looked between us, nervous laughter escaping him. “I was just…”

“Leave,” Nolan repeated. This time he turned his head to look at Jason. “I want to speak with her. Alone.”

Jason swallowed hard. His wolf must have felt Nolan's Aura flaring because Jason quickly stood up. Muttering something under his breath, he left us alone.

I hated to admit that Della was right. We needed to keep Nolan around to keep Jason away from me.

I turned to Nolan and asked, "What was that about?"

"He was too noisy," Nolan said simply and took another sip of his drink.

I laughed. For all the rumors about his brutality, he wasn't nearly as terrifying as everyone claimed. In fact, he was interesting. There was more to him than the cruel Alpha persona.

Nolan set his glass down and turned fully toward me. His eyes locked onto mine, but he said nothing.

"Is something on my face?" I asked.

"No," he replied.

I didn't know what else to say, so I stayed quiet and allowed myself to look at him.

His shirt pulled across his chest when he leaned closer, and I caught sight of a faint scar tracing the line of his neck. His lashes framed his eyes. How had I not noticed that he had green eyes? My gaze went to his mouth, and

the thought of how his lips might feel made me blush again.

My pulse quickened. I shifted on the barstool, trying to distract myself.

"So, what's up? Why are you staring?" I asked nervously.

“Do you still like Jason?” Nolan asked suddenly.