

TALLULAH FALLS

FIELD OF BLOOD
BOOK 1



ZL MORRIS

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TALLULAH FALLS: FIELD OF BLOOD BOOK 1

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CHAPTER ONE

- Tallulah -

While on my bed reading a book, the heavy front door banging shut interrupts me. As I bookmark the page so I don't lose my place, the sound of the doors lock informs me someone's arrived. I frown and think back to when I checked the calendar this morning. There isn't anyone scheduled to come in. Maybe I checked the wrong day? Dad only locks the door while visitors stay with us.

It's a safety measure.

With the way we lock this place down, we should have a lot of vulnerable people who stay here. But really, anyone would be stupid to burgle the place. I mean, we own a couple of weapons, but they're not really needed, especially when most of

our visitors grow fangs, fur, and a tail. The weapons are more of a reassurance to my dad than they are helpful, though, because I'm the only poor bugger who can't shift.

We assume the fact I'm unable to grow fur and howl at the moon has to do with me being half human. I have great reflexes and am physically stronger than full human girls my age, and my hearing, eyesight, and sense of smell are as exceptional as a full shifter.

With a sigh, I place my book on the nightstand then straighten the purple bedspread. My feet drag as I make my way down the stairs. It's gotten really dull around here over the last couple of days. A storm has been hovering over us all week, making it impossible to go out to properly enjoy the fresh air. That is unless I fancy my chances with the risk of hypothermia from the huge amounts of rain.

Trudging my way down the long hallway towards the game room, I'm able to catch little yaps and growls through the door. Those sounds are enough to break me out of my funk. A huge grin breaks out, and I get an extra skip in my step.

It's been ages since babies have stopped by.

Hopefully, Dad won't strangle me if I let my inner child loose and play for a while. He's always there to remind me about the importance of acting like a grown up. My attempts to please him fail miserably most of the time.

I push the heavy oak door open with ease and immediately spot two pups. One is brown with little white paws, and the other is white with brown paws. They're so

cute. Watching, I laugh in pure joy at how they growl and nip at each other as they playfully jump on and off the furniture around the game room.

A burst of excitement courses through me, and I quickly take a couple of skips towards them before a loud growl halts me mid-air, causing me to almost face-plant. Luckily, my reflexes and sense of balance easily stop me from getting a flat nose. If only I'd used my other senses, I would've realised sooner there were other scents in the room mixed with the familiar scent of my father.

Oh boy! All I need is for Dad to witness this. Slowly, I turn my head in the direction of the growl. Any sudden movements will likely tick the pooch off more. My eyes rake over the familiar face of the person responsible for the growl. I barely catch myself before I huff my annoyance at him. As much as I'd like to irritate the shit out of him, I prefer to keep my throat intact.

Especially considering how close I am to the babies.

Six months ago, it wouldn't have been a huff, more a sigh in appreciation, but things have changed, a lot. Of all the people to come here, it had to be him. Why couldn't Alpha Henrique send one of his other sons? Even though they all look similar, the narrowed eyes currently shooting lasers at me are all Theo.

There never used to be this unbearable tension between us. I don't know what changed things, and I've given up on the task to work out how I feel about him. More and more lately, it seems our friendship has somehow been lost by whatever caused

rage to fill his eyes. I can't help assuming it's because of me, somehow.

It never used to be this way.

If I think back to when I was five and remember right, something happened to change the dynamic between us. Suddenly I wasn't allowed to the pack house anymore. But Theo, Kenji, and Quimby always made the effort to visit and make up for any lost time when I couldn't see them.

It's only been over the past six months that our friendship has broken down, and they no longer come to see me unless they absolutely have to. Half-heartedly, I hope they didn't somehow find out about the crush I have on them. Knowing I won't have a mate because I'm half human, I always felt guilty for the crush, even after they left. They had their own mates out there somewhere, so I knew it would never progress beyond a stupid crush. But the time I spent alone and not able to see them, only made my heartache and my feelings grow stronger.

Maybe...maybe that's what it is. They've found their mates, and the women don't want their mates to be friends with the half-mutt.

Hoping he doesn't realise where my thoughts have gone, I decide to try and act confident. I ignore the nervous roil in my stomach and the emotions that swirl through me at the sight of him. Then, I shove the horrible thoughts away.

"Hello, Theo, wanna put them away?" I wave my hand in the direction of his face and his now exposed canine teeth, fully aware it'll only serve to piss him off

more. “You’ll scare the babies.”

A scowl crosses his face, but his fangs recede back into his mouth with little effort. “The pups need to get used to it. They have their own. And they’re pups, Tally, not babies,” he hisses, his annoyance at me clear. I can only guess he’s been forced to be here by his parents, and they volunteered him to transport the babies here.

I open my mouth to argue with him but Dad, forgotten in Theo’s shadow, butts in and cuts me off with a growl. “Enough, Tallulah. Go and make sure the guest rooms are ready for them, please.”

Chastised, I turn and scamper out of the room. If I could shift, my tail would be between my legs. Before I pull the door completely shut, I cut Theo a filthy scowl to let him know Dad saved him from an argument.

Before I make it too far down the hallway, I overhear Dad curse. I can’t help the snigger, I tried to tell him no amount of cleaning products would hide the smell of the last pup who marked his territory up the legs of the furniture. Sounds like the new pups have sniffed out the same spots.

It doesn’t take me long to set up a single suite for Theo. Since we have terrible dust allergies, the rooms are kept clean and are dusted every day. It’s similar to the problems humans with hay fever allergies have to deal with, constant sneezing. So, all I really need to do is double check the bathroom to make sure it’s fully stocked with body wash, shampoo, and towels. A heightened sense of smell also means we need to

be careful about what products we purchase. Strong scents play havoc on our noses.

After I've made sure the main bedroom is fully stocked, I head to the next room through the adjacent door.

The attached room is set up as a nursery, so the babies have a place to stay. There aren't any cribs, however, because the little monkeys like to chew through the bars to get themselves free. Four small beds are set up in a line against the far wall. The room is painted a pale yellow. Dad and I tried to keep it neutral, hoping both males and females would be comfortable when they stay. A toy box, set up underneath the window, is another thing I'm required to check regularly as they've also been known to chew the toys.

The babies, or pups as Theo called them, can't control their shifts for the first year. Pups begin to teethe, crawl, walk, and talk at an accelerated pace, rather than the gradual growth like the average human baby. Unfortunately, because they can't control their shifts, it makes them more vulnerable to outsiders. This, of course, means that the pack is enormously protective of them. But if the pups are in wolf form and spooked, chances are, someone will likely lose a body part or two.

Satisfied the rooms are prepared, I step out into the hallway, right into Theo's path. Tensing, I close my eyes and brace for the impact. But it never happens. Cautiously, I open my eyes. Theo now stands a good four feet away from me. I stare in confusion.

He starts to fidget, and a pained expression crosses his face. Briefly, I wonder how he managed to put such a big gap between us, even though he was speeding down the hallway. I brush it off as luck that we didn't end up in a collision, and then absently wave in the direction of the bedrooms. Theo flinches at my raised hand, so I quickly drop it to my side, to not cause more trouble between us.

His frown deepens, and I wonder if I've pissed him off more than I first believed. Avoiding eye contact with Theo, I mutter, "The rooms are sorted. You'll find everything you need in there. If you do need anything else, come and find me downstairs."

Quickly, I turn in the opposite direction of where Theo stands uncomfortably, to use the back stairs to make my escape. They were originally in place for the service staff of the twelve-bedroom, seven-bathroom house to get between floors. The house was built by a rich couple who had their own maids and butlers.

Fortunately, for us, the original owners didn't have children. When Alpha Henrique put down a bid for the land many years later, the house came with it. The house was briefly used as a self-sufficient squat for pack members up until I was born.

Dad, who never found his mate, found love with a human, then later produced a half-breed daughter. It caused a few problems with the elder pack members. He offered to move us into the abandoned house and keep it stocked and clean for when other members needed somewhere to stay. He had two reasons for his decision. One,

he didn't want to force the Alpha into any tough decisions. Two, he didn't want Mum and me in any potentially volatile pack situations.

I've only been to the primary pack house a few times in recent years, mainly when we were invited to celebrations or I went with Dad on a food run. They limit my time spent there. Their excuse is always because I'm an easy target. I'm not nearly as equipped to defend myself, and it would paint a bull's eye on my back if rival clans ever spotted me.

Most other packs in the area are on friendly terms with our Alpha and pack, but there are a couple of packs who like to cause trouble. They're known to sabotage food runs. With our pack being so widespread, we have to pick up supplies from somewhere out in the human world, then bring them back to spread equally between the different sections. The troubled packs use this to their advantage. If that wasn't enough, they've falsely accused the pack of numerous misdeeds, which have had a deadly impact on the other packs. They're also known to forcefully take our females away from their homes. Our people have always been strong enough to rescue them, but not without consequences. Forced to deal with the after-effects of what happened to the women hurts everyone.

My thoughts stop when I hear a yelp, followed by a whimper.

I jog in the direction of the noise. Dad's office door was left open a smidge. Biting my tongue to stop myself from cursing within hearing distance of the babies, I

can't count the number of times I've told him to keep it shut. Of course, he always responds with, "It's fine, Tallulah. Father knows best."

With a shake of my head to rid myself of the frustration, I push the door open.

The first thing my eyes land on is the monstrosity Dad calls a desk. It's huge, it's gothic, and it's vile. The legs are carved into solid, ugly gargoyles with some sort of pattern of weird letters and numerals along the solid back. I've no clue where he found it, but I've always wanted to use it for firewood.

One of the pups who arrived earlier huddles pitifully next to it. His tongue hangs out, and small whimpers can be heard on every exhale. Cautiously, I get down on my hands and knees. Slowly, I scoot across the floor, closer to the pup, while I continue to murmur assurances that I'm not a threat. When I realise why the little guy's upset, I have to bite my tongue to not shout out at my father.

Four spiked leaves are embedded in his tongue. Of all the things the little dude could've picked to use as a chew toy, he picks the only frigging prickly, nasty, horrible thing in the entire room, the cactus. I barely make out a small pink flower amongst all the drool that's formed a puddle on the carpet. I hide a grimace at the mess and tentatively lift my hand to the pup so he can take a sniff and get used to me. With shifter pups and their human intelligence, I don't have to let him smell me; it's more to show him I'm harmless. With a soft coo to soothe him, as gently as I can, I pluck one

of the cactus leaves out of his tongue.

God knows why Dad has a cactus in his office. You'd think after the sheer amount of plants and paperwork visiting pups have destroyed in the past, he wouldn't buy a cactus...

It's like a lightbulb goes off in my head. He bought the fucking thing, with the assumption they wouldn't touch it because of the spikes, and if they did, then they'd get a nasty surprise. I swear, when I finish I'm going to ram the damn thing down his throat and see how he likes it.

Finally, I pull the last leaf out and watch in amazement as the pup's tongue instantly changes from puffy and bloody to normal again in a matter of seconds. I don't heal as quickly as they do. It only takes a matter of hours for them to heal broken bones. When I remember back to my broken arm, I wince. It had taken three days to heal after I fell out of a tree.

The sound of bones cracking draws me out of the memory of my broken arm.

In fascination I watch as the pup changes before my eyes. His fur shrinks back into his skin, his jaw and nose break, alter, and knit back together into a human baby face. Little limbs and paws realign into chubby legs and dinky feet. A baby's first few shifts can take anywhere from a minute to five minutes to fully change, but this little guy does it in around two minutes. Which tells me he's been fluctuating through the unpredictable shifts for about a week. Within the next few days they should settle, and

he should be able to control his shift and do it a lot more quickly.

Now, the human baby stands completely naked and wobbling precariously while he reacquaints himself with two legs. I take his hand and patiently wait for him to right his balance, before we go in search of a pair of shorts for him. “What’s your name, sweetie?”

“Mylo,” he mumbles, not at all affected by his nakedness.

“Come on little man, let’s find you some clothes, then I’ll make you some food.”

We turn in the direction of the door, but I stop in my tracks. Theo’s sculpted body is stretched out and leant against the doorframe. As much as he annoys me, I can’t stop my eyes from taking him in. They slowly rake up his legs clad in faded black jeans with a worn leather belt secured snugly around his waist. A simple black t-shirt covers his torso, and I barely hold back the drool at the way his arms bulge from the hem. His eyes, so much like his mother’s, are a soft brown when happy, but can rock me to the core when angry. His dark hair appears tousled by the wind, and I fight the urge to run my fingers through it. He looks like he was made by the gods themselves.

What I wouldn’t do to have his body, naked, pressed against mi—

Wait, where the hell did that come from?

When my eyes sweep back up to his face, they’re met with a dark scowl. Right, keep my eyes on his face and not his body, his body might look all, well that, but his

face will always remind me of his stinky attitude. And how much he dislikes me.

I clear my throat in a desperate attempt to hide my embarrassment. “Was there something you needed?”

The scowl drops from his face, and his eyes lighten, but I can’t tell what caused the change. “I came to check in on the pup.”

His constant back and forth between anger and politeness gives me whiplash. In an attempt to get my bearings, my fingers gently sweep through the little guy’s hair. “He’s fine, we’re about to get clothes and food.”

Close proximity to Theo has made my brain fuzzy, and I don’t react quickly enough when Mylo wobbles on his feet. He grabs a handful of my shorts to try to break his fall. Unfortunately, the elastic waistband is almost non-existent, and they offer very little resistance. Quickly, I manage to grab the boy with one hand and my shorts with the other, but not without a part of my thigh being exposed first.

The flush of my humiliation washes over me. I make sure Mylo is steady on his feet before I quickly straighten my clothes. From the corner of my eye, I spot Theo stock still in the doorway, his eyes locked onto my covered thigh. Mortification sets in. He caught a glimpse of my birthmark.

Or rather, my mate’s mark.

Wolves are born with a birthmark identical to their mates. I inherited the birthmark from my dad. Only, because I’m half human, it’s unlikely I will get a mate.

To me, it's a reminder of all the things I could've had, but never will.

Pushing down the self-hate, I peek up at Theo to gauge his reaction. His face is unreadable. However, I notice he's no longer relaxed against the door. His muscles are tense, the ones in his forearms jump and dance as he squeezes and releases his hands into fists. No longer worried about being discreet, I openly stare at his face and watch in morbid fascination as a huge array of emotions flicker: anger, sadness, hunger, and hurt.

His eyes widen in surprise when he realises I'm observing him. Quickly, his features blank and once again, his face is completely void of emotion.

Just as I'm about to question what the expression meant, my dad suddenly appears next to Theo in the doorway. Startled, I jump. "Hey, honey, I've got another run to make. Do you want to come with me or stay with the pups?"

I groan in frustration. How did I not hear him? With the number of tests, they put me through when I was younger, I know some of my senses are as exceptional as theirs. My eyes flicker from Dad to Theo and back again.

Dad shrugs his shoulder, and I know he won't mind whatever I decide. "Henrique and Rosalina should arrive soon to keep you company if you don't want to go."

Does Theo want me to stay and help? Or do I escape and help my dad? Although, Theo's parents won't be far away. If they will be here shortly, it makes

it easier to come to a decision.

Theo will hate my answer, but I really want to see his parents. It's been a while since they stopped by last, and they always bring me treats from their kitchen. My stomach grumbles with the knowledge of delicious treats. "It's okay, Dad. I'll stay here, unless you need help?"

I peek down at Mylo and take his hand so we can resume our search for clothes and food for him. Glancing back at Dad, I notice the scowl on his face is aimed at Theo. Theo notices my dad staring at him and relaxes his muscles.

I stare at them, confused, and attempt to grab his attention. "Dad? Do you want me to help?"

Dad looks back at me and smiles, but I can tell it's forced. "Oh no, honey, I should be fine."

Not really understanding what's going on between those two, I shake my head and decide to leave them to whatever it is. "Come on, little guy, let's leave them to it. How do you fancy pancakes?"

CHAPTER TWO

- Theo -

Seeing the birthmark on Tally's thigh stabs at my heart. It tore open something in my chest, and I've no clue how to fix it. My whole-body screams to touch her, to hold her. But I know I can't, it's what my dad commanded. Well, no, it was originally what my brothers and I wanted to keep her safe. As the years passed, we wanted to go back on our word and tell our beautiful mate that she was ours. It was only then that Dad ordered us to stay away.

The look of hate and shame which crosses her face when her mates mark is revealed makes me want to punch the nearest solid thing. I can clearly see she hates the mark, and she doesn't understand why she has one. Almost as if she assumes she's

not good enough.

Our bond hungers for completion, but if I touch her she'll know I'm her mate. Right now, I'm more pissed than ever that I've been ordered to stay away from her. It will not be forever, but another day that goes by with her in the dark is another day of agony. Witnessing the hurt in her eyes is unbearable, but there's nothing I can do except protect her.

Under constant threat from the Blood Moon pack, it puts the future Luna, my mate, in danger. There's never been a time in my life I've wished to never be the future Alpha of the Argent pack until now. I want to fix it. My brothers, Quimby and Kenji, would help. It's only right they would. She's also their mate. It's eating us all up that we can't.

Solomon's eyes burn into the side of my face, but I don't give a shit about the rules anymore. I'm sick of not being with my mate.

I'm pulled out of my dark musings when she mentions pancakes to the pup. I'm not sure why she's getting him clothes, though. He'll only shred them with his next shift. It's probably better to let him run free.

Solomon returns his murderous stare to me. I know he'll bite his tongue to a certain degree out of respect, but she's his daughter. I can't fault him for being overly protective.

From what I've heard while growing up, it's only natural he act this way. She's

his life, especially after the loss of his human. He never did find his true mate, and he met Tallulah's mother while on a food run and a love quickly blossomed between them. He understands better than anyone how truly fragile they are. I catch the critical stare she gives her dad before she turns her attention to me. With difficulty, I force my body to relax. Then watch as she matches her steps with the pup's as they walk down the hallway towards the kitchen.

I release a frustrated sigh when Solomon pushes the door closed with a click behind her. My body tenses back up, and I scowl at him. "No, I didn't touch her. No, I don't intend to touch her," I growl, ready for a fight. "I'll continue to be the asshole she thinks loathes her!"

Solomon rubs at his forehead, and his shoulders slump. In that moment he appears to age twenty years, which is impossible because we age considerably slower. "Look, I'm sorry, son. I know this hurts her and continues to hurt you three boys, but..." His worried gaze focuses on the door to the kitchen she disappeared behind. "She's my daughter. I want her happy, I do. But I want her alive more."

A growl bursts out of my throat before I'm able to stop it. "God dammit, Solomon, you think I don't know I need to keep my distance? I know! It's tearing all of us up because we can't be with her. We love her, she's our mate!" I take huge gulps of air, desperately trying to calm the rage inside me. "She's our mate. We've carried this secret around with us since she was five! We were pups, and even then, we knew

how special she was. I'm pissed off she doesn't even know. She thinks she doesn't deserve a mate. You can tell, she's decided she's unworthy of it all."

A wounded expression flashes across Solomon's face before he closes his eyes in resignation. "I know you love her, and I know your dad wants it left alone for now. I understand it's hard for you." His face drops, and his voice cracks. "But, please, she's only half shifter and not as strong as us. She's exactly like her mother in that way."

Dejection runs through me, I can't imagine how he must've felt when he lost his female. Unable to express my frustration and hurt, I rub my face in agitation. "It hurts. If I let go of my anger at the situation, I don't know what I'll do." I run my fingers through my hair and tug none too gently. "All three of us are barely hanging on. My anger is the only thing helping me to keep my distance. It has to hurt her too, but I don't want her life to be threatened."

Solomon cautiously places a hand on my shoulder and says miserably, "We'll fix it. I don't know how, but we will. Now, I've got to get this food run done. If I cross paths with your father on the way to the pack house, then perhaps I can speak with him, and we can work this mess out. Are you okay to be here, or do you want to go?"

I shake my head to rid myself of the itchy sensation I get when my wolf wants to come out. "No, I'll call one of the security guys and get them to come here and patrol the area so Tally and the pups are safe. As for my father, I'm not sure what it'll achieve. He's adamant we need to wait."

“Maybe, if I tell him you three boys can take care of her better than I can, he might change his mind. I’ll head out now and see you in a couple of hours.” Before Solomon leaves, he bows his head slightly in a show of respect, which always comes across weird because he’s older than me.

The itchy sensation of being so near to Tally has built to an impossible level, driving me nuts. There’s no way I can wait here while my parents take their time to arrive. But I don’t want to leave Tallulah and the pups here alone, which leaves security as my only option. I dig my phone out of my pocket and hit the button for security. When it’s answered, I quickly explain that I want someone dispatched to the house as soon as possible then hang up.

I take deep breaths and use the technique my mother taught us: in through the nose, out through the mouth. Hopefully, it’ll calm my wolf, but the scent of Tally’s presence permeating the room affects other parts of my body. I quietly curse at how hypersensitive I’ve become.

It’s an uncomfortably pinched walk down the hallway towards the front door. Briefly, I stop, the sounds from the kitchen loud enough I’m able to make out one pup happily giggling while the other yaps excitedly. Tally laughs joyously at whatever they’re doing. I shake my head, adjust my jeans until my dick doesn’t feel strangled, and decide to wait outside.

I don’t think I can cope with any more emotional shit today.

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