

The Alpha's Bride

#Chapter 812: Control vs loyalty

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Chapter 812: Control vs loyalty

After hearing Talia so easily mention a high-ranking position to Varya, Damon had to say something.

'High-ranking people should be the ones you can trust,' Damon's voice sounded in Talia's head. 'No matter what their skills are, if you give them power, they could use it against you. The more skilled they are, the more dangerous they will become. It's a double-edged sword.'

Talia looked at Damon sadly. 'Is there anyone I can trust other than you?'

Damon pressed his lips into a line. How can he say that there are people she can trust when earlier that day, they discussed Stephanie as a potential traitor?

Damon was distressed at the possibility of Stephanie working against the pack. If it ended up being true, Damon would suffer a huge blow. Stephanie was always by his side, encouraging him to keep going and filling the gap his parents left behind. She was his emotional support.

If Stephanie was working with rogues, Damon wondered how far it went. Did she start because Lisa was mated to a rogue? Or did it start before? Did Stephanie have anything to do with his parent's death? Damon didn't want to think about it, but a small worm of doubt was already in his heart, and he was unsure if he would ever look at Stephanie as someone he could rely on.

Talia could sense Damon's mood dropping. 'Don't worry, Damon. We have each other.'

Damon wrapped his arms around Talia and hugged her tightly. 'I'm glad I have you, kitten.'

'And I am glad I have you.'

'Why are you talking like it's just the two of you? What about me!?' Liseli shouted in Talia's mind. 'You know I won't betray you because if you die, I'm a goner also. I just met Sapa, and I have no intention of parting from him.'

Talia smiled. 'OK. OK. I get it. I have you and Damon.'

'And Sapa. He won't betray you either because betraying you is betraying me. See? That's three people already. Don't be a sourpuss.'

Talia giggled, and she had to share with Damon, 'Liseli reprimanded me that we forgot about her and Sapa. And she called me a sourpuss.'

Damon looked at Talia. 'Sourpuss?'

His lips twitched, and then they both laughed.

Varya and Grady looked at Damon and Talia strangely. How Varya and Grady saw this, four of them were talking about the Midnight Guardians pack, and then Damon and Talia hugged, and now they were laughing. To call it strange would be an understatement.

~ the Midnight Guardians pack ~

Talia and Damon walked first into the living room, where they were greeted by Axel, Yasmin, Meg, Kai, Sandy, and Tyler.

Axel was ecstatic to see that Talia came, and this time they brought more company.

After new faces exchanged names and old acquaintances greeted each other, Yasmin moved to the sofa to chatter with Cornelia and Amelia.

When they decided to bring Grady and Varya to the Midnight Guardians pack, Talia called Axel, asking him to alert Cassandra that she would need to conduct ceremonies, and she also asked him to prepare living quarters to be arranged for one mated couple (aka Grady and Varya).

It was just over one hour heads-up for Talia, but that gave Axel a full day to prepare.

Axel was curious about Grady and Varya, and Talia explained their unique situation.

The more Axel heard, the more his brows came together. "A rogue?" Axel said while eyeing Grady.

"They are good people, Axel," Talia assured him and continued through their pack mind-link. 'I trust they won't do anything reckless, but just in case, we blindfolded them during the trip. They don't know how to get here or how to leave. Have a few people to keep an eye on them, with a pretense that they are helping newcomers.'

Axel agreed. 'It's always good to be cautious.' He continued with a normal voice, for everyone to hear, "I am not questioning your decision, Alpha. However," He turned to

look at Grady and Varya. "You probably don't want to mention that you had any connections with rogues. Many of our people perished because of rogues, and there is a lot of bad blood. If anyone asks you from where you are, say that you are wanderers who ended up in the Dark Howlers pack, and that's where you met Alpha Talia."

Grady and Varya both nodded in agreement. They heard that already. No matter with whom they interacted, rogues were treated like something dirty that should be avoided at any cost.

"Alright," Talia said to break the tension. "Where is Cassandra? I'm sure that Grady and Varya are eager to go through with ceremonies and see their living quarters."

Axel cleared his throat. Talia told him they were mates and still waiting to engage in activities. He remembered his first time with Yasmin in the Silver Flame Coven. It was magical, and for more than just Yasmin being a witch.

"Of course. Just a moment..." Axel's eyes lost focus, and then he said, "The Oracle is ready in the garden. After the ceremonies, we prepared a small feast to celebrate."

Grady and Varya were already on their feet.

"I think they are not interested in food. Maybe we can have something delivered in front of their door." Talia said to Axel and then gestured toward the hallway that led to the garden. "That way."

They all gathered on the terrace in the garden. Cassandra was there with Calla, Remi, and several other healers.

Since Cassandra returned from the realm of witches, she didn't participate in ceremonies, leaving those tasks to Calla and Remi. Now that the Oracle herself was about to perform the ceremony, healers came to watch and learn.

They decided to go with the blood oath first, and Damon handed a paper to Cassandra. "Use these words exactly." He had this prepared in advance. No mishaps will happen this time. He turned to Talia and spoke through their mind link, 'Don't you dare make an oath in return.'

'I will just say thank you.' Talia responded.

'You don't need to say anything,' Damon snapped. 'Just nod in acknowledgment of their oath.'

'OK. I got it. It's starting...'

Cassandra was chanting, and Talia could feel the energies gathering.

'It's nostalgic,' Liseli spoke in Talia's mind, and Talia knew that Liseli was talking about the silvery threads that appeared all around Talia, shooting in different directions, connecting her with the members of the Midnight Guardians pack.

There was even one thread that connected Cassandra and Talia, and Talia wondered if that was a sign of Cassandra's loyalty.

'Maybe it's not about loyalty,' Liseli shared her thoughts.

'What could it be?'

'Control. Alphas have control over their pack members. You can feel their emotions and force mind-link. Your aura has a stronger effect on members of your pack.'

Talia thought that it made sense. Talia and Cassandra shared many moments together, but considering their rough start, Talia didn't think it was likely that Cassandra was loyal to her. The Oracle was probably clinging to the possibility of Talia returning her ability.

But if that's true, then... 'If these threads are about control, doesn't that mean that the Sphere of Power is measuring how many people I can control?'

Liseli sneered, 'Aren't Guardians about power and controlling others?'

Well, Talia had to agree with that one.

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Chapter 813: A special Alpha

Talia lost the capacity to think about the threads and what they meant. As one ceremony ended, and the second one continued, she was high on the energies that were pouring into her. It was euphoric.

Cassandra's chants stirred the powers of nature and Talia was a magnet to attract them all, effortlessly absorbing them as her own.

Damon looked at Talia in awe. Her whole body was enshrouded with silvery light, making her look like a Goddess. His Goddess.

"Is this normal?", Varya asked in a whisper while eyeing Talia nervously. She never saw anything like this. There was a sheen of light around Talia, and if this was night, Varya imagined that Talia would be like a lightbulb.

"Your Alpha is special," Axel said with pride in his voice. "It is your luck to join this pack. Don't waste it."

Varya and Grady both gasped when the pack link was formed, filling them with energies they never experienced before. The sensation was overwhelming, and Varya gripped Grady's arm because her insides trembled.

Both Varya and Grady relaxed when Talia's soothing aura enveloped them. It was like a long-forgotten mother's embrace that will protect them from everything bad in the world.

The couple looked at Talia to see her smiling at them.

'Welcome to the Midnight Guardians pack,' Talia's voice sounded in Varya's and Grady's minds, startling them because they never had a mind-link before.

'Please, take a minute to accept congratulations from everyone, and then you will be shown to your living quarters...'

Daria was relieved to see this development. Kalina and Tatiana explained that if Varya and Grady don't join a pack, they will be in big trouble. Actually, Grady would be in trouble, but since Varya was sticking to him, she would be implicated as well. Daria also talked with Pierce about this, and he confirmed that the biggest problem was Grady's association with rogues. It didn't matter if he was with them for a day or for a decade; he was with them, participating in an attack, and that's enough for many to vent their grievances on him.

Wilkow sisters wondered why would the Moon Goddess put Varya in such a tricky situation. However, thanks to Talia and Damon, the potential disaster was avoided, and now all five sisters had their mates and were happy.

Sandy and Tyler took the initiative to escort Grady and Varya to their room. It was a one-bedroom suite, and neither Grady nor Varya noticed that it was underground. They didn't care. The only thing on their mind was that there were no more obstacles for them to complete mating.

Grady's wolf was going crazy from the impulse to sink his fangs into Varya's neck, and Grady also wanted to sink another part of him inside her, repeatedly.

Once they reached their destination, Sandy wanted to wish them all the best, but Grady closed the door in her face.

"How rude..." Sandy grumbled.

Tyler agreed, but... "Can you blame them? I heard that they recognized each other eight days ago. Eight days. Could you wait that long before getting a taste of me?"

Sandy puffed her cheeks. "Well, when you put it that way..." She turned to the closed door. "You are forgiven."

Tyler chuckled and hugged Sandy. "Come, Sasa. Food will be served soon. Now that Alpha is back, we should spend our time with her. Keep your anger toward Grady's rudeness for after they come out of seclusion." Tyler took a mental note to get back at Grady for disrespecting Sandy.

Sandy smiled dreamily and leaned on Tyler, letting him lead the way. Every time he called her Sasa it warmed her heart. It started silly, because of her stutter, but now it was the best thing ever. Everything with Tyler was the best thing ever.

Axel guessed that Varya and Grady won't be in the mood to celebrate, and Talia said not to go over the top with preparations, so they all had dinner in the cafeteria.

Talia was happy to see all the faces looking at her expectantly and she ended up feeling guilty because she promised them to go out and find mates, yet how could she do that with Guardians lurking in the area?

They found out from Vincent that the Guardians were aware of the portal, and the only reason why they didn't intrude openly was because they feared Alpha Sophia and Alpha Isaac might close the portal; their policies to keep everyone inside for safety were known even to the outsiders. However, now that Talia was in charge, no one could guess what the Guardians were thinking. Talia hoped that they will stay on the other side and leave this realm unspoiled.

'What is troubling you, kitten?' Damon asked through their private mind-link.

Talia thought for a moment before sharing her thoughts. 'Guardians are out there, waiting. I want to keep everyone safe. But doesn't that make me the same as Sophia and Isaac?'

'Think about it this way... If you knew there was danger, and if you suspected that I'm out there, would you stay here for your safety, or would you take the risk and go out to find me? And another thing, that Guardian showing up here was proof that any safety in this realm is just an illusion.'

Talia knew he was right. She agreed with him completely. But just letting people out didn't sound like a good idea either. 'Can you help me, Damon?'

'Always, kitten. Just say the word, and I will make it happen.'

His sincerity warmed her heart.

'I want to start letting people out. Maybe if we are with them, the risk of it ending badly will reduce. Let's pick a group and bring them with us to the Dark Howlers pack. They are curious about the world on the other side of the portal, but they are mostly interested in finding mates. After some time there, we can take them to Cristian's and Max's territory. I need a set of guidelines for them, something that will help them see the dangers and stay safe while avoiding exposure.'

'Sounds like you already have something on your mind,' Damon said. 'Let's take twenty people with us for the first batch. I will contact Maya and Caden, asking them to prepare accommodations. Also, you should tell Axel to be ready to welcome additional pack members when those twenty return with their mates.'

'When?' Talia asked. 'You wanted to say, IF they return with mates.'

Damon chuckled. 'Malia is a famous service for finding mates. As long as you are nearby, they will find mates.'

Talia rolled her eyes, but she didn't want to argue. She knew that After Daria, Lidia, and Varya found their mates, Damon was an open supporter of the Malia service.

'Tell Axel to come up with a list of people,' Damon said to Talia. 'There must be some criteria to decide who will go first. And also... don't forget that there is another realm with witches. Axel could take another group that way to see if they get lucky.'

Talia liked that idea. She was confident that Damon always knew what to do. 'I will make a point that Axel and Yasmin should go with them, or Evanora might keep them as ingredients to make potions.'

Damon chuckled.

"Talia, can we have a word?" Yasmin called and gave eye signals toward the exit. It was obvious that she wanted to talk in private.

"Sure," Talia responded. They could always talk later, but she guessed that it was important if Yasmin wanted them to leave the cafeteria early.

See pic of Varya and Grady in the comments

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Chapter 814: Baby-growing powers?

Talia followed Yasmin through winding passages while wondering what the witch was up to. Yasmin was secretive and she seemed nervous which made Talia nervous as well.

Eventually, they emerged outside. It was a warm night without any wind, and only crickets disturbed the silence.

Seeing that Yasmin hesitated, Talia decided to start the conversation. "I assume this is urgent." She turned to look in the direction from where they came. "Or you just don't want Axel to know about it."

"I plead guilty," Yasmin said.

"Guilty of what?"

"I watched a drama with lawyers. That's what humans say when they admit to their crimes," Yasmin explained.

Talia was alerted. "What crimes?"

None yet, Yasmin thought. "I don't want Axel to know about this. Can you keep a secret?"

"I can try," Talia said reluctantly. "If it's something that jeopardizes the pack or..."

"No, no. This is about me."

Talia paused. "Axel won't like it if I keep something about you from him. Can't he sense your emotions?"

Yasmin rolled her eyes. "Whatever I feel, he says it's because of the pregnancy and it's normal. But it's not normal."

"What is not normal?"

Yasmin tightened her blouse to show her nearly flat belly. There was a small bulge in the lower region, but it could be easily mistaken for bloating.

"This!" Yasmin exclaimed. "I am pregnant since forever and there is no progress."

Talia realized what this was about. Considering that werewolf pregnancy lasts five months, Yasmin should be way into it, or maybe even with kids on her hands, yet she didn't look pregnant. Witches said that energies flow differently here and that even though time passes faster, the creatures are maturing at a speed comparable to the human realm.

Talia tried to calculate how far along was Yasmin, but she didn't know much about pregnancies anyway so she gave up.

"What do the healers say?" Talia asked.

"They say that everything is normal and that I shouldn't worry. Talia, maybe for you was just a few weeks, but for me was months. MONTHS!" Yasmin's voice was rising. "I am not allowed to eat or drink half of the things I like and there is no end to it. At this rate, I will give birth to my babies in another hundred years, assuming they are growing."

"Please, calm down. You might upset the babies."

"Maybe I should upset them and remind them that they should develop, grow, and get out!"

"OK. OK." Talia said while waving her hands. Telling Yasmin to calm down only caused her to be more upset. "I assume you are here because you think I can help."

Yasmin put her palms on her belly. "They say that mother's intuition is the best guide when raising children." She looked at Talia expectantly. "My intuition is telling me you can help."

"How?"

"Hear me out first," Yasmin started cautiously. "You told me I'm pregnant, and if you didn't, I wouldn't know. After that, I went to numerous checkups and everyone said that things were fine, that timelines can't be predicted because I'm not human and I'm not a she-wolf either. No one of these people saw a witch and a werewolf have a child, and these are twins, so it's bound they will be special but... I don't feel them, Talia. I call for energies and they wash over me, but somehow, avoid my stomach, like my children are not compatible. But then, during the ceremony at the Coven, when you and Damon were in the fountain, I felt it... I felt the energies, and I felt my babies move. They grew. I thought it was a coincidence, or maybe you kick-started the process, but after that, there was nothing... until now."

Talia looked at Yasmin and her brows were coming closer together as she understood where Yasmin was going with this. "Are you saying that you felt your babies growing during today's ceremony?"

Yasmin nodded. "Towards the end, when you were glowing. I felt it. I called for energies, and they flew freely without avoiding my stomach. It's because of you. You have some power to connect the missing pieces and help my babies grow."

Talia puffed her cheeks. It was difficult to believe she had baby-growing powers.

'Does this make sense, Lis?' Talia asked her wolf.

'I don't know. If we can predict heat and detect pregnancy, maybe we can grow babies also.'

Talia didn't miss the sarcasm in Liseli's tone. 'You could have said you don't know.'

'I said that first,' Liseli responded matter-of-factly.

Talia decided to focus on Yasmin. "What do you expect me to do?"

"Use your energies on me. Help me to establish the connection so that my babies can grow."

"What if I harm you?"

Yasmin shook her head. "That's not likely. It happened twice and..."

"What if I harm your babies? Do you think I will be able to live with it? What will I tell Axel?"

"He doesn't need to know."

"But I will know!" Talia snapped. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to... it's just... a lot of things happened."

Yasmin pressed her lips into a line. "I heard that your guard died while protecting you. I am sorry about it. But people live and die. It's the will of nature. We can't change that."

"You speak about the will of nature, yet you want to do experiments on your unborn children."

Yasmin looked down at her belly and smiled. "That's not how I see it."

"How do you see it?"

"When it happened the first time, at the fountain, I wanted to ask you to do it again, but I was reluctant to do so. As you said, I didn't want to risk endangering my babies. But many days passed, months, and my pregnancy was stagnant. Today, during the ceremony, I felt it again. I believe that this was nature reminding me of what should be done. The first time it might be a coincidence, but when it happens twice, it carries a different message."

Yasmin looked at Talia pleadingly. "Please, Talia. Help me."

Talia was not sure what to think about it. Channeling some energies wouldn't require much effort, but she was uncomfortable with sneaking around.

"One condition," Talia said. "I want Axel to be present. He is the father, and both of you are parents. It's not fair that you do this behind his back."

Yasmin bit her lower lip nervously. "If he agrees, will you do it?"

"Yes."

...

Talia and Yasmin were returning to the cafeteria when two familiar voices reached them from the side hallway...

"What do you mean you lost it?", the female asked.

"I told you. It was broken and I threw it away," the male responded.

"That was priceless! You don't throw it away!"

"You gave it to me so easily, how was I supposed to know it was priceless?"

"You are lying!"

There were some grunting sounds like people struggling, and Talia rushed to see what was going on. Yasmin was right behind her.

Talia took a turn and paused to see Keith and Cassandra wrestling. Keith was above Cassandra whose body was bent at an awkward angle as she was gripping his thigh and pulling it up to get him off balance.

"What's going on here?" Talia asked.

Keith and Cassandra froze. His arm was around her neck and her mouth was open like she was about to bite him. After a second of an awkward pause, they released each other and stepped away.

"Well?" Talia asked. "Will you tell me what's going on?"

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Chapter 815: A broken necklace [Bonus chapter]

"Will you tell me what's going on?" Talia asked Cassandra and Keith, who were both looking at their feet.

"Nothing." Keith and Cassandra responded in unison.

"That didn't look like nothing," Yasmin chimed in. "Lover's quarrel?"

Keith and Cassandra grimaced like they had eaten something sour.

Talia was not in the mood to play. She crossed her arms over her chest. "Which one of you will explain why are Oracle of my pack and the head of my guards fighting in the hallway like two ruffians?"

Cassandra responded, "I gave him a necklace, and he threw it away."

"You didn't say I need to return it." Keith barked back.

Talia's eyebrows rose in slow motion. "I didn't realize that your relationship progressed to the point where you are exchanging jewelry."

"Bwahahaha!" Yasmin burst into laughter.

"It's not like that!" Keith said with urgency. Did Talia think he was wearing such things? "Cassandra gave me a necklace, saying that it would help me. That necklace could resist magic, but it broke, so I threw it away."

"A necklace that can resist magic?" Talia asked, and she thought of a possibility, "Is that why you were able to fight with the Guardian?"

Keith nodded.

Talia turned to Cassandra. "How did you know that the Guardian would attack me?"

"That's what I do. I am the Oracle of the Midnight Guardians pack. I had a vision of you being in danger and your guard rescuing you."

"Tell me the details!" Talia demanded.

"The vision was about a man with black hair using some ability to paralyze people. His intention was to get his hands on you, Alpha Talia. I saw him," Cassandra pointed at Keith, "Coming to your rescue. And he could break through the restriction because of the necklace I gave him."

A million questions popped into Talia's mind. "What else did you see? Is that the only vision you had? Did you see something about our pack? How often do you have those?"

"I have many visions, Alpha. Some are clearer than the others." Cassandra responded. "Most of the time, it's just bits and pieces that don't make sense until it actually happens."

Talia was visibly disappointed to hear this. But maybe it was bits and pieces for Cassandra, while someone else could figure it out easily.

Keith felt a need to say something. "When we were in the Silver Flame Coven, Cassandra told me she had a divine message from the Moon Goddess. She said that my fortune is tied to yours and that by protecting you, I am protecting myself. Since then, I was carrying that necklace with me."

Cassandra also exposed Keith's attraction to Talia and told him his wolf knew that if anything happened to Talia, Keith would never be happy. Were those words also true? Keith was not sure, but he knew that thanks to the necklace, he saved Talia.

Keith remembered one more thing, "The Oracle also said that her fate is tied to yours."

Talia was still looking at Cassandra. Was that why Cassandra gave the necklace to Keith? Was she hoping to score points and Talia will return her ability?

'What did you expect?' Liseli sneered in Talia's mind. 'The Oracle was always selfish.'

Talia wished for that to be untrue. As an Oracle, Cassandra should think about benefits for the whole pack and not only for her own interests.

The biggest issue Talia had was that she couldn't trust Cassandra, not after the Oracle tried harming Damon. Even if Cassandra came with a warning that the sky was falling, Talia wouldn't believe it until the world was flattened. It was ironic that the person giving prophecies had zero credibility.

Talia could see Cassandra looking at her expectantly, probably wanting to make amends, but Talia doubted that it could ever happen.

"The necklace you gave Keith, where did it come from?" Talia asked.

"It's one of the relics we have in this pack. No one uses them, so... when we headed to the realm of witches, I thought it will be handy to have an anti-magic item, and I brought it with me." Unfortunately, it didn't work against potions.

Talia thought that she had heard something interesting. "There are more of those relics?"

Cassandra confirmed. "Would you like to see them?"

"Yes." Talia was excited. Whatever that necklace was, it managed to repel Guardian's restrictions. Caleb told them that he couldn't move a muscle, yet Keith didn't only break free, but he jumped on Gregory and beat him up. Talia definitely wanted to check other relics.

Talia reached to touch her chest, pressing on the necklace she was wearing under the blouse. Would Cassandra be able to recognize it as a magical item and make it work? What if she ruins it or...? Can Talia risk anything happening to that necklace? Talia was back to wondering how much she could trust Cassandra.

'Kitten?' Damon's voice sounded in Talia's head. 'Are you alright?'

'Yes, yes,' Talia responded with haste, realizing that Damon could pick up her excitement. He probably thought she was in some kind of trouble.

Talia remembered that she left Damon a while ago in the cafeteria, saying she would be back in a minute. How much time passed? Talia was not sure, but she knew it was much longer than she thought it would be.

"How about you show me the relics tomorrow, after breakfast?" Talia asked Cassandra.

Cassandra responded right away. "Anytime is fine."

"Please forgive Keith for the necklace he lost. I will make it up to you."

Cassandra's eyes lit up. "Of course, Alpha." Cassandra bowed at a ninety degrees angle. "I am available to show you relics anytime. As our Alpha, you don't need to ask for permission. I am at your service. If you excuse me..." And then she left.

Talia eyed Keith suspiciously, and she waited for Cassandra to move out of the earshot before asking, "Did you really throw it away?"

Keith avoided Talia's gaze.

"Keith?"

"I threw it away, but..." He hesitated. "Then I picked it up."

Talia watched as Keith reached into the back pocket of his pants and pulled a necklace out of there.

Talia couldn't believe this. "Why did you hide it from Cassandra?"

Keith puffed his cheeks. "Because it's not working anymore, and it's the thing that saved my life."

"Saved your life? You mean... saved MY life." Talia corrected him. If Gregory got his hands on her while she was in heat... Talia didn't want to think about that, but she knew her life would be horrible.

Keith raised his gaze and looked at Talia sadly. "My life. If I couldn't protect you, Alpha Damon would kill me." And even if Damon spared him, Keith would never forgive himself.

"He is right, you know..." Yasmin said from the side. "Damon would kill him if anything happened to you. How I see it, Keith deserves to keep that necklace, regardless of if it's working. He put his life on the line for you, thanks to that necklace."

"Thank you, Keith, for everything. I am lucky to have you watch my back," Talia said. And she really meant it. Other than Damon, no one else did so much for her without asking for anything in return. But she couldn't give him more than a thank you, no matter how unfair it was.

Keith balled his hand into a fist to hold onto the necklace firmly, and he lowered his head. "It's my honor to be your guard, Alpha Talia."

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Chapter 816: Channeling energies (1)

The next day...

After breakfast, Talia wanted to seek Cassandra in order to see ancient relics, but Yasmin blocked her path.

"I spoke with Axel. He agrees."

Yasmin gave Talia a knowing look, and Talia understood this was about Talia channeling energies to Yasmin.

Talia craned her neck to see Axel. "Are you sure?"

He was not really excited about it, but he nodded. "If that's what Yasmin wants, we should do it. But start slowly and if anything seems amiss..."

"I will stop," Talia ended instead of him.

"What's this about?" Damon asked.

Cornelia and Amelia also perked up their ears, eager to hear Talia's response.

Talia felt guilty for not telling Damon right away, but she didn't think that Axel will agree to this stunt. Besides, they spent most of the evening talking about the safest approaches to bring members of the Midnight Guardians into the human realm, and then they made love, and Talia fell asleep.

"While you tell him the details, I will inform healers to get ready," Axel said, and his eyes lost focus as he issued orders. He didn't want to take any risks.

Talia told Damon what Yasmin wanted, and ended with a question, "What do you think?"

Damon shrugged. He didn't have an opinion about it. "As long as it's not a strain on your body and they agree, I guess it's fine." Damon turned to Axel. "Why didn't you take Yasmin to the human city? They can do measurements and ultrasound and... stuff. Even my pack doctor can do a better job than your healers."

Damon was not an expert in obstetrics, but he knew that human medicine was more precise than chants, potions, and hopes that the Moon Goddess will take care of everything. Travis studied with humans and did his internship there, so he would know a thing or two about what's going on inside a woman's belly when there is a baby inside.

Normally, werewolves wouldn't go to a doctor for pregnancy. The pack doctor would confirm it, and that was it. With their fast healing, she-wolves would let the nature take its course, but Yasmin was not a she-wolf, and she needed frequent checkups.

At Damon's complaint about how they didn't take Yasmin to a modern doctor, Axel lowered his head in embarrassment. It's not that Axel didn't think about it, but...

"Healers said there was no reason to worry. One day passed after another, and here we are." And he was so busy with everything. Now he regretted not making time for Yasmin and their unborn babies. What kind of a mate and a father was he? Horrible.

They all moved to one large room where healers were ready with incense that was already lit up. Cassandra was there as well.

It was a circular room without a roof, allowing daylight to illuminate it. There were incense burners along the walls, one big altar, and four smaller ones to form a circle,

leaving the middle of the room empty. Talia could imagine that healers would do ceremonies here under the moonlight.

Cassandra was at one of the smaller altars, carefully arranging colorful crystals in a pattern only she understood.

All eyes were on Talia and Yasmin who stood in the middle of the room, facing each other.

Yasmin asked everyone to give them space, she didn't want anyone to disturb this procedure accidentally.

Yasmin was thinking about this for ages, and she barely managed to convince Axel to give it a shot. She threatened him that she would go back to the Coven because the atmosphere in the Midnight Guardians pack was not suitable for babies. Axel panicked and said that he will do anything, and Yasmin asked that he lets her do what she feels it's right. He agreed.

Axel was confident Yasmin would do something drastic and leave him. He had a duty to stay in the Midnight Guardians pack and take care of it, people depended on him, but Yasmin was a different story. She was not attached to the pack, as she still didn't form the pack link. In addition to that, Yasmin still spoke about the Silver Flame Coven as her home. Yasmin was a witch, and the soulmate bond affected her differently. If she left, Axel would be torn between following her and abandoning his people. It would be tough, and no matter what he chose, he would be on the losing end.

When they spoke on the previous night, it sounded like Yasmin was giving him a choice, but Axel knew that was not the case. Yasmin was never so determined, and he was never so nervous.

Axel prayed silently that Talia knew what she was doing. He didn't want anything bad to happen to his babies, and he definitely didn't want a scratch on Yasmin's body. He didn't dare voice his concerns, out of fear that he will fall apart and ruin this, and then Yasmin would leave.

Amelia and Cornelia were standing closest to Yasmin, ready to chant protective spells if needed.

Talia looked around. "Considering all security measures, maybe we shouldn't do this."

Yasmin smirked at Talia. Did Talia think of wiggling out of it? "Considering all security measures, we should definitely do this. Come on. I'm ready."

Yasmin waved at the healers who added more herbs into incense burners, and then they started chanting.

Talia looked down to see a diagram appearing below their feet.

"This helps gather energies," Yasmin explained. "It's not harmful. Healers do this daily to focus and sense the connection with nature."

Talia had to acknowledge the freshness that surrounded her like someone infused more oxygen into the air.

'Lis?' Talia called.

'Calm your mind and think happy thoughts,' the ancient spirit instructed. 'This is not an attack nor defense. Follow your instincts. You want to grow the most delicate plant in the world. Slowly. Carefully. Gently.'

Somehow... Talia knew what to do.

"Give me your hands," Talia said to Yasmin.

Yasmin extended her hands and Talia held them.

"I will send you my energy. It will be up to you to channel it where needed," Talia said.

Yasmin nodded enthusiastically and she stared at Talia as Talia's eyes started flickering in silvery light.

Faint pulses of silvery light traveled across Talia's arms to meet Yasmin's hands where they disappeared.

Yasmin gasped when she felt the energies that warmed her hands with a dose of chill. It was a strange sensation, yet familiar.

Yasmin guided Talia's energy up her arms, and then into the rest of her body. Her lips lifted into a smile when her stomach absorbed that energy hungrily.

Yasmin felt that her babies were happy as if they were being fed after a long period of starvation.

"More..." Yasmin said in a whisper. "Give me more, Lia."

Damon, Axel, Cassandra, and a number of healers watched the spectacle in front of them without breathing.

Talia was enshrouded in silvery light that spilled on Yasmin. They looked like two ethereal creatures that held hands while smiling at each other. It was magical.

The winds were picking up to rotate around Talia and Yasmin, and Damon frowned as this reminded him of the spectacle those two females caused when they were in the realm of witches, searching for clues about Yasmin's father. Were they about to summon another tornado?

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Chapter 817: Channeling energies (2)

The faster the winds around Talia and Yasmin whipped, the more Damon's anxiety rose as it reminded him of the phenomenon in the realm of witches when Talia and Yasmin hugged to summon a powerful tornado that glowed. Wasn't that related to a portal that was lost? Were they about to open another one?

Once, it might be accidental or due to the location, but this was the second time, and it couldn't be a coincidence. It was like Talia and Yasmin resonated to awaken greater powers. Damon barely held back from rushing in there and snatching Talia away from Yasmin. What if something had happened? What a portal opens and swallows Talia? The thought of losing Talia was gripping his heart, and he wished for this spectacle to end right that instant. Cornelia and Amelia couldn't see each other clearly because of the dust that twirled with the wind around Talia and Yasmin. Cornelia and Amelia were unsure what to do. Should they start chanting for this to stop or to give it a boost? Both witches knew in the back of their minds that it would be useless to try stopping it. This was too sudden, powerful, and mysterious, and neither Talia nor Yasmin performed any spells. From where did all this energy come?

Axel's anxiety matched Damon's. He felt helpless and unworthy. Axel was unsure if the phenomenon unfolding was because Yasmin was a witch, or because she had alpha pups in her belly, or if it was due to something else, but he was aware that Yasmin was special and out of his league. Axel was a strong male with an Alpha bloodline that made him appealing to many she-wolves, but that was not Yasmin. Yasmin was beautiful, kind, smart, and talented, and if not for the mate bond, an amazing female like Yasmin wouldn't spare him a glance. To make things worse, Axel was aware that Yasmin was doing this reckless act because of him. If not for the babies, she wouldn't put herself in this unknown and potentially dangerous situation. What if something bad happened? It would be his fault! Axel was ignorantly talking about how wonderful it will be when they become parents, blind to Yasmin's desperation to get that pregnancy moving along. He was busy taking care of the pack matters, letting Yasmin stay with Meg and Sandy, telling her that she shouldn't tire herself. There were many days when they would meet only for meals, and sometimes, when he returned to their room at the end of the day, Yasmin was already sleeping. Axel silently vowed to do better. If Yasmin could come out of this unscathed, he will do better.

Cassandra's eyes moved frantically over the crystals in front of her. They were sparkling

now as if something within them lit up to create a light show. Those crystals were measuring strength and type of energies, and Cassandra was visibly excited, but no one paid attention to her frantic expression. 0 In the middle of the storm, Talia and Yasmin stood, both high on the energies that coursed through them. They were connected to each other and something new that always belonged to them. In the middle of that windy storm, ancient powers were awakened, tangible, whispering the truths that only their souls could understand. Talia was sure that she heard voices in the wind, they were saying something important, but then it all stopped suddenly, like someone unplugged the power cord. The wind stopped, and it all became eerily silent as the dust drifted toward the ground. Talia tried to remember the words she heard in the wind, but they faded quickly, like a dream she would forget after waking up. Talia and Yasmin stared at each other, both breathing heavily. "How was it?" Talia asked. Yasmin's lips stretched into a smile to the point of hurting. "My babies are happy." And she was happy as well. After such a long stagnation, she knew that things were progressing. "Thank you, Lia." Axel and Damon rushed to their mates. Axel was holding Yasmin, and Damon was pulling Talia into his embrace. "Let's not do this again," Damon spoke into Talia's hair. "No, no. We need to repeat this," Yasmin protested. She put her hands on her belly. "I felt them absorb the energies. They liked it." Yasmin looked at Axel. "They are growing. I'm sure healers will confirm that things are fine." 0 Damon's frown was deepening. He was not worried about Yasmin or her babies. He was worried about Talia! What did Yasmin mean by repeating this? How many times? Until Yasmin gives birth, or until they crack open a portal to a realm of monsters? 0 "Are you saying you need Talia to feed your unborn children?" Damon grumbled at Yasmin. Yes! "No. Think of it like a boost. Battery charging" Yasmin hoped this was acceptable. "We will see how long this will last, but once the effect stops, we will need to do it again." "Let's talk about it later," Talia said. "Make sure your condition is stable, and we will take it from there." "How are you feeling?" Damon asked Talia. She gave him a reassuring smile. "I am fine, Damon. It's like I woke up from a pleasant dream" Damon's expression was not good. He hugged Talia with all his might, hoping that her closeness would dispel the unease that seeped deep into his bones. When Damon loosened his hold on Talia, her attention went to Cassandra, who was writing down something on a notepad. Everyone else was busy around Yasmin, while Cassandra was the odd one. Talia went to see what Cassandra was up to. "What are those?" Talia asked while eyeing colorful crystals that were laid on the altar. "Energy crystals," Cassandra responded without lifting her gaze from the paper. "What are you writing down?. "The order and intensity with which they lit up. Please, Alpha... Give me a moment to finish before I forget the patterns I observed." Talia waited for Cassandra to stop writing before asking, "Well?" "Nature is full of energies. You can think of them as elements that create and influence everything around us," Cassandra started her explanation. "Knowing what energies are prominent in a specific area can help us determine the best place to grow crops, build houses, cast

spells, and other everyday stuff. These crystals can identify the type of energies and measure strength."

"You used them now?"

Cassandra nodded. "When I heard that you will use your ability, I thought of seeing what these will show."0

"And? What are they showing?" "I'm not completely sure. I will need to analyze the data. The reaction of the crystals was strong, showing that you can not only command the elements but their synergies as well."

"Is that unusual?"

Cassandra gestured toward the crystals. "I have twelve crystals here. While healers are performing spells, each can activate one, maybe two. I can activate three." It's down to two now since Talia removed Cassandra's ability to control the fire element. Cassandra swallowed that complaint back and continued talking. 0 "We collaborate in spells to activate up to seven. You activated all of them." Cassandra licked her lips nervously while looking at Talia. "If you would use your ability again, I can collect more data and_" "Absolutely not!" Damon growled from the side. "You are talking to your Alpha, not a research specimen" Cassandra quickly lowered her head. She didn't miss murderous intent seeping from Damon, and she couldn't blame him. Because of what she did, he nearly became a cripple..

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Chapter 818: Ancient relics (1)

"I apologize, Alpha Damon. I didn't mean any disrespect." Cassandra said in a shaky voice. With every passing heartbeat, her body was chilled by the cold sweat.

"It's OK," Talia responded, more to calm down Damon than for Cassandra. "I will think about it and let you know."

The truth was that Talia was curious about her powers as well. The only problem was that she didn't trust the Oracle.

"Can I?" Talia asked while pointing at the purple palm-sized crystal shaped like a crooked pyramid.

Cassandra gestured for Talia to go ahead, and Talia took the crystal into her hand. Its smooth surface was cold to the touch.

'What do you think, Liseli?' Talia asked.

'It's a pretty rock.'

'Can it measure magic? Or is it about something else?'

'Are you worried if it can detect me?'

'Yes.' Talia admitted while keeping the crystal back to the altar.

The old wolf didn't have an answer to this question. Can there be a thing that detects spirits and determines their nature? Anything was possible.

Talia would like to know more about her powers.

At first, Talia thought her powers stemmed because she came from the Midnight Guardians pack, but Axel's exaggerated reactions whenever she did something he thought was impossible told her it was more than that. Every member of the Midnight Guardians pack had only one ability, which applied even to Alphas, yet Talia clearly had more.

Axel and Damon said that things like sensing surroundings and precisely controlling the Alpha aura take years to master, yet she did it effortlessly.

And then there was Liseli, an ancient spirit that was raised by the Moon Goddess and was shrouded by many mysteries, just as Talia was.

However, no matter how curious Talia was, she didn't want to risk exposing Liseli. If people knew how special her wolf was, Talia would be in danger for much more than just being a female Alpha with magical powers.

After confirming that everything with Yasmin was fine, Talia asked Cassandra to show her the relics.

Axel, Yasmin, and Damon joined them as well.

They entered the archives of the Midnight Guardians pack.

The long and narrow room had tall shelves on each side, packed with books and rolls of parchment. Several tall ladders provided access to shelves that were at the top. There was no obvious categorization, but everything was neatly stacked, giving an impression it was organized.

Talia wondered if Axel read all those books with his ability. That was highly possible.

Cassandra led the way to a door that was in the back.

The room was dark and dusty, with old books and parchments scattered everywhere, some on the shelves, but most on the floor to create piles of mess. Faint squeaky sounds made Talia wonder if they had mice or rats here.

"How old are these?" Talia asked Axel.

Axel shrugged. "I was here once as a kid, and then the door was closed." He looked at Cassandra suspiciously. "I was not aware that the Oracle can come in here."

Cassandra turned to look at him. "This area is not off-limits. Anyone can come here. It's just that no one cared to see these old records." She continued talking to Talia. "I explored this place way before young Alpha Axel was born. Most of these are old ledgers about food, water, and other supplies, and there are notes people forgot to finish. Some list pack members and their occupations, but that information is now obsolete. You can think of this room as a place where we keep things we don't need anymore."

"And ancient relics are here?" Talia asked in disbelief.

Cassandra confirmed. "No matter what magical powers they possess, since no one can activate them, they are just trinkets."

Talia thought how some things didn't add up. If no one can activate them, then... "How did you know that the necklace resists magic?"

"There was a time when I thought I had answers to everything," Cassandra responded. "I was trying to figure out the nature of the relics, but nothing worked, so I left them here. About a few years ago, I had a vision that told me a necklace will be useful, and I found it here. Since then, I have carried it with me."

Cassandra paused while sorting her thoughts before continuing, "Another vision told me that the necklace could resist magic, and I took it with me when we headed to the realm of witches, thinking it would protect me from... whatever they were doing. But then I had another vision; a vision which included your guard, and you know the rest."

Talia was visibly disappointed. Part of her hoped that Cassandra would have universal answers, but that was not the case.

And there was one more point that rubbed Talia the wrong way. "If you had a vision of a guy coming after me, why didn't you warn me?"

Cassandra paused. "The vision was about your guard and the necklace. A man approached you with malicious intent, and I saw the woods. It was Keith's fate to rescue you."

"Wouldn't it be simpler if you told me to stay away from the woods?"

Cassandra looked at Talia like she had said something silly. "As an Oracle, I learned that some things shouldn't be said. I didn't know when or where it would happen. If I told you, would you stay away from the woods? Would you run away from anyone with dark hair?"

Talia pressed her lips into a line. Unless she cooped up inside, she would go into the woods. Actually, she would either become paranoid or dismiss the Oracle's warning as the rambling of a crazy woman. But still, this was about Talia's safety. Shouldn't she know about it?

Seeing Talia's stubborn expression, Cassandra shook her head. "My job is to do the minimum required in order to make it happen unless the vision tells me otherwise."

"Do you always blindly follow what your visions show you?"

"If it's not too troubling," Cassandra responded mysteriously, stopping at the end of the room. "Here we are."

Talia looked down to see a wooden chest that reached her knees. The red paint flaked brown due to its age.

"Disappointed?" Cassandra asked.

Talia confirmed. "When you said ancient relics, I was expecting display cases and not... this."

Cassandra chuckled. "This is not a museum, Alpha. Our kind doesn't care about material things, regardless of how old they are."

Talia had to agree with this. Werewolves were simple. They cared about food, clothes, the roof over their heads, and... mates. Pack and family were important, and many pack members were unmated. Why would they care about magic necklaces and whatever else was in that chest if they didn't have their other half?

Talia squatted and put her hand on the chest. Again, nothing. It was a plain, dusty chest.

Damon, Axel, and Yasmin stood on the side, eagerly waiting to see what was inside.

The rusty lock creaked when Talia flipped it, and then she opened the chest.

With a glance, Talia could see that most of it were jewelry. Necklaces and various chains, brooches, and gemstones. It was like a box of trinkets that belonged to a female. Talia put her hand inside and moved them around. There was a belt and a palm-sized dagger whose white hilt was embellished with emeralds.

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Chapter 819: Ancient relics (2)

"What makes them magical?" Axel asked Cassandra. No matter how he looked at those, they were ordinary.

Cassandra reached into a box and took one diamond-shaped silver brooch. "If this is normal, it would be affected by abilities. However, all these things will absorb the energy directed at them, change its properties, or repel it. I'm not sure if that classifies them as magical, but they were tampered with magic. I experimented enough to know that whatever was done with these, it's beyond our knowledge."

"And you didn't report this to Alphas?" Axel asked angrily while pointing at the chest.

Cassandra raised her arms defensively. "They were right here. I assumed that one of the previous Alphas got these as a gift, or maybe one of our gifted pack members crafted them. And there was a possibility of them being failed experiments of imbuing items with abilities." She turned to Talia. "We don't care about gold, silver, and gems. Other than being shiny, they have no other purpose."

Werewolves didn't wear jewelry because it would come off or break when they shifted. Things like these would be kept in some storage or used in the human realm in exchange for money and supplies. However, since these were special, they were not to be given away, so they stayed in a chest.

"How many of these did you take?" Axel growled at Cassandra.

"I am not a thief!" Cassandra hissed back.

"That's what you say!"

"Calm down, Axel," Talia said. She couldn't think with all the noise. "Can we get this chest in one of the labs? I would like to see how these items are tested."

"Yes, Alpha," Cassandra said and bowed respectfully.

Axel was irked. Why was Cassandra talking casually with him while bootlicking Talia? What was with that double standard? He was an important member of the pack also!

"You should listen to Lia," Yasmin spoke softly to Axel.

Axel didn't understand. "What?"

"I know you are anxious since Talia channeled her energies into me, but I am fine. You need to relax and not vent on the Oracle. We all want to get to the bottom of this, and Cassandra is just trying to help." Shouting and pointing fingers were not helpful.

...

Cassandra stood behind a stone table that had magic symbols etched into it. In the middle of the table was a metallic cup with twelve colorful crystals arranged around it.

Calla and Remi were on Cassandra's left and right, ready to assist when needed.

Axel, Yasmin, Damon, and Talia were there, but Cassandra was focused on Talia.

"Is that a magical item?" Talia asked while pointing at the cup.

"No," Cassandra responded. "Before we use relics, I want to show you what normally happens so you can compare."

Cassandra started chanting under her breath while drawing patterns with her fingers in the air.

The crystals lit up, and then Calla and Remi joined with their chants.

The rays of light shot from each crystal toward the cup like lasers. At the point of contact, the rays of light paused, and then some seeped into the metal, while others reflected randomly, with much less intensity, like they lost power.

Damon moved to dodge one blue ray of light that went straight for him, and Calla said, "No need to avoid them. They are used for training and are harmless." To prove her point, Calla extended her hand, letting the purplish ray of light hit her palm.

Damon felt silly. Why was he the only one who moved? But out of everyone present, only he was in the direct path of a ray of light. Did Cassandra do that on purpose?

Talia hugged Damon's arm. "You have impressive reflexes."

Damon's mood soared. Talia praised his reflexes, and he decided to go with it.

Cassandra stopped chanting, and then she explained, "Depending on the item's property, the energies will either be absorbed or will be repelled after being weakened."

She replaced the metallic cup with a golden bracelet she got from the chest.

"Observe the difference," Cassandra said, and she started chanting again with Calla and Remi.

The light from twelve crystals shot toward the bracelet, and when it reached about one inch from the bracelet, the light rays halted like they had reached an invisible barrier. Little by little, the light spilled like liquid to form a colorful sphere around the bracelet.

Talia looked at everything with eyes open wide in wonder. She never saw anything like it.

"Do all relics respond in the same way?" Yasmin asked.

"No," Cassandra responded. "Some will absorb it, repel it, or change its properties."

"Interesting..." Yasmin said, and she reached to get one oval-shaped brooch from the chest. "Do they react differently to abilities?"

"Yes," Cassandra responded, hoping they won't ask her for a demonstration because her fire was gone.

Yasmin held the brooch, and she turned her back to Cassandra. Her eyes widened in surprise as she stared at the brooch resting on her palm.

"What is it?" Talia asked Yasmin in a whisper.

"It should move."

"It should?"

Yasmin confirmed. "I can move things. I am trying to move this, but it won't." Yasmin's head snapped to look at Talia. "How about you try with your energies?"

Talia reached into the chest and took one necklace. It had a pendant with several pearls arranged to form a flower; the pearls reminded Talia of the necklace hidden under her blouse.

Did this one hold a secret message also? Could she activate it? Talia was reluctant to experiment on the necklace her mother left behind, but this was a different thing.

Damon and Axel approached Talia to see what she was doing.

Talia held the necklace in front of her and focused on her palm, which started glowing in silvery light.

The necklace resisted Talia's energy for a second, and then it started absorbing it hungrily. Talia increased the output, which made the whole scene fantastic as the necklace started glowing like it had built-in lights.

Talia's eyes were solid silver now, and her hair turned silver also. Every time she used her energies, it was easier; she was getting used to it. The power coursing through her was addictive.

Talia was elated while looking at the necklace, thinking that it worked, but with every passing second, her brows came closer together. Other than glowing, nothing else happened.

'Don't stop,' Liseli said.

'What's going on?' Talia asked.

'The item is reacting, but it needs more energy. Let me help.'

'Wait!' Talia called. 'What will happen when we add more energy?'

'There is only one way to find out. Are we doing this?'

Talia exhaled helplessly. What were her options?

'What if something goes wrong?' Talia asked.

'Uhm... We can cast a protective shield to contain whatever wrong is about to happen.'

This pacified Talia a bit. She didn't want to risk negative energies impacting Yasmin's babies.

With a boost from Liseli, the bracelet started flickering from silvery to white, nearly blinding everyone looking that way.

'Zzzz...'

A low buzzing sound started emitting from the necklace, and Damon's eyes flashed when his instincts told him something was wrong.

In one swift move, Damon snatched the necklace from Talia's hand and threw it in the far corner of the room.

'BOOOOM!'

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Ancient relics (3)

'BOOOOOM!'

A thunderous explosion shook the room, and Talia found herself in Damon's embrace. He shielded her with his body from the debris.

The dust settled, and Talia blinked to see on the side Axel holding Yasmin protectively with his back facing the explosion, just as Damon was holding her. Cassandra, Calla, and Remi were hiding behind the stone table.

Talia's eyes widened when she saw the area where the necklace exploded. Everything in that corner was blasted away, including the walls. There was a gap big enough for a person to pass into the adjacent lab. Three panicked heads were peeking through there to see what caused that explosion.

"It's OK!" Cassandra exclaimed while waving at those three healers to leave. "Just an experiment went out of hand!"

Talia silently thanked the Moon Goddess that no one else was in the lab. If this stunt ended up killing someone, she would blame herself forever.

"Is everyone OK?" Talia asked.

"We are fine," Yasmin responded for her and Axel.

"Ugh," Remi groaned, and they all saw a gush of blood on her left thigh. She didn't avoid a beaker that flew her way and ended up with a nasty cut.

Calla was quick to get there and apply pressure on Remi's wound.

"We need healers!" Calla shouted from anxiety, and then she remembered that she was one. She placed her hands above Remi's wound and chanted magical words to promote healing.

Talia wanted to go there, but Damon's hold on her was solid.

'I can heal her,' Talia said through their mind-link.

'It's not life-threatening,' Damon responded stiffly. 'Let the healers handle it.'

A low growl formed in Damon's chest. "Let's NOT do that again." If he didn't react in time... he didn't want to think about it.

Talia wanted to tell him it was fine. She also heard the buzzing sound and was thinking if a shield was needed, but Liseli was calm, so Talia guessed that nothing wrong would happen.

'Didn't you sense the upcoming explosion?' Talia asked Liseli.

'No,' Liseli said bluntly. 'That necklace looked like it was charging.'

'It was. For an explosion.'

'It didn't look like anything explosive to me.'

Talia didn't want to argue. She needed to pacify her Alpha, who was holding onto her like she was his lifeline.

Talia's heart cracked when she sensed Damon's emotions. He was terrified by the possibility of losing her. She tightened her hold on him.

Talia thought of something else, so she mind-linked Axel, 'Didn't you see the upcoming explosion with your ability?'

'My ability is not working here,' Axel responded. 'I believe that one of the relics is blocking it.'

Talia thought how it made sense. She returned her attention to holding Damon.

Talia scrunched her nose, unsure if the scent of Remi's blood mixed with Damon's or if he was bleeding.

"Are you OK?" Talia asked in a whisper.

"No."

Talia quickly ran her hands over his back to sense if there were any tears or stickiness due to blood. "Are you harmed?"

"My heart nearly broke. Why do you make me worry, kitten?" He spoke into her hair. "What will I do if I lose you? Do you want me to go mad and kill everyone?"

His anxiety was spilling on her, and Talia felt dizzy.

"Damon," Talia called. "Damon!"

He moved to look at her, and she teared up when she saw the panic in his eyes. He was pale like a sheet of paper.

Talia put her palms on his cheeks and started chanting, "I am fine. I am right here. You protected me. Everything is fine." She kissed him on the lips. "See? I'm right here." She kissed him again. "How about we go to our room and rest for a bit? Or would you rather go for a run to let out some steam?"

Damon nodded. He didn't care where they went, as long as it was away from this place. Damon paused when he noticed that Talia's attention was behind him.

Damon turned to see Cassandra clearing the rubble with her bare hands.

"Ha!" Cassandra exclaimed victoriously, and then she returned with the necklace in her hand.

"It didn't blow up?" Yasmin asked. Considering the explosion and the damage, it was unbelievable that the necklace was only dusty.

Cassandra bobbed her head. "Relics are resilient. I tried on them spells, abilities, and physically smashing them. I couldn't make a scratch."

Talia thought how that was interesting. "Does this mean we can use this necklace as a bomb?"

"YOU can use it as a bomb," Cassandra responded to Talia. "But I don't think it would blow if you kept holding onto it."

"What do you mean?" Talia asked.

Cassandra gestured toward twelve crystals on the stone table. "Measurements showed energies converging, but nothing volatile. I believe the explosion happened because it lost contact with you. Of course, that's just a theory. The way to make sure is..."

"NO!" Damon shouted, and everyone (other than Talia) felt his Alpha aura pressing on them.

"Talia is NOT going to do that again!" He kicked the chest with relics to close. "Take this back from where it came from. Or even better, throw it into the ocean. Bury it somewhere no one will find it!"

Talia hugged Damon, knowing that her proximity could calm him down. There was no point in talking when he was having a panic attack.

'Let's talk about it later,' Talia said to Cassandra through the mind link and turned to Damon. "Are we going?"

Damon nodded stiffly, and they walked out.

Damon didn't say a word until they reached their room.

Talia closed the door behind them and turned to face him.

Damon jabbed his hand into his hair angrily.

"Damn it, Talia! When are you going to..." His words were cut off when Talia jumped on him. "What...?"

Her legs tightened around his waist, and she grabbed fistfuls of his hair.

Before he could figure out what was going on, Talia's lips latched on her mark on his neck.

"Damn it..." He spoke breathily. "Kitten... You... Mmm... Fuck..." He had so many things to say, but she executed a lethal move, and he hated and loved how much she could influence him.

His arms snapped around her, and he fell to his knees. Every move of her tongue over the mark sent electric pulses straight to his groin area and numbed everything else.

Talia continued sucking and licking her mark, and her hands moved to undress Damon.

He was stressed. They both were. Instead of a shouting session to release tension, they might as well indulge in carnal pleasures.

Damon wanted to say they needed to talk, but Talia's emotions told him she needed him, and his resolve dissolved faster than cotton candy that fell into the water.

His head dipped to find his mark on her neck, and he kissed her there, her every moan soothed his anxiety, and by the time they were naked, he forgot why his mood was off when they entered their room.

There were no words spoken, nor foreplay, as Damon invaded her insides with urgency, and she welcomed him eagerly, right there on the floor of their bedroom in the Midnight Guardians pack.

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