

The Alpha's Bride

#Chapter 861: Not alone (1)

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~ the Dark Howlers pack ~

It's been two days since Damon and Talia returned from the Spring Leaf pack.

Trisha and Arya also came with Caleb and Keith.

On the day they returned, Doctor Travis examined Arya and confirmed that she had healed well. Other than a few fading bruises, she was as good as new.

Gideon was ready with a ceremony for Trisha and Arya to join the Dark Howlers pack, and they prepared a small feast to celebrate afterward.

Talia told Keith and Caleb that she won't be leaving the pack in the next few days, so they could take time off guilt-free and enjoy getting to know their mates.

Keith couldn't wait to end the formalities and head to the secluded house prepared for them. The house was comparable to what Gideon and Mindy used, with three bedrooms upstairs, and a living area downstairs, and it included a patch of land around it for privacy. Keith hoped they could stay there long-term.

Arya expected to meet Keith's family when they came to the Dark Howlers pack, but Keith had a different idea. As soon as the pack-joining ceremony ended, Keith and Arya excused themselves. Keith didn't care about the feast.

Since they met, Arya was in the pack hospital, so they couldn't get handsy. Hugging and kissing were fantastic but torturous as well because their kisses would turn steamy, and he could pick up the scent of her arousal, but they had to stop.

On the positive side, they had a lot of time to talk and get to know each other on a non-physical level.

Now that Arya was cleared by doctor Travis as recovered, and she joined the Dark Howlers pack officially, Keith had no intention of sharing her with anyone. At least not until he got his fill of her.

Zina reported that the food she delivered to their villa was disappearing, so they were alive.

Caleb showed Trisha around and introduced her to his friends and family. Zina knew that Talia was planning for Trisha to work in the packhouse, and she said that she will give Trisha some light duties to start.

Mindy and Zina were elated to hear about more females joining the pack and coming into their small circle that revolved around the packhouse, and they were busy organizing the upcoming mixer.

Maya and Caden were not heavily involved in ongoing activities, as they were preparing (mostly mentally) for their imminent vacation and Maya's heat. Until the last moment, the Beta duo was focused on training Erik, Petra, and Zack, so that the youngsters could help Damon and Talia in Maya's and Caden's absence.

Back to the present...

Talia and Damon were in the study attending a video conference with Maddox, Cristian, Axel, and Tony.

Axel didn't have the means to join the conference from the Midnight Guardians pack, so he went to the Lightclaw pack and attended from Tony's study. Moving from the portal to Tony's packhouse didn't require much time, and Yasmin was happy to perform the teleportation spell if that meant chatting time with Kalina while the guys dealt with work.

Cristian and Maddox summarized what they found from the interrogation of rogues that attacked them recently. Unfortunately, it was not much.

Alphas agreed that they must collaborate in dealing with this. Since rogues were tightlipped and organized, unlike before, it was essential for packs to cooperate.

"I want to thank everyone for your assistance during Ashton's birthday party," Cristian spoke from the computer screen. "If your warriors were not there, the casualties would be unimaginable."

"We were lucky to find out that rogues will be attacking," Damon said.

"I guess this proves that Cassie from the Steelbite pack knows something," Tony said. "Damon, when will you call her to see if she has more information?"

Damon released a long breath.

He didn't want to deal with Cassie, especially not from a position where he was the one asking favors. First, it might all be a trap where Cassie revealed one attack in order to

gain their trust. And there was a chance she might give them more legit information with the goal of betraying them when they lower their guards. Second, even if Cassie wanted to collaborate, Damon knew that female was a pain in the ass. And third, there was always the possibility of Talia remembering that Cassie was Damon's bed warmer at some point and all that exploding into Damon's face. With Talia's temper flaring unexpectedly due to pregnancy, anything was possible.

Unfortunately, he didn't have a choice.

"I will call her today and let you know about the outcome. Any updates about Alpha Adam?"

Alpha Adam asked if he could join their open-borders policy and act as a bridge between a combined territory that belonged to Damon, Maddox, Cristian, and the current isolated territory owned by Tony.

"Alpha Adam met with Alpha Peter from the Everfang pack yesterday," Tony said. "I still need to hear the outcome of that meeting."

Tony would love it if they could combine all their territories, but not at the expense of opening the door to backstabbers. None of the Alphas present trusted Alpha Adam or Alpha Peter. Those two flip-flopped too many times. Sure, they had their reasons, but their previous behavior was a testament that they would collaborate with whoever gave them more benefits.

Luckily, Tony was not isolated. With the portal of the Midnight Guardians pack nearby, Axel could send reinforcements when needed.

After a long time of stagnation, dozens of members of the Midnight Guardians pack found their mates among witches and werewolves. Their morale was on all high, and they were ready to help their allies in fighting off attackers.

...

After the video conference with other Alphas ended, Damon glared at his phone like it was his mortal enemy. He knew that he needed to call Cassie, but every cell in his body was resisting that action.

"The sooner you do it, the sooner it will be done," Talia said.

Damon cocked an eyebrow at Talia. "Come here."

Talia got off her chair and sat on Damon's lap. His calm exterior didn't deceive her as she could feel his anxiety.

"It will be alright, Damon," Talia said. "It's just a phone call. Put her on a speaker, and let's hear what she has to say. And no matter what she says, I won't think you are cheating on me," she ended teasingly.

Damon groaned. "That was not funny."

Talia pressed her lips into a line. She was trying to lighten the mood, but it didn't work. Change of strategy!

Talia ran her fingers through his raven black hair. "How about you tell me what's bothering you?"

"If Cassie doesn't have a believable story, she wouldn't risk coming here with the tribute from the Steelbite pack and seeking me. I can't imagine what she can offer that we don't know already, but it will be something big, something I can't ignore. If I ignore it, I will regret it, but if I act on it and it's a trap..." He will regret it even more.

Damon was always a control freak, acting logically, choosing violence over negotiations because it was faster and cleaner, but now it was not just him. Other packs will be involved, and he had Talia and a pup on the way if anything happened to them because he made a wrong decision... Damon didn't want to think about it.

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Chapter 862: Not alone (2) [Bonus chapter]

In his search for comfort, Damon hugged Talia and buried his face into her hair, taking deep breaths to fill his system with her sweet citrusy scent of freesia.

Talia hugged him in return and let him have that moment of peace, happy to know that she had that effect on him.

Talia realized that when Damon shared his concerns, Damon was talking in the first person, like he was alone, and it made her heart ache. Didn't he know how many people would gather around him?

Talia was ready to stand by his side no matter what enemy they were facing, and she was confident that at least a few others would do the same.

Damon was used to carrying his own burdens, and he couldn't see that he was not alone anymore. Talia understood him completely because she was the same. For such a long time, Talia was surviving on her own, and even though she enjoyed Damon's care and affection, it took her a long time to accept it as real.

Talia was determined to remind Damon as many times as necessary that he was surrounded by friends and allies, people who shared his ideals and desire for peaceful lives.

OK. Maybe not everyone would risk their lives for Damon out of the goodness of their hearts, but they all understood that if their packs didn't stand united, they will be defeated one by one. Neutrality was not an option, and they didn't have a tangible enemy with whom they could negotiate.

The only thing they could do now was to prepare themselves to defend, but that had its limitations. In order to assure a victory, the only viable path was to attack, and for that, they needed more information.

Talia didn't like Cassie. Actually, Cassie was one of Talia's least favorite people. Cassie came to this packhouse like she owned the place, acting like a spoiled princess and Damon's future Luna. Well, that didn't turn out the way she hoped.

Cassie had a history with Damon that Talia didn't want to think about, Cassie accused Talia of stealing and slapped her, and then she was unreasonable at Kalina's Luna ceremony. Talia had no good memories of Cassie, and Talia's skin crawled at the thought of Damon getting in touch with that wench. Still, if Cassie had some valuable information, Talia needed to swallow her grievances and encourage Damon to make that call.

After an unknown measure of time, Talia realized that Damon was procrastinating. How will that help? Can a powerful Alpha act like a baby?

Or did he forget about that call completely? Damon was known to push aside anything he didn't want to deal with, and this belonged in that category.

If not for the small movements of his fingers on her back, she would think he was asleep.

"Damon?"

"Hmm?"

"You know that you are not alone in this, right?"

"Yes. I have you, Max, Chris, and Tony." He would mention Maya and Caden, but those two will go on a vacation, so he couldn't count on them short term.

"And James," Talia added. "How about we record this call and ask Cornelia to bring James here tonight? We can have dinner together and let him listen to the call. James always had unique views and ideas. And this would be a good chance to get updates on Alpha Edward."

At the mention of James, Damon's mood improved. Talia was right. That boy always had good ideas. If James comes, Damon will remind him that the offer to be Gamma of the Dark Howlers pack still stands.

Seeing that Damon was willing, Talia thought of something. "How about we can ask if George and Dawn can also join? If this is as big as we think it is, we will need all the help we can get."

Damon pushed a lock of coppery-colored hair behind Talia's ear.

"What would I do without you, kitten?"

Talia's smile fell. What would he do without her? He would go with his business as usual. Wasn't his life much simpler before she came into the picture?

"If not for me, you wouldn't be in this mess."

Damon frowned. "Don't say that."

"Did you forget that the intrusion in the Dark Howlers pack during the Summer Solstice festival was because of me? Since then, things have been escalating. The last few attacks wouldn't happen if the Guardians were not set on me."

They didn't have any proof, but after her encounter with Gregory, Talia was confident that the Guardians were the ones pulling the strings from the shadows.

Gregory said that he didn't have anything to do with the attack on the Blue River pack, but why would Talia believe him? The only thing she believed was that Gregory would say and do anything to make her trust him long enough so he could snatch her.

If the Guardians thought Talia would come to them willingly, that disappeared when Gregory forced heat on her. Sure, it all ended well, but it could have ended in so many horrible ways that Talia was getting nauseated just by thinking about it.

"Rogues were attacking way before you came into the picture," Damon reminded her.

She couldn't deny that, but... "They see your Luna as your weakness, so the rogues want me as well."

"I wish that you could see yourself through my eyes. You are my light. You are my everything." He put his palm on her abdomen. "You are my gift from the Moon Goddess that keeps on giving. It is my duty and my honor to protect you. Don't see yourself as my weakness, and you are definitely not a burden. If anything, you are a catalyst that urges me to try harder and improve."

Talia smiled as he shared his emotions so she could feel the raw adoration he had for her, and she would love to spend eternity basking in his unconditional acceptance, but they had work to do.

"If you think your sweet-talking will get you out of calling Cassie, you should think again."

Damon chuckled. "Busted."

Talia's eyes flashed in outrage. "So, you admit to it?"

"That doesn't mean my words were not true. You make my life worth living. Don't forget that kitten."

Talia melted into an emotional puddle. Even after all this time, she sometimes doubted if this was happening. Even the wildest dreams of Talia from the attic in the Red Moon pack didn't include becoming Damon's Luna, being an Alpha, or that this handsome male specimen would look at her like she was the only woman in the world and say all those sweet things... it was surreal.

Damon's palm landed on the back of Talia's neck, and he pulled her closer for a slow sensual kiss that made her toes curl.

Was this another Damon's tactic to postpone calling Cassie? It didn't matter. Damon wanted kisses, and Talia was willing to let him have them.

Later that evening...

As Talia suggested, Dawn, George, James, and Cornelia came from the Red Moon pack to join them for dinner. Zina was elated to see her bestie.

Dawn wanted to join George for the serious talk Damon planned (and why they came to the Dark Howlers pack), but she also wanted to hang out with Zina. George helped her decide by saying he would tell her what happened after they returned home.

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Chapter 863: Not alone (3)

After dinner, Trisha stopped by the packhouse with the intention of meeting Dawn.

Caleb was waiting for Trisha in the car. Trisha was new in the area, and they were newly mated, so Caleb didn't want to leave Trisha on her own, but he also didn't want to intrude on her girl time. Trisha had a bubbling personality, and she had a lot of friends in the Spring Leaf pack. Caleb couldn't deny her this opportunity to make friends, even if it

meant sitting in the car and playing games on the phone to pass the time until Trisha returned.

Zina, Dawn, and Trisha were gathered around a small mountain of food on the kitchen island and chattering away.

Talia, Damon, James, Cornelia, George, Maya, and Caden were in the study.

Damon gave them quick updates on the situation before playing the audio recording he took while talking on the phone with Cassie.

'Beep-beep... beep-beep'

"I knew you would call," Cassie said smugly the moment she picked up the call.

"Get to the point, Cassie," Damon sounded impatient. "What do you know, and what do you want in return?"

"I know plenty."

"Don't talk in a roundabout way if you expect me to take this bait. Give me more than words. How do I know your info is valid? And how do I know you won't backstab me?"

"That's up to you," Cassie responded. "But I won't talk until you give me what I want."

"And that is...?"

"A ticket out."

"Out from where?" Damon was audibly confused.

"From here. People are saying you bailed out Marcy from the Red Moon pack."

"They are saying, what?" Damon growled.

"There is no proof, but the fact that she disappeared without a trace means someone big helped her. You were right there, so it's natural for people to connect the dots. I want the same. Different identity, money, and one ticked to a place my father won't find me."

"Do you expect me to believe you are abandoning your free meal ticket? Everyone knows that Alpha Richard treats you like you can't go wrong."

Cassie released a whine. "That was before. Now the Elders are bitching how we need to pay tribute, that I embarrassed the pack, and I have no value with my hair gone."

"Your hair will grow, Cassie."

"That's not the point. My duties are already given to Beta's daughter, and my father's mistress showed him a positive pregnancy test. They are mistreating me here, and it's not going to get better... I want out. Will you help me?"

"You are asking for a lot. What do I get in return?"

"Information. I got into my father's study while he was entertaining his new lay, and I learned a lot. I will tell you when you get me out of here."

"That's not how it works, Cassie. I need something if you want me to risk provoking Alpha Richard."

Cassie snorted. "He doesn't need provoking. He is already set on attacking you. Here is my show of sincerity. Several Alphas are set on attacking the Dark Howlers pack and dividing your territory."

"Tell me something new."

"This time, it's real. This is bigger than just a few Alphas coming together. This time, someone smart is behind them, telling them what to do. They are using rogues to test how they can get closer and... I'm not saying another word until you get me out."

"You are talking like getting you out is an easy task. Can you even get out of the Steelbite territory without your father knowing? Or are you expecting me to march into your packhouse to pick you up?"

"Let me take care of that. There is an event in one week that my father will attend. I will send you coordinates where to pick me up..."

Damon pushed the button to stop the recording, and he looked around the room.

"I want to hear your thoughts on this before I share it with other Alphas," Damon said.

"Did you agree to extract her?" Caden asked.

"No. I told her I would get back to her within three days."

"I don't trust her," Maya said. She had too many bad memories related to Cassie to believe that Cassie could do any good.

"Can we afford to ignore this?" George asked. "If what she said is true, and they plan a coordinated attack on the Dark Howlers pack, it will change the landscape as we know it. People will die, and someone will get more powerful. If they take down the Dark

Howlers pack, the Spring Leaf and the Blue Moon will also fall. And which one will be next? And who is pulling the strings?"

James raised his hand, indicating to George to calm down. His Alpha aura was leaking and making others uncomfortable.

"Everything you said is valid, but if Cassie misdirects us, it will cause more damage than good.," James said. "Imagine that her info is about an attack on the Blue River pack next week. Everyone will send help, staying thin on only minimum security. And what will happen if the said attack is on the Lightclaw pack? They will be massacred."

"I can call my sisters from the Coven to help," Cornelia said.

James gave Cornelia's hand a squeeze. He loved that she offered help, but... "Let's hold off on that. First, we need to hear what Cassie has to say. Next, we need to verify if her intel is true. I suggest we start with confirming if Beta's daughter is handling Cassie's previous duties and if Alpha Richard is going to be a father."

"I have ways to get that info," Damon said.

Cassie's duties shouldn't be a secret, and Alpha Richard was not a person who would stay quiet about the future heir.

"I can confirm if someone is lying," Talia said.

James shook his head. "That will be useful if Cassie is not used by someone. It's no secret that Cassie is not the brightest she-wolf in their pack. There is a chance that Alpha Richard left that info on purpose for her to see."

Talia's enthusiasm dwindled when she realized that James had a point. Verifying if Cassie was lying would work only if Cassie knew she was lying. What a mess.

After a short discussion, Damon agreed that he will confirm Cassie's current situation and give her refuge. If Cassie dares to lie, she will wish that she stayed in the Steelbite pack.

With Amelia's teleportation magic, escaping won't be an issue. Before bringing Cassie to the Dark Howlers pack, they will ensure she has no tracking or recording devices or magic on her.

Damon will arrange a safehouse for Cassie so that no one knows she is here, and once Cassie gives them the info, they will tackle the part of verifying its validity.

Damon was relieved that they had a plan. And Talia was right; discussing this with others made him feel like he shared the burden.

"You seem to think Cassie knows something," Damon said to James. He noticed that James was set on rescuing Cassie.

James confirmed. "My father would normally boast about things. In the last few weeks, he has been different. He has phone calls behind closed doors that even Beta Raymond needs to wait out in the hallway."

While thinking about changes in Alpha Edward's behavior, George thought of something. "Alpha Edward is asking us to train in new patterns. He never meddled with our training, and we all know that Alpha Edward is not into military tactics, but lately, that changed."

"Can you share those patterns?" Damon asked.

"Sure. I can write down now what I remember and will send you more when I make copies in my office."

George moved to sit at Talia's desk and started writing down things.

"Well, it seems that Alpha Edward is part of the coalition that Cassie mentioned," Talia said, and she turned to James. "How are preparations for your birthday going?"

James didn't understand why Talia would ask about that. "Fine. I guess. To be honest, I'm not involved." He was not looking forward to the party that will be a circus with him as the main attraction. And also, Cornelia won't be present.

"You should be," Talia said. "If your father plans something against Alpha Damon or the Dark Howlers pack, your birthday would be a great opportunity to strike."

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Chapter 864: Not alone (4)

James thought how that was a possibility. With Damon attending the party, his father could ambush Damon or attack the Dark Howlers pack, or both. Without Alpha Damon, his pack was vulnerable.

In the end, it won't matter if people knew who was behind the attack on Damon, no one would dare to say a word if they succeed in eliminating him.

Damon was just one man, but he was the Alpha of the largest pack in North America. With Damon gone from the picture, it will be carnage to fight for what Damon currently controls.

"I will keep my eyes open," George said from the side. "The party preparations need manpower. I will send a few Omegas loyal to me."

"Will you attend the party if it's confirmed that Alpha Edward is planning something?" Cornelia asked as her eyes darted from Damon to Talia.

"Of course!" Talia exclaimed. "How can we miss James' birthday? Damon will attend with his Luna Talia, who is also Alpha Natalia Moonrider of the Midnight Guardians pack. It will be our debut as a mated couple. No more secrets. And if Alpha Edward tries to put a finger on Damon, he will need to go through me. If he wants war, he will find out that we are ready."

People might think that Talia was boasting, but her eyes were shimmering in silvery light, so no one dared to question her.

"Are you sure you should take a risk considering your condition?" Maya asked.

"What condition? Do you think our enemies care if it's convenient to attack?" Talia asked. "I've had enough of waiting to see from which corner enemies will slither. If we stay passive, it's only a matter of time before we fall to one of their tactics. I won't sit still and watch them hurt my friends, my pack, or my mate."

Damon puffed his chest with pride. That's his kitten!

George felt that his fighting spirit was swelling at Talia's words. It was inspirational.

George cleared his throat to get everyone's attention. "My preparations are done. I am waiting for the right time to issue an Alpha challenge to Alpha Edward."

"Don't rush," James said. "My father has many ways to deal with you outside of the Alpha challenge. Now we know someone is pulling the strings behind these attacks. It's someone powerful enough to unite rogues and Alphas. Getting rid of Alpha Edward might unleash calamity no one knows how to deal with."

"Who could be that strong?" Caden asked.

"This is not about strength, but it's about brain and resources," James responded. "Wave a piece of territory or money while coddling their egos, and they will all become lapdogs. It could be the Guardians, humans, or maybe someone we never heard of." James turned to Cornelia. "We know there are other realms, and it takes only one portal to connect them."

Maya shifted in her chair. "When you speak like that, it sounds like enemies might pop from anywhere."

"That is true," James said. "But the enemies we should fear are those among us, wearing masks of allies."

Damon was alerted. "Are you saying that someone here is a traitor?"

James shrugged. "Who knows? Anything is possible. Take me, for example. My father is proudly showing me as his heir, the next Alpha of the Red Moon pack, yet I am sitting here with you, and I didn't blink when George said he plans to kill my father. Aren't I a traitor? You can argue that my father is greedy and we are only protecting our lives and the people we care about, but in the end, there is no right or wrong. It's all a matter of perspective."

With that, James stood up and walked out.

Cornelia was unsure what to do. "Excuse him. James is under a lot of pressure lately."

She was about to get up and go after James, but Damon was faster.

"Let me talk to him," Damon said before disappearing through the door.

"George," Talia called. "I don't think you should delay challenging Alpha Edward. Make sure you get the timing right so he can't trick you or avoid fighting you. Once Alpha Edward is gone, you and Dawn will be the only Alphas there, and no one will be able to harm you. Protect your allies and provide guidance for those willing to follow you. We will help you deal with the ones that are retaliating. Just give us a heads up, so we know it's coming."

...

Outside...

Damon found James in the garden. He was standing next to the fountain and staring at the water that trickled to create ripples in the moonlight reflecting on the surface.

"How are you doing?" Damon asked.

"Like crap," James responded. "I don't want Cora to find out, yet I end up cracking." He turned to look at Damon. "How do you do it? How do you keep your cool with so many dangers?"

Damon puffed his cheeks. "First, talk to her. Be honest. Tell her how you feel."

"How I feel? Like a cornered rat. No matter what my plan is, I don't see how I can come out of it alive, and if something happens to me, who will protect my mate?"

"If that's how you feel, that's what you should tell her. Your mate feels your emotions, and without you explaining, she will get worried and think of unreasonable scenarios. Women do that. Besides, there is no need for you to feel cornered. There is always a solution."

"Are you talking about me becoming your Gamma?"

"Yup."

"Are you not afraid that my father will use that to attack you?"

"Nope."

"What changed?"

Damon stuffed his hands into his jeans pockets. "We are not playing undercover games anymore. We know exactly who our allies are, and everyone else is an enemy. There are no neutral parties. The latest rogue attacks show that Alpha Edward and his cronies are making their moves, and if you stay where you are, my most reliable strategist is stuck behind enemy lines. I would rather have you in my camp and use your brain to get us out of this pickle while minimizing casualties."

"How do you know I won't betray you?" James questioned with a stubbornness of a teenager.

Damon shrugged. "I believe you are a smart guy. Even if we ignore the lack of your Alpha aura, Alpha Edward always cared only about himself. He used your sister, he is neglecting your mother, and he is displaying you like you are a trophy. Everyone is a pawn in his eyes, and he gives no loyalty. Future under Alpha Edward's shadow is grim."

"And you are offering me a bright future?"

"No. I am offering you a future in which you will be my Gamma; what you will do with it is your business. I will demand your loyalty and that you perform your tasks to the best of your abilities. In return, I will ensure your basic needs are met. Outside emergencies and usual work hours, you will be free to do whatever you want, without hiding. With your mate. And the best thing..." Damon gave James a meaningful look. "I pay well."

James burst into a laugh.

'PAK!'

Damon smacked James' back with more force than necessary, and the unsuspecting teen nearly fell into the fountain.

"You should laugh more often. You are only sixteen years old, yet you are acting like a grandpa."

"I do what I need to survive," James responded.

"Then do it. Come to my side and survive. I will be waiting."

With that, Damon turned and walked back to the packhouse.

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Chapter 865: Solitude (K&A) (1)

Keith laid on his side and observed the female sleeping soundly next to him. His cantaloupe-infused mate.

Her bruises and cuts were nearly gone, and he could see how beautiful she was.

Keith remembered how he carried Arya into the house and up the stairs (two at a time), and then he checked two bedrooms before finding the master bedroom. Of course, it was the last one he checked!

The bed was covered with red rose petals, and there were strawberries, chocolates, and champagne on the bedside table. Keith took a mental note to treat Zina for this extra touch. Zina was the one who prepared the house for them. And at some point, Keith heard movements downstairs, only to find fresh food in the kitchen waiting for them. Again, it was Zina. When he noticed a presence downstairs next time, Keith didn't bother with it, knowing it was Zina, and he hoped she brought more food.

Since arriving at this house, Keith and Arya didn't talk. They did that for the whole night in the pack hospital of the Spring Leaf pack, in the following morning, when she introduced him to people in the Spring Leaf pack, and on the way to the Dark Howlers pack. It was enough talking. He couldn't wait to claim Arya as his.

He smiled while remembering Arya breathlessly calling his name and when her moan changed pitch as his fangs sank into her neck. Marking. It was done.

They mated, and he marked her, and she was his now. Completely.

Her gorgeous legs were sticking out from the bedsheet that covered her midsection, and her breasts were also peeking at the top. Keith licked his lips. He wanted to suck on her nipples and feel them hardening on his tongue. He did that a few times on the last day, and it was fantastic.

He did a lot of things, and now that he thought about it... he was acting like a sexually deprived man. Maybe there should be more cuddling and talking, but he couldn't stop himself because she was hard and soft in all the right places, welcoming and pulling him closer, and she tasted of cantaloupe.

Ah! He was hard again! Should he wake her up?

Arya would fall asleep after a few rounds of lovemaking, taking about one hour-long nap before she was ready for more. It was more than an hour now. Did she have enough rest?

Keith couldn't stop himself from reaching to touch the left side of her neck where his mark was forming.

"Mmm..." Arya stirred from her sleep and exhaled shakily.

Her eyes fluttered open, and he could see her drowsiness morphing into confusion as she processed where she was.

"Good morning, gorgeous," Keith called, his voice huskier than usual.

Arya blinked at him and smiled while pulling the bedsheet to cover herself properly. She was a warrior and a werewolf, and she was used to nakedness, but with Keith, it was different. Arya wanted to impress him, and she was not sure if she was presentable, considering that her body was sticky from sweat and bodily fluids. She pulled the bedsheet to her chin before responding.

"Good morning?" It was dark outside. "What's the time?"

"You woke up and lit up my world, so it's morning."

"You are a smooth talker," she said.

"I am much more than that."

Seeing her shyly hiding behind the cover, Keith remembered one important thing.

"I'm sorry, Arya."

"For?"

"For not being more... gentle." He was horny, and he could feel that she wanted him, so he went for it without thinking much. But now that he had the time to process events since they reached here, he needed to address a certain point. "If I knew it was your first time, I would..."

"Can we not talk about it?" She interrupted him.

Keith's brows came together, and he focused on her emotions. "Why are you embarrassed?"

"Can you stop using cheats on me?"

Keith reached to hold her hand, and he pried her fingers open to release the bedsheet. "These are not cheats, Arya. This is our bond. I can sense your emotions, and you get to sense mine. Do you feel how happy I am?"

"Because it was my first time?"

"That also," Keith admitted. "I mean, I wouldn't think less of you if you had men in your past before me." She was not his first, and double standards would make him an ass. "What matters is that I will be your last. However, I must ask, how is it possible that an absolute stunner like you was not intimate with a guy before? I'm sure males were going crazy around you."

Arya pressed her lips into a line. Should she tell him that there were many guys, but none of them was worthy of her? The truth was that Arya compared them all to Alpha Cristian, and that's why none was worthy.

Nope. She shouldn't say that.

After experiencing intimacy with Keith and their bond strengthening with mating and marking, she could barely remember what she liked about Alpha Cristian. Everything worthy of mentioning was flavored with cotton candy, just like the handsome male who was on the bed next to her, buck naked.

Keith's erection was distracting, and she wanted to cover him up with a bedsheet, but then we would both be naked under the same bedsheet, and... she was not sure what to do.

She did her best to focus on his rich brown eyes that stared at her expectantly.

"Males going crazy around me and me responding to them are two different things. By the time I came of age for men to pursue me openly, I was perfectly capable of kicking their asses."

Keith stared at her in awe, and he pulled her hand to his lips without breaking eye contact.

He kissed the root of her palm. "I will thank your ass-kicking abilities because they allowed me to be your first." He pressed her palm against his cheek. "I will make you happy, Arya. You won't regret this."

"I'm not regretting it," she responded. "I hope you won't feel burdened by the idea that you must make me happy. I can do that myself."

Keith frowned. "I know you can, Arya, but you don't need to. You are not alone. You have me."

Arya thought he was silly, but she didn't want to stay passive and let him do all the work. "You make me happy, and I will make you. How does that sound?"

"That sounds acceptable."

Keith was horny as hell, and he leaned to claim her lips with his when...

'Grrrr...'

Arya's stomach rumbled loudly, and she was back to being embarrassed.

Keith grimaced. How could he forget to feed his mate? It's many hours since they ate last time, and considering their recent activities, she should be starving.

"I said I will make you happy, yet I'm not feeding you." He pecked her lips and jumped out of bed. "Give me a minute until I get something."

Arya held her breath while staring at his naked form until his perfectly firm ass disappeared through the door. As a werewolf and a warrior, Arya saw many naked men, but Keith's form was fantastic. Broad shoulders, V-shaped back, muscular legs, and that ass... Keith had a great ass.

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Chapter 866: Solitude (K&A) (2)

Keith was happy while inspecting the food Zina left for them. Soup, steak, sauteed mushrooms, mashed potatoes, creamy spinach sauce, and homemade dinner rolls. Everything was neatly wrapped and covered, and some things were left in the oven on warm. Zina's attention to detail showed because there were two slices of raspberry cheesecake in the fridge. She thought of everything.

Even if Zina didn't bring food, they wouldn't starve as the pantry was stocked, and there was food in the fridge, but still... it was good to have a warm meal without the hassle of preparing it. This was their solitude, and every minute counted.

Keith returned to the bedroom with a large tray filled with food, and he found the bed empty.

Where did Arya go? He was not gone for more than a few minutes.

Water running from the bathroom told him Arya had started the shower.

Keith stared at the closed door of the bathroom while imagining Arya standing there, under the hot water, the hazy glass of the shower enclosure obscuring the view of her naked body...

'Crack-snap-crack...'

Keith was startled from his fantasy when he realized that his grip was breaking the tray he was holding.

He swiftly moved to the low coffee table, happy that the lids were tightly securing contents from spilling all over. The last thing on his mind was cleaning the carpet. No one cleans the carpet naked, with a raging hard-on, and a perfectly naked mate under the shower... only a few steps away.

Keith ran his hand through his hair and breathed into his palm to check his breath, and then he strode into the bathroom. His erection was sticking forward, showing him which way to go.

Arya was scrubbing herself with urgency.

Keith said he would get food, and Arya assumed she had at least a few minutes to tidy up.

Normally, Arya wouldn't care about some sweat and gunk. She was a warrior, and hygiene was not a top priority. But now she was with her mate, and she couldn't bear the thought of him thinking she was fine with being smelly and filthy.

Too many things happened in the last few days, and Arya was still adjusting to the fact that she nearly died, found her mate, left the Spring Leaf pack, and now she was here... with a male who entered her life and immediately got access no other man had. It's not that Arya didn't like it, but she never truly belonged anywhere.

Arya was the perfect girl, the smartest student, the best soldier, always standing at the top because she feared that if she were lacking, they would discard her.

The only person she looked up to was Alpha Cristian, and the fact that these feelings exploded for another man was... unexpected. She will need some time to adjust to the change.

Goosebumps ran over her skin when she remembered Keith's hungry gaze directed her way, locking her in place and making her heart flutter. Keith was like a predator, ready to devour his prey, and in a way... he did devour her. Many times.

Arya's hair stood on the ends when she felt a presence behind her.

In one swift move, she lowered her center of gravity and turned when...

"Woah!" Keith exclaimed when he caught her elbow. If he didn't react in time, that would hit him in the solar plexus. Dangerous.

"Sorry," Arya said while pulling her hand away. "You surprised me."

"Good reflexes," Keith praised her. "Do you always greet people with elbows?"

"I was thinking something and..."

"It's OK," Keith interrupted her explanation. "Sorry for sneaking on you. I didn't think it would freak you out. I won't do it again."

Arya bit her lower lip guiltily. She acted on an impulse, a habit. No one dared to come so close to her, especially not in the shower when she was naked and vulnerable.

Like nothing out of the place happened, Keith reached for the shower gel and squeezed some on his hand.

"Turn around, let me wash your back," Keith instructed, and when she did, he asked, "I guess growing up as a warrior in the Spring Leaf pack was not easy."

Arya released a long breath. His palms on her back felt good. "It was OK." It's not like she had anything to compare it with.

Keith's hands slid around her waist, and he pressed on her abdomen to pull her on him until her back was stuck to his chest.

"It was not OK," he spoke into her hair. "I can't imagine how you grew up without a family, but I promise I will be your family going forward."

"I'm not sure I know what that means," Arya admitted.

"It means you will never be alone, and there will always be a chance I will sneak on you while you shower."

Arya stifled a laugh. "You will need to improve your sneaking if you want to succeed."

"I guess general Arya gave me my first assignment. Lieutenant Keith is at your service, ma'am," he said gleefully.

"What happened with," she lowered her voice, "I won't do it again?"

Keith chuckled. "The last directive overrules the previous one. Expect me sneaking unless you command me otherwise."

"You make it sound like I can tell you what to do."

"But, you can. Only you can. No matter what I do, I will ensure you are OK with it. I hope you know that much."

It was a strange thing to say, but Arya could feel his sincerity. Keith wanted to please, to make her happy.

Arya craned her neck to look at him. "Don't you think it's strange how comfortable I am with you? We just met, and I barely know you yet..." She was not sure how to finish that, and she hoped that he could feel her emotions.

Keith smiled as immense belonging washed over him.

"I feel the same," Keith said, and then he leaned to claim her lips with his.

Keith's arms were around Arya's waist, his chest pressed on her back, hot water fell on them, and she could feel his erection poking her bottom. She wanted Keith's hands to move all over her, and when they didn't, she decided to take the initiative.

Without breaking the kiss, Arya turned to face Keith, and her arms sneaked around his neck.

"We should eat first," Keith said between kisses. He remembered how her stomach rumbled.

"That can wait," Arya responded breathily.

Keith's cock lurched in response, and the last shred of reluctance vanished when she dug her nails into his back.

Keith pushed her to lean on the wall and then lifted her right leg as far as it went. Keith was pleasantly surprised that Arya could make a full split effortlessly.

Her leg rested on his shoulder, and he rocked his hips against her, allowing her to feel his length pressing between her folds and teasing her clit.

"Do you feel this?" His hot breath splashed on her ear. "This is how badly I want you. Your pussy is mine. Every inch of you is mine and mine only."

He grasped her chin roughly and stared into her eyes with an intensity that turned her on. "Say that you are mine, Arya."

Keith needed to hear Arya say that or he would lose his mind. The idea of anyone else claiming Arya was driving him mad.

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Chapter 867: Solitude (K&A) (3) [Bonus chapter]

"Yours," Arya said. "I am yours."

"Only mine," Keith demanded.

"Only yours," she confirmed.

Arya gasped into the kiss that landed on her lips with urgency.

She could feel his erection teasing and prodding, and his hands caressed her to set her body on fire, but even more impactful were his emotions that matched his words. Possessive, unyielding, dominating. Under that overbearing attitude was an endless ocean of worship he had for her, and she knew he would do everything in his power to make her happy.

Keith pushed inside her with a groan. She was hot and wet, and the sparks of their bond amplified the pleasure to the point of his legs trembling.

Keith's right hand gripped Arya's hip to hold her in place, and his left palm laid flat on the tiled wall for support as he thrust into her vigorously. Faster. Harder. It was mind-blowing, and he wondered how high they could go.

Arya was lost in the sensation of his hard cock stretching her while delivering an addictive dose of sparks that drove her closer to the edge.

Arya was never with a man before, but that didn't mean she was unaware of how perfectly Keith handled her body. He knew exactly where to touch, how hard, and how long to maximize her pleasure and make her cry his name within minutes.

Her mind was dazed by lust that consumed her, and then it all exploded into ecstasy when his lips latched on his mark on her neck.

The bathroom was spinning, and she held onto Keith for her dear life as an orgasm trashed her insides. Her left leg gave in, but luckily, Keith was pinning her against the wall so she didn't plop on the floor.

"Fuck! You are perfect!" Keith breathed as his body twitched while releasing his load inside her.

No matter how many women he had before, those were just fleeting pleasures, while intimacy with Arya was on a totally different level. She was able to make him experience heaven, and it was absolutely addictive. If it was up to him, they would have sex all the time.

Arya leaned on Keith limply while he washed her body under the hot shower. He was so gentle while rinsing shower gel that she couldn't believe that was the same man who fiercely plundered her insides only minutes ago.

Keith cradled Arya in his arms and waited for her to catch her breath before asking, "How about that food now?"

"You know what a woman wants," Arya said. "In more ways than one."

Keith felt a pang of jealousy coming from Arya, and he guessed that her comment was about his past. He didn't mention how many women he bedded, and he had no intention of going there, but it was obvious he was not a newbie. Shouldn't that be a good thing? Keith cringed at the memory of his first time, how nervous and clumsy he was. If he showed that side of him to Arya, she would make fun of him forever.

But Arya's dejection was rising, and Keith needed to fix the situation before it escalated.

"Hey, hey," Keith called while cupping her cheeks and making her look at him. "All of me is only for you. Do I need to take a blood oath for you to believe me, or will my feelings be enough?"

Arya was embarrassed that her insecurities showed. She was always stoic, her actions measured and careful not to disappoint people, yet now she was making a fuss in front of Keith. What will she do if he thinks of her as petty?

"That's not what I meant," she said.

"What did you mean?" Keith questioned. "Whatever is on your mind, you can talk to me. No secrets."

"What if you don't like my secrets? What if you dislike me?"

Keith puffed his cheeks. "I can't guarantee I will like your secrets, but you... I will always like you."

"How can you be so sure?"

"You are my other half, Arya. Disliking you is the same as disliking myself, and I love myself."

Arya didn't know how to respond to this, so she didn't.

She watched in silence as Keith turned off the shower. He wrapped her into a large bathroom towel and wiped himself roughly with another before picking her up and carrying her to bed.

"You got a lot of food," Arya commented when she saw a full tray. Some containers were stacked.

He smirked. "We will need it."

Keith got the soup to start with and offered a spoonful to Arya.

Arya wanted to take the spoon and feed herself, but Keith avoided her hand.

"Open widely. Your mate wants to feed you."

Arya pouted. "So bossy."

Keith smiled, seeing that she accepted his offerings.

"If you become Talia's guard, I will be your boss. Keep in mind that I'm strict. I might require... extra hours." He wiggled his eyebrows, and Arya couldn't prevent herself from smiling.

Keith continued feeding her while talking.

"I know this is a big change for you, Arya. The Moon Goddess paired us for a reason. Trust in her and trust in me. I will do whatever I can to make it easier on you, but I need you to talk to me. Tell me what's bothering you and if we could do something differently. And especially tell me if I'm doing something right, so I can do it more often..."

All this was a big change for Keith also. It's not like he had a mate before. Actually, he didn't have a proper girlfriend either. But Arya left her position as a general, and pack and her friends, and everything was new, mate included.

Keith could feel her insecurities bubbling to the surface, and he was unsure what was causing them, but he was determined to assure her he was there for her.

Arya was lost in his deep brown eyes and deep soothing voice, and she would open her mouth whenever food got close. She hummed in satisfaction when perfectly roasted steak danced on her tongue.

"Can you tell me something?" Arya asked.

"Anything."

"I don't know if I imagined it, but... When Luna Talia found me, I thought I was dying. I believe I died, but then I felt warmth, and there was light. Is it possible that Luna Talia did something?"

"It's possible."

Arya was not pleased with that ambiguous response. "You said there shouldn't be secrets between us."

"True. And I won't have secrets from you. However, if Talia had the power to bring you back from the dead, that wouldn't be my secret to tell."

Arya disliked the protectiveness coming from Keith, but there was another thing... "You didn't say no."

Keith puffed his cheeks. "Arya, Talia is the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack. I'm sure you've heard about that pack."

Arya nodded in confirmation. Of course, she heard about that pack. They were mysterious, and rumors said their members were descendants of witches with mystical powers.

Indirectly, Keith confirmed that Talia was special.

Arya's eyes flashed when she remembered one more incident she couldn't explain. "Are you from the Midnight Guardians pack?"

"No."

"How did you ignore Alpha Cristian's suppression?"

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Chapter 868: Solitude (K&A) (4)

At Arya's question about Keith ignoring Alpha Cristian's suppression, Keith wondered how much he should tell her.

At what point do the secrets he found out cross the line of putting Talia's safety in danger? Would Talia be in danger from Arya? Would he need to keep Arya in the dark because of Talia? Surely, there must be some middle ground.

Arya was his mate, she joined the Dark Howlers pack, and he could feel that she didn't have malicious intentions, so... Keith smiled and reached to touch the necklace around his neck. "This is from the Midnight Guardians pack."

Arya stared at the necklace. "Is that a magical object that gives resistance to Alpha aura?"

Keith was not sure what it was, but he knew what Talia had told him. "This necklace offers protection and healing. Talia gave it to me when she visited you in the hospital." It

was not a lie. Talia fixed the necklace and gave it to him. "You were unconscious, and doctors were not optimistic about your recovery."

Arya gaped at Keith as his words sank in. Doctors and nurses were gushing how Arya's miraculous healing was because of the mate bond, but now it seemed it was because of the necklace.

"Are you saying that Luna Talia didn't save my life once, but twice? I feel like an idiot."

"Why?"

"I insulted her, looked down on her. I am jealous when you talk about her, yet she saved my life twice. She gave you time off duty as her guard so we can work on our bond in solitude, and I am..." Ungrateful. That was the word, but Arya couldn't say it as there was a lump in her throat.

"Don't be jealous of Talia, Arya. I told you, I think of her as a friend." Keith thought this was a good opportunity to clarify a few more things. "There is more."

"More?"

"Mhm," Keith hummed in confirmation. "The Oracle of the Midnight Guardians pack gave me prophecy. She said that my luck is tied to Talia's and that by protecting her, I'm protecting myself. I didn't know what that meant until the night I found you. While kneeling next to Talia who was holding your battered body, I realized that I needed to protect Talia so she could save your life. If Talia was not in that forest, you would succumb to your injuries, and we wouldn't meet. So, you see, Arya..." Keith looked at her dreamily. "I will be forever grateful to Talia because thanks to her, I have you."

Arya's chin trembled. "When you put it that way, I feel even more like an idiot for thinking badly of her."

Keith shook his head. "You have the right to think what you are thinking and feel what you are feeling. We are all products of our previous experiences. But I hope you will keep an open mind and don't let prejudice guide you. Talia is kind and forgiving. Once you spend more time with her, I'm sure you will see how wonderful she is. The Dark Howlers pack is lucky to have her as our Luna."

Arya never had so many conflicting emotions. She wanted to slap herself for acting like a bitch to her savior, and she wanted to slap Keith for thinking so kindly about another woman. Was she the bad guy in this situation?

But there was one more thing. Keith's acceptance. He didn't think badly of Arya, no matter what she said. How was that possible?

Keith could feel Arya's conflict. "Talia is your Luna now, and Damon is your Alpha. I hope you will find pride in the fact that the two strongest Alphas are leading us. Their glory is ours, and ours is theirs. We are one pack, bound to face challenges and prosper together."

Arya left the Spring Leaf pack and joined the Dark Howlers pack. She could feel that the pack bond was different, but she still needed mental adjustment in accepting it as her new normal.

"I want to know more about the pack," Arya said.

"You can ask me whatever you want to know, but first..." Keith spread his arms, silently inviting her into his embrace.

Arya blinked. He was completely naked, and she had only a towel around herself. Arya was not sure if she should ask him to cover up (at least his erect cock, if nothing else). Or should she remove the towel? Was he really going to talk with that hard-on? And there was still some food left.

Arya decided not to be fussy, and she scooted closer to him.

Keith liked seeing Arya settling into his embrace. It was natural, and she fit in there perfectly.

Keith resumed feeding Arya and himself, and then he started telling her about the pack.

"As you already know, our pack is the largest in North America. For a long time, it was just Alpha Damon with his Betas. A few months back, he found his Luna, and things started changing."

Keith put a piece of steak into his mouth, and Arya used that chance to ask, "Only Alpha and Betas? What about Elders?"

"We have Elders, but they don't hold any real power. Alpha doesn't consult them when making decisions."

"What's the point of them being Elders if they don't do anything?" Elders normally held influencing positions and had a say in managing the pack.

"I'm not sure," Keith admitted. "I heard stories that things changed when Alpha Damon took over, and he stripped away their power while letting them hold titles. I was in middle school then and not interested in pack politics. We can go to the library where we can check our archives."

"Isn't it simpler to ask Alpha and Betas?"

"I guess it is, but if it's a sensitive topic..." Keith's voice trailed, and Arya nodded in understanding. Alphas get touchy if someone questions their decisions.

"Library it is," Arya said. "What else?"

"Whenever you are up for it, we will go for a run, and I will show you the territory. Our wolves could use some bonding time."

Arya agreed with this. She felt that her wolf was happy to be with Keith, but she also wanted to meet her mate's wolf form. Arya wondered about the fur color of Keith's wolf and how big he will be. Her cheeks heated at the thought that their wolves will go for a run, and they will want to mate as well.

Keith's nostrils flared when he picked up the scent of her arousal. They still didn't finish the steak, and there was dessert also! Or should he just leave that on the side and tend to more serious matters? He was hard ever since they exited the bathroom, but he focused on feeding Arya at talking because he didn't want to appear like a savage. However, if Arya was willing, there was no need to hold back.

Keith contemplated what to do, and then he decided it was safest to ask, "What's on your mind?"

Arya lowered her gaze. She had no intention of admitting her thoughts. She was imagining two wolves going at it, and for some reason, it turned her on. How embarrassing.

"I was wondering about Darkbourne. I heard it is large enough to support the economy of the Dark Howlers pack without trading with other packs or humans. And there were fantastic stories about the Summer Solstice festival."

Keith decided to let this one slide. He didn't want to starve his mate. They will get frisky as soon as they finish the food.

"Darkbourne has good restaurants and a sweetshop that will make you gain a few pounds... I guess the best way to see the town is to go shopping. We can get you some new clothes..." Keith imagined holding Arya close to him and walking around for everyone to see that he had found his mate, and that she was gorgeous. "The lake gets chilly in the winter, but otherwise, is a great gathering spot..." He told her about bonfires in the evening, how he will show her the perfect spots to watch nature blooming in the spring and the explosion of yellows and reds in the fall.

Arya smiled while listening to Keith's stories that had the power to dispel her worries, and she was looking forward to seeing all those places with Keith. Her mate.

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Chapter 869: Talia's Luna ceremony (1)

It was decided for Talia's Luna ceremony to be held this night when the mixer for unmated werewolves was organized.

They picked this evening in order to conceal any possible magical effects due to the bond forming between Talia and pack members.

When a new Alpha or Luna are introduced to the pack, every pack member will feel the bond changing to some degree. Considering Talia's unusual background, they couldn't predict how this would affect members of the Dark Howlers pack.

Another risky variable was the point that Talia was an Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack, and there were no recorded cases of an Alpha having two separate pack links.

Talia's Luna ceremony overlapped with the event where people will be in high spirits. Unless something extreme happened, people would think that whatever they felt was due to the joy of an unexpected event (like a fair where several packs participated). Everyone loved parties.

Damon and Talia considered officially merging their packs, but that was not feasible because the Midnight Guardians pack was still not in a position to come out openly. There was also the challenge of their territories being physically separated with great distance between them.

Amelia's and Cornelia's research on portals was progressing, but they were still far from coming up with a working portal. If they could open the portal into the Midnight Guardians pack, that would open them up to the possibility of merging two packs into one. However, until that happens, Talia's pack still needed to maintain their secrecy as they were gradually being introduced to society.

Another benefit of cramming the mixer event and Talia's Luna ceremony on the same evening was that after the ceremony, they would all head to the mixer. That will give Damon and Talia the perfect excuse not to shift into wolf forms and go for a run. Normally, that would be expected, but Talia couldn't shift due to her pregnancy, and she didn't want to reveal that at this time.

Talia's Luna ceremony was supposed to be private, but the number of people attending was rising by the day.

Other than Mindy and Gideon, in attendance will be Damon, Maya, Caden, Talia's guards and their mates, Elders of the Dark Howlers pack, several high-ranking warriors, and Doctor Travis. They will be official witnesses.

Maya and Caden moved their vacation to one day later so they could attend this event. Maya said that she had no hints of her heat coming (yet), and she didn't want to miss

Talia becoming their Luna. Maya was looking forward to it since she realized that the girl coming out of the trunk was Damon's mate.

With everyone important being busy and low-key about Talia's Luna ceremony, Erik, Petra, and Zack were stuck with ensuring everything went well at the mixer event until Talia, Zina, and Mindy (main organizers) returned to their posts.

Talia was surprised that all Elders agreed to attend without making a fuss, and they collaborated in keeping this a secret.

Maya believed Elders were obedient because they already had a pack run where Damon announced Talia as his mate and a future Luna, so any agenda Elders had was ruined. In addition, no one could deny the positive changes happening since Talia came to the Dark Howlers pack. Everyone knew that Talia was responsible for the tribute from the Steelbite pack and the scent-concealing mixture. Those were not secrets before, but now that it was revealed Talia was Alpha Damon's mate, all those contributions became much more significant.

In short, Elders had two choices, either to support Talia as their Luna and maybe get some benefits or to accept being non-relevant.

In addition to the people from the Dark Howlers pack attending, Cornelia was there. She would come to the Dark Howlers pack daily, so she knew about the ceremony. James didn't want to separate from his mate, so he was there as well, and how could Dawn miss this? Of course, George will come with Dawn, and then there will be Cristian, Michelle, Tony, Kalina, Maddox, and Tatiana. Axel and Yasmin were due to arrive with Kai, Meg, Tyler, and Sandy.

Most of them were set to come for the fair-like mixer event, and since they would already be in the area, Talia thought it would be wrong to exclude them.

James and George shouldn't show their faces, so Cornelia performed a spell to conceal their true appearances from everyone other than their small circle of friends.

Somehow, Talia's private Luna ceremony turned out to be a big deal, but Talia didn't hate it. She loved the idea of her friends witnessing this monumental event. She became Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack when she was at her loneliest, and Damon couldn't remember her, and this will be the complete opposite.

...

Zina, Trisha, Caleb, Pierce, and Daria were in the garden behind the packhouse, setting up chairs and tables for their guests that were due to arrive soon. It will be a short ceremony, and the afterparty will be at the mixer event, but they still needed some drinks and snacks in order not to look shabby.

Mindy and Gideon were on the platform in the back of the garden, preparing the ceremonial altar. Now that Gideon and Mindy had relocated into their new home close to the packhouse, this platform became the official spot for ceremonies. The stone altar was moved from Gideon's old home to here, and it took several warriors to lift each stone block that was etched with ancient symbols.

Gideon could create a new ceremonial altar, but the old one carried a lot of history, and he didn't want to discard it. Shamans believed everything in nature had a soul and was worthy of respect, stones included.

Gideon was busying himself at the ceremonial altar, and Mindy smiled when she heard him hum a tune; he would do that often since he found out that she was expecting his pup. Gideon was truly happy, and it reflected on Mindy as well.

"Do we need more osage fern?" Mindy asked while showing him the container with dried plants that was among the others on the side of the platform. It was her duty as his helper to pass him ingredients during ceremonies.

Gideon took a glance at what she was showing and shook his head. "No, those are more than enough."

Mindy picked up the next container. "How about climbing sorrel?"

"We have enough of those also."

Mindy puffed her cheeks. "Is there something I can help with? I feel useless."

Gideon shot her a side-glance. "You can help me organize these."

Mindy saw that he was pointing at the altar, and she happily went there.

No matter how she looked at the altar, it looked neat.

"What can I do here?" Mindy asked, and she sucked in a sharp breath when she felt Gideon hugging her from behind. It was not about the hug, but she could feel him pressing his erection on her bottom.

They were both wearing ceremonial clothes that didn't provide much obstruction for their private parts to meet.

"You can do plenty," Gideon's hot breath splashed on her neck, just above his mark, and she felt tingles all over.

Mindy nervously looked toward the garden, where several others were busy with preparations.

"There are people there," Mindy whispered with urgency when Gideon's palm moved up her thigh under her skirt.

Gideon chuckled. "I see no people, princess. It's just me and you and..." He released a low hum when he felt her pumpkin-infused moisture at the tip of his fingers. Mindy's pregnancy was making her super-horny, and he loved it!

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Chapter 870: Talia's Luna ceremony (2)

Gideon thought of teasing Mindy a bit, but he ended up being tormented.

They were both wearing ceremonial clothes that provided easy access (and no underwear). He just needed to push her skirt higher, and his on the side, and... damn it!

Now he had a raging hard-on and an aroused mate right there that wafted of the most delicious pumpkin he wanted to devour. Unfortunately, Mindy and Gideon were on the podium, and if they did anything their bodies desired, they would give a good show to the people below. The surrounding forest was full of patrols, and their home was far away.

Gideon's eyes flashed when he got an idea.

"We need sage," he said. He took Mindy's hand into his and tugged her to the side.

Sage? Mindy wondered if he was about to cook or conduct a ceremony. OK, sage was needed for some rituals, but not for the Luna ceremony. In preparation for this event, Mindy read Gideon's notes, and she was confident no sage was mentioned.

Gideon led the way into a small shed only a few trees deep into the forest. It was used as temporary storage for ceremonial items.

The place was cramped with shelving all around and one counter filled with various containers to the brim.

Gideon pushed containers with powders and crystals to the side, making them clatter and fall to the ground, and then he hoisted Mindy to sit on the counter.

Mindy's arousal swelled when she realized what Gideon was up to.

The shed was enclosed from all sides, but the thin walls made of wood and plastic mixture didn't provide soundproofing.

"Someone will hear us," Mindy protested, but she lifted her butt when he pushed her skirt up.

Gideon smirked. "Then, this is your task. Be quiet. Not a sound."

"Ah!" She moaned loudly when he entered her in one mighty thrust.

"You failed," Gideon said grimly. "How will I punish you now, princess?"

Mindy's insides trembled. His punishments included a lot of sex and him telling her when she can (and when she can't) have an orgasm. Those sessions were torturous, but at the same time, they were the most pleasurable she had ever experienced. She loved when Gideon bossed her around.

"Please," Mindy squirmed because Gideon stopped moving. "I will be a good girl, just... let me have this one."

"How will I teach you obedience if I give in that easily?"

"Double my punishment. I will do anything."

Seeing his pumpkin-infused princess beg for his cock was the best turn-on ever.

"Tonight, your punishment will begin," Gideon said, and he spread her legs as far as they went. "Not a sound or you will miss the event you planned for," Gideon warned, and Mindy nodded with urgency. She would do anything for an orgasm.

Mindy bit her lower lip, and her eyes rolled at the back of her head when Gideon started rocking into her. The sparks and the friction were getting stronger by the day due to her pregnancy, and holding back sounds was more difficult than she thought it would be.

The containers that were still on the counter clattered against each other, and a few fell on the floor and made a mess, but Mindy and Gideon didn't care about those.

Mindy was on the verge of passing out, and she held her mouth closed tightly out of fear that Gideon would stop if she made a sound. And just when she thought she reached her limit, Gideon pulled her into a kiss, and he swallowed her cries as she fell apart right there, on the counter in a shed that was used as temporary storage for ceremonial items.

"You did good, princess," Gideon rasped.

Mindy leaned her forehead on his shoulder while catching her breath. She loved that he praised her, but part of her was hoping he would increase the punishment further.

Now only if she could find a cloth to wipe his seed that trickled out of her, that would be perfect.

...

In one of the guest bedrooms on the second floor of the packhouse...

Talia was sitting in front of a mirror with Meg and Sandy styling her hair in a French braid with little flowers in it.

Talia was delighted to have her Beta and Gamma from the Midnight Guardians pack with her. Kai and Tyler were mingling with guests.

Maya, Tatiana, Kalina, Dawn, Michelle, Cornelia, Amelia, and Darya were in the room as well.

Caden, Max, Tony, and Cristian were with Damon in a different room. Others were either getting ready or were already in the garden.

Three Wilkow sisters were asking Meg and Sandy about Varya and Grady, and they knew that Lidia and her mate will be at the fair. The event was organized as a mixer for unmated werewolves, but anyone could attend.

"Why is Yasmin late?" Talia asked.

"She should be here by now," Meg responded.

Just as Meg finished saying that, there was a knock on the door, and Yasmin peeked in.

"Oh, I thought I would never find you," Yasmin said before opening the door and waddling inside. "I took a left instead of right, and I got lost. This pregnancy is messing with my sense of direction."

Talia wanted to ask, how can anyone get lost in this packhouse where staircases were in the middle of a building and straight hallways go left or right? But then her attention fell on Yasmin's belly, which looked like she was about to blow any minute.

Yasmin paused. "Is there something wrong?"

"Uhm... Your stomach," Talia said.

Yasmin grinned and rubbed her big bulge. "Thanks to you teaching me how to channel energies, I was able to advance my pregnancy."

Talia was still processing this information. She saw Yasmin only two weeks ago, and at that time, Yasmin had a flat stomach, and this... this was huge!

Talia remembered that the time in the Midnight Guardians passed differently and that Yasmin was carrying twins, and she reminded herself not to stare. She gave Yasmin a big hug.

"You are glowing," Talia said to Yasmin.

"And you are beautiful," Yasmin returned the compliment.

Talia suddenly became aware of her outfit.

Meg, Maya, and Sandy also wore ceremonial outfits, but Talia's stood out with black embroidery that formed shapes of wolves and a moon above them.

Talia turned to the mirror and ran her hands over the soft brown leather that covered her chest and made a skirt. She wore that same outfit for the Dark Howlers pack run, and there was a ceremony as well, but Talia missed it because Damon didn't remember her, and she needed to prepare for the magic spell that would snap Damon to his senses.

This time, Talia was determined that this will be successful. She will have her Luna ceremony, and everything will be great. It had to be.

Damon said that her Luna ceremony was low-key, and if anyone wanted to cause trouble, they would be targeting the fair. Talia was unsure about redirecting attention of bad people to the fair, where a lot of civilians were, but Damon assured her that they had plenty of warriors standing guard and mixed in with the crowd, and it will be OK. Besides, with so many Alphas in the area, no one would dare to act rashly.

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