

The Alpha's Bride

#Chapter 871: Talia's Luna ceremony (3) –

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"It is time!" Maya announced, and the females milled out of the room, leaving Talia with Maya, Meg, and Sandy.

Yasmin and Mindy would also be there, but Yasmin had difficulty moving around with her huge belly, and Mindy will be at the ceremony with Gideon.

Of course, Tatiana, Kalina, Cornelia, and Michelle wanted to be part of that event also, but Talia said that they will get to participate in the ceremony when the big party happened. This was the formal part of her becoming a Luna, so only her Betas and Gammas (aka her official aides) would stand by her side.

Mindy was not officially a Beta or a Gamma, but it was just a matter of time.

Every pack had its own customs, and that applied to the Luna ceremony as well.

This was not a wedding where Talia gets to walk down the aisle to meet Damon, who was waiting in the finely pressed suit. This was a werewolf ceremony for a new Luna of the Dark Howlers pack to be crowned.

Damon accepted Talia as his fated mate and as his Luna, but the pack needed to accept her as well.

Talia was set to take a roundabout way toward the garden. She will move through the forest and face challenges set by pack members in order to prove she is worthy of being their Luna.

She didn't know who or what was waiting for her. Her challenges were selected by the Shaman and Elders.

Talia released a long breath and closed her eyes while sensing the surroundings of the packhouse. People, plants, objects... there was nothing suspicious for miles. The only people she saw were from the Dark Howlers pack, and her senses were not disturbed, giving her confidence that rogues or Guardians won't meddle with this.

This was it.

What could go wrong? Even without enemies, plenty could go wrong.

Talia was mostly worried about her body rejecting two pack links. What if her bond with the Midnight Guardians pack gets severed? Or what if this fails?

'It will be alright,' Liseli comforted her. 'You and your pup will be alright. If the Moon Goddess didn't think you could handle it, she wouldn't make you the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack and give you Damon as your mate.'

'Thanks, Lis.'

"Ready?" Maya asked Talia.

"As ready as I will ever be," Talia responded.

"We've got your back!" Meg exclaimed.

Talia's brows came together in concern when she saw Meg's belly. She was not super-pregnant like Yasmin, but anyone could see Meg was with a child.

"Be careful, Meg. If anything happens to your baby..." Talia stopped talking when Meg raised her hand, palm toward Talia.

"I am your Beta. Kai agrees that I can accompany you on this task. I am attending daily training without any issues. Besides, if I can't protect you, no one can." Meg declared proudly, and then she glanced at Maya guiltily. "No offense."

"None taken," Maya responded and turned to Talia. "It will be fine. It's just a ceremony, for show. Besides, if anyone gets too excited, just push them down with your aura."

"And don't forget that I'm here!" Sandy exclaimed excitedly.

Talia smiled gratefully at her three friends while wondering what the challenges could be. They were all talking like fighting would be involved, but the truth was that it could be anything.

Hand-to-hand combat, hunting, preparing a meal, a math problem... MATH!? Talia felt her insides tightening. She will definitely fail if they ask her something from academics!

'Kitten?' Damon's voice sounded in Talia's mind.

'Yes?'

'Hurry up.'

Talia couldn't believe this. 'Seriously? Is that how you are encouraging me?'

'This is to prove you are worthy of being my Luna, and I know you are overqualified. What I don't know is how delectable you look in that outfit.'

Talia sucked in a breath when Damon sent her mental images of two of them naked.

'Stop that!'

Damon chuckled. 'I wish I could. You and me is all I can think about. Well, mostly me inside of you.'

'What am I going to do with you?'

'I can suggest a few ideas if you have none. But my ideas are mostly about the two of us, naked.'

Talia was about to respond snarkily, but then she realized that this little banter helped dispel the last traces of anxiousness she had.

'Damon?'

'Yes, kitten?'

'Thank you.'

'You are welcome.'

Talia walked out of the packhouse to see that Keith and Arya were standing on the right, where the forest started.

"This way, Luna," Keith said and gestured in the direction Talia should go.

"Unfortunately, we can't accompany you. The path will be marked with black scarves. There are twenty of them, and you need to collect at least ten in order to gain the Elders' approval. We will wait for you on the other side."

Keith and Arya bowed when Talia stood in front of them.

This was the first time for Talia to see Keith and Arya since they left for their solitude, but she could see they were happy.

Talia walked into the forest first, with Maya, Meg, and Sandy behind her.

Four ladies could see well in the darkness, but the shadows played tricks on them. Talia didn't tell her three helpers that she could clearly see every strand of grass all around them.

Talia led the way around traps; one big hole covered with thin branches and dried leaves, and some wires that would trigger simple mechanisms.

They collected five scarves without any issues.

"This is a piece of cake," Maya said.

"Don't celebrate before it's done," Sandy said solemnly.

A few steps later, Talia stopped advancing, and several figures emerged from the shadows.

"Maybe you should go back," a male voice spoke, and Talia recognized the guy who stepped forward when he was a few steps away from her. It was Mark from the soccer team.

"Who are you to tell me to go back?" Talia asked while her eyes moved over other figures. They were all members of the soccer team, elite warriors.

"We are warriors of the Dark Howlers pack. Unless you can defeat us, we won't acknowledge you as our Luna," a voice said from the back.

"You think you can stop me?" Talia asked. "Just you? What can you do?"

"We can make it so that Alpha Damon doesn't recognize you," another shadow spoke.

Sandy's temper flared. "Watch your mouth!"

"Pft! You are not a part of our pack anymore, Sandy. Do you think we will listen to you?"

Meg was about to say something, but Talia raised her hand, indicating to Meg to wait.

"I just need to defeat you. Is that all?" Talia asked.

There was no malicious intent from the people who blocked her way; it was all part of the show. No matter if Elders were plotting something against Talia as a last-minute resort, the warriors in front of her wouldn't stand against her. They all met her as Talia, the team spirit of their soccer team; a silly girl with wolf ears headband on her head whose furry hand they held (and kissed) while praying for their team to win... and they

did. They also knew Talia as the female who brought the scent-concealing mixture, which made their missions easier and possibly saved lives. The female who secured them a tribute from the Steelbite pack.

They all looked at Talia with admiration, and she was touched.

At the same time, she needed to put up a show as well.

With one thought from Talia, all figures in front of her fell to their knees. "Do you accept your defeat, or should I prove myself more?" She released a bit more of her aura to make her point, and a few groans were heard.

"We are convinced," Mark said in a strenuous voice. "We acknowledge you as our Luna. Here is a token..."

Maya moved forward and took a black scarf from his hand.

"As I said, easy-peasy," Maya said with glee as they continued walking through the forest.

"You said it was a piece of cake," Sandy reminded her.

"Can you stop talking about food?" Meg complained. "I'm hungry now."

Sandy stifled a laugh. "You are always hungry."

Meg's eyes flashed in outrage. "You don't say such things to a pregnant woman!"

Talia, Meg, Sandy, and Maya burst into laughter. Ah, the mood was good.

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Chapter 872: Talia's Luna ceremony (4) [Bonus chapter]

Damon was in the garden with Caden, Maddox, Tony, and Cristian. They were chatting to pass the time while waiting for Talia to finish her challenges so that the ceremony could start.

"It will be alright," Caden assured Damon. "Do you want to hear their progress?"

"No need," Damon said. He could feel Talia's emotions, and there was not a shred of negativity. Actually, she was happy, so he knew that his kitten was doing fine.

Damon could mind-link Talia himself, but he didn't want to interrupt. What if she ended up in trouble because he distracted her?

He could imagine her walking through the forest and stepping on a slippery rock and falling, and... what if their pup gets hurt?

Damon shook those thoughts away. It will be fine. Talia was careful and not clumsy. And then he remembered that unless he was holding onto her, she was prone to accidents!

No, no... Talia changed. When they met, Talia's body was covered with injuries, and she bumped her head into a fridge and she fell off a bed, but she was a different girl now.

Then, she was a weak she-wolf without her wolf, yet now she was powerful and confident, so falling off the bed was replaced with random explosions and teleportations!

He was super anxious now.

Damon puffed his cheeks and took deep breaths while repeating that it will be alright.

'Mate is close,' Sapa's voice sounded in Damon's head.

Damon swiftly downed his glass of scotch and kept it on the nearby table before dashing onto the platform where Gideon and Mindy were waiting.

Caden was right behind Damon.

"Are they coming?" Caden asked, and Damon's eyes were glued onto the darkness where the forest began.

Four figures emerged from there leisurely, like they were not participating in a challenge, but they took a stroll in the park.

Elders gathered in front of the podium, waiting for Talia, Maya, Meg, and Sandy to arrive and deliver the necessary number of scarves.

"Our Luna candidate is here!" Elder Agatha exclaimed to get everyone's attention.

"Let's see if she has the necessary number of scarves," Elder Thomas said in a low voice, but everyone was quiet now, and they could hear him clearly.

Talia's expression was unreadable as she extended her hand with black scarves. Elder Charlie accepted them and started counting while separating them.

"One. Two. Three... Six. Seven. Is that all?"

"That's all from me," Talia responded.

"That's not enough!" Elder Agatha said while looking around at other Elders. Now what?

"These are from me," Maya said while handing another bunch of fabric.

Elder Charlie took them and counted, "One. Two. That's a total of nine."

Elder Agatha frowned. "Still not enough."

"Maybe with these, it will be enough," Meg said while extending her hand.

There were two more scarves there, and it was more than ten, but then Sandy also gave two more.

"We have thirteen!" Elder Agatha announced.

"These should be presented by the future Luna," Elder Patsy said with a frown. "How are we supposed to interpret these? Will Alpha Damon take four Lunas?"

Talia couldn't believe this. Was he trying to stir trouble?

"There will be no such thing," Talia said sternly. "I am here to be the Luna of the Dark Howlers pack, but I have no intention of doing it alone. My aides will work with me just how they did in this challenge." Talia established eye contact with every Elder without flinching. "The Dark Howlers pack is the largest pack in North America, and it's my honor that the Moon Goddess decided I should be your Luna. However, I will rely on my friends to advise and keep me in check so I don't get consumed by the power that comes with this position." She lifted her chin arrogantly. "Any complaints?"

"No, no," Elder Agatha was quick to say, and she shot a glare at Elder Patsy. "I am sure there are no complaints. You presented thirteen scarves out of twenty. That's three more than necessary. We, the Elders of the Dark Howlers pack, approve of you as our Luna."

With that, Elders moved to open a path for Talia to the podium where Damon waited for her.

Caden was also there, but Talia's whole world narrowed to her mate.

Damon was wearing a ceremonial leather garment that hung at his waist like a miniskirt, and the rest of his body was covered in black symbols that were painted on him. Damon wore a necklace made of teeth that gave him an air of danger, and nothing concealed his impressive form.

Damon noticed Talia was checking him out, and he straightened his back to give her a better view.

'You like what you see?' Damon asked through their private mind-link.

'You look delicious,' Talia responded.

'Not only look. I am delicious,' he said cockily. 'Now, come here, so we finish the formalities, and I can see what you are hiding under that skirt.'

Talia strode with confidence that made Damon hold his breath, and he couldn't stop staring at her face, which was adorned with blush.

'You are beautiful,' he said.

'I was going for fierce, but beautiful is fine.'

Damon's smile reflected in his eyes as he extended his hand for Talia to take.

'Did you have any issues with the challenges?' Damon asked.

'No,' she responded.

If it were anyone other than Talia, it would be difficult. Some traps were well hidden, and thanks to Talia's ability to sense surroundings, they avoided a few spots that would be dangerous. But even with that, Talia found that some scarves were missing. There were only fifteen scarves hidden in the forest, which meant that someone wanted to sabotage her.

One scarf was tied to the top of a rotting tree, and Sandy climbed it under Talia's guidance on where to put her weight without falling.

Talia knew that even if she returned with less than ten scarves, Damon wouldn't care, but it would give a reason to the Elders to create problems. She was unsure how much trouble they could cause, but she knew that when a seed of doubt was planted in people's hearts, it didn't take much for it to grow. Talia wanted to start this right.

Damon gave Talia's hand a squeeze. 'It's happening, kitten.'

'It is.'

'You still have a chance to change your mind.' They talked about this more than once.

Damon told her that she didn't need to go through the ceremony as she would always be his mate and Luna, and he will never accept any other. However, Talia didn't want to

hear about it. Yes, there was a chance of things going haywire because she was the Alpha of another pack, but she wanted to be Damon's Luna for everyone to know, and she didn't want to choose between those two.

Talia wanted the acknowledgment of the Dark Howlers pack. It was important.

If they didn't go through the ceremony, she will never be a member of Damon's pack, and his people would wonder why Talia didn't become their Luna. Rumors would spread that she might be incompetent or maybe that Damon was ashamed of her, and their enemies would definitely use that to sow discord. That was something Talia didn't want to allow.

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Chapter 873: Talia's Luna ceremony (5)

'I am not backing down from this,' Talia responded to Damon through their mind-link with confidence. 'I am Talia Blake, your Luna. I am also Natalia Moonrider, the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack. I refuse to shrink in front of dangers no matter how big they are.'

Talia looked Damon straight in the eyes and continued with her voice for everyone to hear. "I don't know what lies ahead of us, but I am confident that we will go through it together."

Damon was emotional. His timid kitten, who he found hiding in the attic, was standing proudly in front of him and the audience, and she spoke to him as an equal. And she was his.

Damon reached for the necklace made of teeth that was around his neck and lifted it over his head.

"Talia Blake, the Moon Goddess made us fated mates. The Elders of the Dark Howlers pack accept you as their Luna. I stand before you, humbled by your beauty, kindness, and power. Do you accept to be my Luna and lead the Dark Howlers pack with me, as the pack Luna and my equal?"

"I do," Talia responded with a smile that widened when Damon put his necklace around her neck.

"This necklace represents my honor, my ability to provide for my pack and to protect them. It is yours now. Everything I have is yours as we are one."

Talia's heart swelled with all the emotions that poured into her. Damon meant every word, and he was really happy and proud that she accepted him in front of their friends and pack Elders to see.

Talia wished that she had a necklace to give him in return, and she wanted to hug and kiss him, but this was not the time, so the only thing she could do was to say, "I acknowledge your sincerity, Damon Blake, Alpha of the Dark Howlers pack. I will be your Luna and stand by your side, as your equal."

'I love you, kitten,' Damon said through their mind link.

'I love you more,' she responded dreamily.

Gideon saw that Damon and Talia were about to kiss, so he cleared his throat loudly before starting the ceremony.

Caden and Maya stood by Damon's side, and Meg and Sandy were next to Talia. Kai wanted to be there also, but Talia was not ready to reveal her identity as Alpha Natalia, so he needed to watch as an audience. Meg and Sandy were known to be Talia's friends, so their presence at the podium was not suspicious.

Fire danced in a bowl that was on the stone altar, and Gideon chanted while putting herbs in the fire that burned with purplish smoke. Mindy was passing things to Gideon without a word, and every next thing Gideon threw into the fire created a different scent that spread through the air to create a mystical and solemn atmosphere.

Talia was glad that Damon was holding her hand as butterflies went crazy in her stomach, and she feared that she might start floating from the excitement that swelled within her. It was happening!

Gideon handed the perfectly white knife to Damon, who accepted it with a bow.

Damon turned to Talia while holding the blade.

"This is it," he said in a low voice. "After this, there is no going back."

"I am ready," Talia responded.

Damon didn't flinch when he cut his palm. It was a deep wound, and Damon made a fist above the fire.

Flames twirled and reached higher like they were hungry for Damon's blood that was dripping in there.

It was Talia's turn next.

Talia cut her palm and made a fist above the fire, and the flames intensified further, nearly licking her hand.

Gideon was chanting unintelligibly as Damon put his bloodied hand over Talia's.

Talia gasped when Damon's blood mixed with hers. She could feel the burning sensation traveling up her arm. It was almost as intense as when he marked her.

Talia's fist loosened, and Damon's hand moved to interlace his fingers with hers. Their wounds pressed against each other, and Talia wondered if Damon could feel her coursing through his veins because she could feel him.

But it was not just Damon; it was much more. Like thousands of minds were combined into one, her mind expanded to accept them all, like a boost that amplified her powers.

The connection with the Midnight Guardians pack was full of respect and worship. This was different.

The energy of the Dark Howlers pack coursing into Talia wrapped around Damon's emotions, creating something warm and friendly, like when one returns home after a long journey; a home that was safe and filled with positivity, welcoming, and eager to embrace her.

Talia's eyes swelled with tears of happiness.

She spent two decades alone, hiding while craving to be noticed and accepted, and here was not only Damon but his whole pack accepting her as their Luna. She knew that the acceptance of the pack came only because she was Damon's fated mate, but she was the only one who had that status which meant that only Talia could be received in this way.

Talia smiled at Damon as her heart swelled with joy and all things good in this world.

Everyone stared at the scene of Talia's hair turning white, and in less than a second, her whole figure was glowing in pulses that followed her heartbeat.

Elder Agatha pressed on her chest to feel that the pulsating light matched her heartbeat, and it was not just her. It was like all people in attendance got synchronized. One heartbeat, one breath... it was unity on a higher level, with Talia in the middle.

Talia's light expanded and enveloped Damon, and then it exploded silently in all directions.

It was over, and only the fire crackling could be heard.

Talia's body was buzzing with energy, and she had an urge to shift into her wolf and run. Unfortunately, that was not an option.

'Did it work?' Damon's voice sounded in Talia's head.

She wanted to say it did, but then she remembered that she had a mind-link with him and that this energy boost might be because of whatever energies Gideon attracted.

First, Talia focused on her connection with the Midnight Guardians pack. It was still there, but just to make sure.

'Meg?'

'You will need to explain to these ignoramuses the flashing spectacle,' Meg said sourly.

Talia wanted to do something else first.

She confirmed that she didn't lose anything, but was the ceremony successful?

'Maya?' Talia called through the mind-link.

'It's good to hear your voice, Luna. I must admit that I could feel the jolt when you joined the pack link. We will need to tell something to our people because just saying they were happy due to the fair won't be believable.'

Talia's face exploded into a smile when she heard Maya's voice.

"It worked," Talia said to Damon and added through the mind-link only for him to hear, 'And our pup is fine also.'

Damon was quick to wrap her into his arms and give her a mind-spinning kiss like no one was watching.

Damon didn't want to pressure Talia, but her joining him as his Luna officially meant the world to him. Now they were a mated couple in front of their friends and their packs, just how it was supposed to be from the beginning.

Talia wondered how to explain the glowing. Most of their friends were aware of witches and magic, but she could feel many questioning gazes on her.

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Chapter 874: Talia's Luna ceremony (6)

Talia didn't want to lie, not anymore. Can she tell them that she is Alpha Natalia without revealing the magic part? Was it wise to disclose her true identity and spoil the surprise she was planning for James' birthday?

"The Moon Goddess gave us a blessing!" Gideon exclaimed, making everyone look at him in surprise, Talia included.

Gideon moved to the front of the podium and continued talking.

"What we experienced tonight is a rare phenomenon when the Moon Goddess endows us with her powers. Alpha Damon waited for his mate longer than any other Alpha. We know that Alpha's powers swell when he finds his Luna, and we had our theories on how to find him the best Luna and impede dangers tightening around us. Tonight, the Moon Goddess gave us the answer. Only Alpha Damon's union with Luna Talia could take the Dark Howlers pack into a bright future."

Gideon made a dramatic pause and pointed his finger at the people in the audience. "If you are doubtful, feel the energy coursing through you. This is a miracle to benefit all of us for not losing faith in the will of the Moon Goddess."

Gideon leaned forward and spoke in a hushed voice to the Elders of the Dark Howlers pack, "Ancient texts mention that we might discover special abilities. I will count on you to keep an eye on the youngsters and tell them not to spread this around as we might attract trouble before we confirm the effects of this blessing. Seek me for guidance. Let's not waste this opportunity to boost the power of our pack. Only together will we prosper!"

"Only together will we prosper!" The Elders chanted in unison. They were all super-excited about the possibility of getting mysterious abilities. And since they were the closest ones to the ceremony, didn't that mean they will be the most affected by this boon?

Talia and Damon looked at Gideon gratefully.

Gideon came up with a perfect story. If anyone else told such nonsense, people wouldn't buy it, but this was the Shaman. He was a master of stories that sounded like they came out of fantasy novels, and people ate whatever he served.

James snorted derisively while looking at the Elders who were celebrating. He knew their type. Power-hungry bastards. But James couldn't deny that he also got a power boost of some kind, as his body was brimming with energy.

Whatever happened was not only reserved for the members of the Dark Howlers pack. He was itchy to see if he was faster or stronger, or maybe he got an ability also. James dismissed the last part because if abilities were this easy to gain, everyone would have them.

"Jay?" Cornelia called. "What are you thinking about?"

"The energies," he said. "I can feel them." He stared at his palm. "There is power coursing through me, but instead of wanting to be expelled, it's merging with me."

Cornelia smiled. "I can feel it also. Don't resist it. It seems that Talia can boost our connection with nature. The more you absorb it, the more benefits it will bring you. I can already tell that you are more handsome."

James chuckled. Was she flirting with him?

"Did everyone get this?" James asked.

Cornelia nodded. "To some degree. You might be more affected because I am your mate."

James thought that it made sense. If he got a bigger boost because Cornelia was his mate, didn't that mean that Axel got a big boost also?

James looked around to find Axel standing frozen and pale as a sheet of paper. Did he suffer from some side-effect?

"Ahhh!" Yasmin cried, and everyone turned toward her. She was bent at an awkward angle and holding onto the bottom of her stomach. "The babies... I think... they are coming..." she said breathily.

Doctor Travis was by her side in a minute.

He had his share of dealing with Alphas, so he raised his hands in front of Axel, indicating that he meant no harm.

"I am a doctor. I want to check Luna Yasmin's condition," Travis said, and only when Axel nodded stiffly did Travis get closer.

He was about to lift Yasmin's skirt when he realized Axel would rip his head off.

"Can you take her inside? I will need to check..." Travis glanced toward Yasmin's crotch area, and Axel swiftly scooped Yasmin into his arms and carried her inside.

Talia was there right away, and so were Cornelia, Amelia, Maya, Meg, Sandy, Dawn, Tatiana, Kalina, Daria, and Michelle.

The excitement was tangible. There were babies on the way!

Axel took Yasmin into the first bedroom available, and Tatiana and Kalina pushed him out in the hallway because he was growling and releasing his Alpha aura, making everyone uncomfortable, and Travis was unable to work.

Axel found himself in the hallway with Damon, Maddox, Cristian, Tony, George, James, Kai, Tyler, and several others. All guys. They were all standing there with stiff

expressions, none liking to be excluded, but they didn't dare to go inside and face the wrath of females.

In the room...

Travis had his first aid kit ready, so he put surgical gloves on and checked Yasmin's state while Meg and Sandy were filling him up with details such as that she was expecting twins.

"I'm sorry, Yasmin," Talia said. Somehow, she knew that the ceremony progressed her pregnancy.

"Why do you sound like this is a bad thing?" Yasmin asked. "You know I've been waiting to meet my children for a long time. Nature made sure it happened here, with a doctor who knows modern medicine and is familiar with werewolves." How Yasmin saw this, it was the best-case scenario.

Travis straightened up and pressed his lips into a line while removing his gloves.

"How is it?" Meg asked.

"She is in labor," Travis responded. "Pups could come in five minutes or in five hours. I am thinking if we should wait here or if we should take her to the pack hospital."

"I want to go to the hospital," Yasmin said. "How far is it?"

"It's about ten minutes for the stretcher to come here, and by the time we take you in, it will be about half an hour."

"Axel can carry me," Yasmin said. "He is a fast runner. We can be there in five minutes."

"Are you sure?" Cornelia asked.

Yasmin nodded. "It might seem like a safer option to stay here. However, if anything goes wrong, the doctor can take care of me better in a hospital."

"Alright," Travis said. "Then, we shouldn't delay. Let's call Alpha Axel here, and I will mind-link my staff to be ready to receive you."

They were all about to go, but Yasmin pulled Talia's hand. "You should go to the fair."

"I want to be there when my nephews are born!" Talia protested.

"You heard the doctor. It might take five hours, maybe longer," Yasmin said. "We are in the middle of the Dark Howlers pack. I feel safe here, so security is not a concern. Our people are out there. Some found their mates, and some are still searching. They will find comfort in your presence, and you must assure them that things will be alright."

Yasmin looked at Cornelia and Amelia. "The two of you are needed to help transport the lucky ones who found their mates. Everyone here should attend the fair. You can check on me later. Your company in the hospital will be appreciated, but it won't make it faster or easier. Axel will be with me."

"I will take good care of Luna Yasmin," Travis declared. "I will keep you up to date with any progress."

"I will send guards to make sure nothing goes wrong," Talia said, and her eyes lost focus as she spoke directly to Keith and Arya, 'Luna Yasmin is in labor. The two of you will escort her to the pack hospital and make sure no one unauthorized gets there. I know you were looking forward to the event, but this is important. In one hour, someone will come to replace you, and then you can go to the fair.'

Keith was on duty to protect Talia during the Luna ceremony and for the rest of the evening, so he didn't think about having fun at the event anyway. Arya was not a guard, but she was a capable warrior, and she tagged along with Keith.

They got organized quickly, and Axel carried Yasmin with Travis, Keith, and Arya following them.

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Chapter 875: Talia's Luna ceremony (7)

With Yasmin gone to the hospital, things settled down, and Talia turned to see Damon in the hallway.

He was leaning sideways on the wall and looking extra yummy with the ceremonial garment around his waist and his body covered in markings done with black paint. But the whole visual was spoiled by his troubled expression.

"What's wrong?" Talia asked while approaching him.

He shook his head. "After the ceremony, we were supposed to address our people, but with Yasmin..."

"It's OK," Talia interrupted him.

"No. It's not OK." He took her hand into his and placed her palm against his cheek. "I was supposed to tell everyone that now they have their Luna, but it didn't happen. I failed you again, kitten. I wanted to make this right."

Talia was touched by his sincerity, but she didn't think anything was amiss. Sure, Elders tried to sabotage her, and she was set to find out who was behind it, but she would never blame Yasmin or Damon for something out of their control.

"The ceremony was completed, and I am the Luna of the Dark Howlers pack. I can feel the energy of the pack and their trust in our leadership." Damon's leadership, and she hoped that in time they would accept her as more than just Damon's mate. "Yes, Yasmin went into labor, but if you look at our experiences so far, this was the closest thing to perfect we ever got."

"Next time, no pregnant women will be allowed," Damon grumbled.

Talia smiled helplessly. She accepted his condition of no children allowed for this ceremony. He said that it was for safety, and considering the latest incidents, everyone went with it, but Talia guessed that Damon didn't want Ashton around. The unsuspecting boy was at the fair with his grandparents.

Damon wanted to ban pregnant women? Doesn't that mean Talia will be banned as well as Meg, Tatiana, and Mindy? And there was one more point she wanted to address.

"Next time? How many Luna ceremonies will I have?"

"As many as you need until we get this right," Damon responded seriously. "I want everyone to know that you are mine and that you are my most important person. You are my mate, and I will do whatever I can to make you happy."

Talia looked at Damon dreamily. How could she say no to that?

Damon's arms wrapped around Talia's bare waist, sending a dose of addictive sparks as he pulled her closer.

Talia thought Damon would kiss her, but she saw him lick his lips while looking at her seriously.

"I'm not sure if I said this before. Welcome to the Dark Howlers pack, Talia. This was your home from the moment you stepped into this packhouse, and even before that, but now it's official. You are the mistress of this house and of this pack. It's all yours, just how I am." He regretted that he didn't do this on the day he brought her here.

"Thank you, Damon," Talia responded, and she really meant it. "This position, this house, this pack, I accept it, just how I accept you. Thank you for taking care of me so

far. From today onward, I will take care of not just you, but of the whole pack as well. We will do this together."

Damon's insides shook when he felt her acceptance and adoration. She was so small and fragile, yet so powerful and determined, and he was confident that his heart was not capable of more love, but here he was... loving her more by the minute. She was perfect, for him. Only for him.

Talia got on her toes, searching for his lips, and their soft kiss turned hungrier with every heartbeat.

Little by little, Damon pushed Talia backward, and she didn't notice at what point they entered the room where Travis had been examining Yasmin before.

Talia snapped to her senses when Damon closed the door behind them with a kick.

"Damon..." She protested weakly when she realized that their destination was the bed. "Do we have time for this? Guests..."

"They are grownups who know that the ceremony is over," Damon cut her off, and then he closed the distance between them to plunder her mouth with his tongue.

Talia sank into the mattress with Damon on top of her.

'Besides...' Damon continued through their mind-link. 'I said I want to see what you are hiding under that skirt. Your mate is not a patient man.'

His lips latched on his mark on her neck at the same time his hand ventured at the cradle of her thighs, providing a sensory overload and making Talia forget about everything beyond the confinements of that bed.

...

Mindy was frustrated with Elders swarming around Gideon. She was looking forward to going to the fair, but this will take forever!

Elders think of themselves as influential people who provide guidance to younger generations, but they had a lot of questions about the Moon Goddess, mysterious energies, and the signs of abilities being awakened.

Mindy wanted to slap Elder Agatha when the old crow said how she knew that good were days coming because her left armpit was itchy. What nonsense.

Consumed in her angst, Mindy didn't realize that her Alpha aura was leaking until everyone quieted down to look at her.

The only one not bending was Gideon, as her aura didn't affect him. It was a perk of being her fated mate.

"Uhm..." Mindy cleared her throat. "As your Shaman said, you should all go home, meditate, and pay attention to changes in your body. This time is crucial. You wouldn't want to miss an ability awakening because you were here chattering."

Mindy could see people's eyes widening, and then they all nodded in agreement. Elders took turns thanking her and Gideon before dispersing.

"I thought they would never leave," Tatiana said from the side.

Mindy bobbed her head while walking to her sister-in-law. The Mindy-Tanya duo was getting along well from the day they met, and then Tatiana ended up being Maddox's mate, they were both strong-willed business-oriented she-wolves, and now they were pregnant at the same time. How could they not be close?

"I am surprised you are still here," Mindy said. And it was not only Tatiana. Maddox, Tony, Kalina, Cristian, and Michelle were also there. "I thought you went to the fair with Damon and Talia."

"We are waiting for you. Besides, Damon and Lia were seen entering a room while locked in a kiss. I assume they will take a while." Tatiana wiggled her eyebrows to what Mindy rolled her eyes.

She wanted to say that Alphas are unsatiable beasts, but then she remembered what Gideon did to her in the shed before the ceremony, so she kept that snarky comment to herself. She didn't hate it.

Tatiana gestured toward Mindy's ceremonial clothes. "Are you going like that?"

"Yes, we will go like this," Mindy responded for herself and for Gideon who was tidying up the altar.

Werewolves didn't mind going au naturel, and her ceremonial clothes covered all her important parts. However, knowing it was all right there, accessible, and that Gideon would be right by her side was turning her on.

"Give me a minute to help Gideon, and we can go..."

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Chapter 876: The fair mixer (1)

Mindy helped Gideon tidy up the area where the ceremony was held.

Gideon's addictive scent of lavender stirred Mindy's lust and her mind started running wild.

Will they go at it behind a food booth? Or maybe they jump in a crate full of plush toys? There was a stage with live music, and Mindy knew one dark corner where she could go down on Gideon. Ah, so many possibilities!

Mindy felt like a naughty teenager who was planning to sneak around with her crush, and the playful mood from Gideon told her that he approved.

Mindy was confident that people would be shocked to find out how bad their Shaman is, bad in a good way... bad in the best way possible. She was happy that only she got to see that side of Gideon. Others could see him as a tranquil wiseman, but Mindy knew better. That man was fire and ice in one, and he was hers.

...

The fair was organized on a clearing at the virtual border of the Dark Howlers pack and the Spring Leaf pack.

Not long ago, that land was unclaimed, used by the rogues to move between territories without being noticed. Since packs combined borders, they agreed to use this no man's land like it belongs to all of them. The only condition was that no one would create settlements on it, and for any resources found there, negotiations would be needed before they could be harvested.

This event was for several packs, so Damon and Cristian agreed on the location. Of course, they did because Talia worked with Zina and Mindy to make this happen.

Mindy called her sister-in-law (aka Tatiana), and they immediately thought of this event as something that could cheer up people currently finding refuge in the Blue River pack. People from the shelters were assigned to help with stalls and games, and they assured plenty of breaks for everyone to enjoy the event.

Mindy and Tatiana hoped that those poor souls would find their mates, as that would be the best chance for them to heal mental scars that were etched deep into their existences.

Michelle was coordinating members of the Spring Leaf pack who were responsible for kid-friendly games and snacks, which made the fair more family oriented.

Other than members from three packs, they had people from the Midnight Guardians pack, and Tony and Kalina arrived with two full buses of the Lightclaw pack members.

The event swelled into something no one could predict, and the most impressive part was that the fair was organized within a few short days.

Talia and Damon emerged from between bushes, following the makeshift trail many feet before them created.

The duo was fully dressed in comfy casual clothes, and Talia had a small backpack.

Talia paused at the sight in front of them.

Only two days ago, she came here to check if the clearing was suitable for the event, and she provided guidelines, yet she didn't imagine it would turn into this. There were stalls and booths as far as her eyes could reach, the smell of various delicacies filled the air, there were music and cheers and laughter, the whole area was lit up with string lights, and it was all buzzing with positivity. It was fantastic.

Damon pulled Talia to lean on him, and he kissed her temple.

"You did a fantastic job, kitten."

"I had help."

Damon clicked his tongue. "This is not the time for modesty. Of course, you had help, but without you, this wouldn't happen."

Talia didn't want to argue. Besides, he was right. This all started because she wanted to organize a mixer for members of the Midnight Guardians pack.

'Meg?' Talia called through the mind link. 'How are things going?'

'Fantastic!' Meg exclaimed. 'Amelia is giving rides every thirty minutes. So far, we have had twenty-two people from our pack mated, and more are coming! Oh, and we are not the only ones scoring here. Everyone is finding mates. They are everywhere! This event is a huge hit! You probably don't want to go into unlit areas of the forest, if you know what I mean.' Meg ended with a giggle.

Talia's heart expanded at the thought that many people found their mates, and it was all thanks to her organizing this event. It was a big deal.

Talia's expression froze when Meg spoke through the pack link again, 'After tonight, everyone will talk about Malia!'

'What Malia?' Talia asked.

'Your mate-finding service. We are low-key advertising you. I received business cards from two other packs interested in your...'

'Meg!' Talia interrupted Meg. 'How about you and Kai go to the pack hospital? Take the next shift so Keith and Arya can come to the event.'

'Did I do something wrong?' Meg asked, this time with much less enthusiasm.

Talia couldn't believe Meg had asked her that. How many times did she tell her not to spread the Malia nonsense? 'Yasmin is in labor. As a Beta of the Midnight Guardians pack, you should watch over her.'

'Yes, Alpha Talia,' Meg responded respectfully, and Talia could feel that Meg felt guilty because Talia reminded her of their positions.

'Is it OK if I ask Sandy and Tyler to join?' Meg asked reluctantly.

Talia knew that those four were getting along well, and she could imagine them chattering the night away. 'As long as you make Yasmin's safety a priority, you can.'

'With the four of us there, we can keep each other company and stay until morning...'

After hearing this, Talia felt less guilty for punishing Meg in the spur of her anger.

Talia turned to look at Damon, who didn't show an intention to move from the edge of the clearing.

"Is something wrong?" Talia asked.

Damon looked at Talia seriously. "I want to introduce you to our people. Can I?"

Talia's lips lifted into a smile. "I would love that."

Damon turned toward the pair, and his hold on Talia tightened.

'This is your Alpha speaking!' Damon's voice boomed in the head of every member of the Dark Howlers pack. 'You are aware that I found my fated mate. Tonight, Talia officially became your Luna. I expect that you will support her in the same way you are supporting me.'

'Welcome, Luna Talia!' Caden and Maya exclaimed in unison through the pack link.

"AWOOOOO!"

The ground shook as hundreds of attendees raised their heads and howled to welcome Talia.

Talia was overwhelmed. The joyous event became better.

'Thank you, everyone,' Talia spoke into the pack link. 'The Moon Goddess gave me Damon as my fated mate, which made me your Luna. I promise to do my best to be the Luna you deserve.'

"AWOOOOOO!!!"

This round of howls was louder than the previous one.

Talia raised her head to meet Damon's eyes smiling at her. She thought that her heart would burst with happiness.

"This whole evening was fantastic, and it's getting better by the minute," she said. "Thank you, Damon."

"No, no, kitten. Thank you," he said and leaned to capture her lips with his.

Before their kisses turned steamy, Damon inched away, and they had matching smiles on their faces.

"I have my Luna and a pup on the way, and our pack is celebrating. Life doesn't get better than this."

"It can get better," Talia said and glanced sideways in the direction of the fair. "How about we attack that food? It smells delicious, and I'm eating for two."

Damon chuckled. "Your wish is my command, kitten."

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Chapter 877: The fair mixer (2)

Talia was on cloud nine.

Walking among the lively crowd and stalls with Damon by her side brought back happy memories of the Summer Solstice festival, but this was better. This time, Damon was not holding her hand. His arm was on her shoulder, holding her close to him, and her arm was around his waist. Everyone could clearly see they were a couple.

Talia was not an invisible girl anymore. Many people greeted her with big smiles and small bows, and vendors offered them free samples.

Damon stopped at a food stall with grilled meat skewers. Talia looked dreamily at the Alpha, who was making sure they got two skewers for each sauce flavor available.

Damon's hands were full when he turned to look at her questionably. "Do you want to eat here, or should we find a spot to sit?"

"There are tables that way, Alpha!" A vendor shouted over the clamor of the fair while gesturing to his right.

"Let's sit," Talia said. She would love a bench, or maybe something elevated so that she can watch the people and witness a scene of mates recognizing each other.

Damon refused to let Talia carry anything other than her backpack on her back, and even with his hands full, he managed to hover around Talia and ensure no one got too close.

The area with dozens of tables was in sight when Talia found a stall she was looking for.

She tugged Damon's t-shirt to stop before calling, "Chef Page, how is business?"

The people waiting in line moved to clear the space between Talia and the man who was selling ramen.

Chef Page bowed respectfully. "It's doing well. Thank you for allowing me to set up a stall."

"Nonsense!" Talia said while waving her hand. "Your food is delicious. I have craved your ramen since the Summer Solstice festival. When we finish these skewers, we will come here to place an order. Save us a bowl."

"I will be honored, Luna." He glanced at Damon and bowed again. "Alpha."

The moment Talia turned away, her smile fell. She could see the sadness behind Chef Page's polite expression.

'What's bothering you, kitten?' Damon's voice sounded in her mind.

She shook her head. 'I was hoping Chef Page would be happy to participate in this.'

'He lost his daughter. It will take more than one event to cheer him up, but this is a good start.'

Talia was not sure. What if this only reminded him of Lulu, who would be by his side and help him serve ramen? 'Do you think I did a good thing by asking him to come?' She knew that he wouldn't refuse.

'If he was home now, he would be alone with his grief. Like this, he can see that there are people who need him and are happy to eat his food.'

"Look who decided to join!" A cheerful voice reached them, and Talia recognized Mindy.

Talia turned to see that James, Cornelia, Mindy, Gideon, Tatiana, and Maddox were sitting at one table. It was such a strange group of people. People from three packs and a witch.

Mindy and Gideon were the glue that brought them all together. Mindy had a family relationship with Maddox and Tatiana, and Cornelia and Gideon were familiar because of her research that Gideon was interested in.

The nearby table was occupied by Kalina, Tony, Cristian, Michelle, Pierce, Daria, Jordan, and Lidia.

Damon and Talia joined them, and Talia found herself sitting between Maddox and Damon. Somehow, this was familiar also. At the Summer Solstice festival, Maddox was teasing Damon, who was pulling Talia closer to him, and... Talia shook her head helplessly. How come she was so oblivious to the signs that she was Damon's mate?

"Open wide, or you will get messy, and then I will need to lick you clean," Damon said to Talia.

Talia blinked to see a meat skewer hovering in front of her mouth and she opened her mouth obediently.

'I wouldn't mind you licking me,' Talia said to Damon through their mind link as her lips closed around the meat, and Damon cursed under his breath. He was always half-hard around Talia, and the slightest sign that she was willing would send a pulse of pressure into his groin. Like now.

Talia hummed in satisfaction as sweet and tangy flavors with the smokiness from grilled meat coated her tongue. She leaned on Damon while chewing happily.

For Talia, this right here... food, friends, and Damon... that was the definition of happiness.

Talia's eyebrows shot up when she saw one guy standing up with his eyes fixed on the noisy crowd that gathered around a stall where a vendor was taking bets for some guessing game he had set up there. A moment later, a female emerged from the crowd, and Talia squeezed Damon's hand excitedly when the two people met in the middle and kissed without a word. Mates!

"The female is from our pack," Damon said to Talia.

"The male is mine," Maddox chimed in. "My pack is growing."

Tatiana and Talia looked at each other helplessly. Why was everything competition? Will those two Alphas grow up?

Noise from the nearby table reached them, and Talia realized that Kalina and Cristian were arguing.

"What's going on there?" Talia asked, fearing that this might escalate. If Alphas start fighting, everyone will suffer. They will ruin the fair!

Mindy waved her hand, indicating to Talia not to worry. "Ivy and Lily found mates tonight. Their mates are twins from the Spring Leaf pack. Kalina is not willing to lose both of her helpers at once, and Cristian says it's normal for females to leave their packs, and... you can guess the rest. I don't understand why they don't agree that one couple stays in the Lightclaw pack and the other goes to the Spring Leaf. Like that, no one will be at a loss."

Talia nodded in slow motion while listening. She thought how Kalina and Cristian arguing was useless. Shouldn't they ask the mated couples where they want to live?

Talia had a good opinion of Ivy and Lily, and she was happy to hear sisters found mates who were brothers. But she couldn't see them separating. Two families will definitely want to stay close.

Without Talia noticing, they finished the meat skewers.

"Are you still in the mood for ramen?" Damon asked while collecting now empty plates and used napkins.

Talia nodded, and Damon kissed her cheek with, "Let me get it."

Talia understood that she should wait for him (and ramen) at the table. She had no objections.

Mindy whistled loudly after Damon while speaking to Talia, "If someone told me a few months ago that mighty Alpha Damon would dote on a female so much, I would call that person a liar. You turned him into a sub."

Tatiana threw a napkin at Mindy. "Stop talking nonsense. Did you forget that Talia is an Alpha? And even if she isn't, it's perfectly normal for a guy to dote on his mate." She turned to Maddox. "Isn't that right?"

Maddox nodded earnestly. "Absolutely! What do you want to eat next, my queen? Your mate will get it for you."

Mindy stifled a laugh. It was strange to see that her pompous brother was domesticated.

It's not that Gideon didn't treat her right, but he was not an Alpha.

Mindy knew that Alphas would never lower themselves for a female, yet here were Maddox and Damon, at the same table, willing to crawl if that would make their mates happy.

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Chapter 878: The fair mixer (3)

Talia looked in the direction where Damon went, and she could see the crowd parting to make way for him.

"What are you looking at?" Mindy asked.

Talia shook her head. She didn't want to admit that she was eyeing if any female would be foolish enough to get close to her man. Talia was done being intimidated or polite when it came to shameless women. Damon was mated and marked, and he was Talia's!

Talia saw chef Page preparing two bowls of ramen with extra care, and she noticed one more figure by his side passing him things as he extended his hand. They worked without a word spoken. It was a female child, around ten years old.

Talia could sense that the child was not from the Dark Howlers pack, and what stood out in this mass of smiles was that the girl was not smiling. Her expression held a sadness that was kept in. It was uncharacteristic for such a young child.

Talia remembered that Mindy and Tatiana collaborated that people from the Blue River pack shelters to help with the fair, and Talia guessed that the girl was from that group.

"Do you know who is the girl at the ramen stand?" Talia asked.

Mindy was not sure, so she looked at Tatiana.

"Oh..." Tatiana said when she recognized the face. "That's Jane. Why?"

"It's just..." Talia was not sure how to explain it. "She seems to be shouldering grief that shouldn't belong to such a young child."

Tatiana nodded in confirmation. "She came to our shelter not long ago. We found her wandering the streets of a human city and searching for food in trash cans. We have no idea if she has any living family, and we don't even know her name. She has no pack link. Jane refuses to talk, and people in the shelter gave her the name Jane Doe. She doesn't trust people, and when she finally opened up to one..." Tatiana glanced around, and she was glad that Cornelia and James had left the table some time ago.

Tatiana continued in a hushed voice. "It was Kim Dorsey. Jane was by her side when Kim was killed."

Talia's face fell when she connected that Kim was Marcy. She read reports that Marcy was killed during the rogue attack while defending a child, but Talia didn't know that was the girl in question.

"It must have been horrible for the girl," Talia said. If she didn't belong to a pack, it meant that she grew up isolated from their kind and probably from humans as well. At such a young age, she wouldn't be able to shift into wolf form and hunt, and since her social skills were lacking, she couldn't seek help either.

"Whatever progress she made, it was wiped off with that attack," Tatiana said. "After that, Jane barely ate. We brought her here because we didn't know what else to do. Our psychologists are helpless because she is not responding to their treatments. At this rate, she will lose her wolf." Tatiana looked toward the ramen stand. "To be honest, I am surprised to see that she is reacting to the instructions of that man. Is he some kind of an expert with trauma victims, or is he just good with children?"

"That's Lulu's father," Talia said, and it took a second for everyone to understand what Talia meant.

"Sometimes, one grief recognizes another," Gideon said.

"Do you think they could help each other heal?" Mindy asked.

Gideon shook his head. "No one heals after such a loss. But maybe they can help each other find purpose to keep living."

"What are you thinking?" Tatiana asked Talia, who was obviously up to something.

"Both Chef Page and Jane lost the only person they were attached to. Would it be possible for him to visit Jane, or maybe for Jane to stay with him?"

Tatiana looked at Maddox, who was so far only listening.

"As Tanya said, our treatments are not working. If you have an idea, feel free to give it a shot," Maddox said.

Talia was quick to mind-link Damon. 'Can we get someone to replace chef Page at his stall temporarily? I would like to talk to him.'

...

"You want me to do what?" Chef Page asked Talia in disbelief.

Chef Page and Talia were at the table with Damon, Mindy, Gideon, Maddox, and Tatiana.

"The girl helping you at the stand," Talia said. "She lost a person who was dear to her recently and is currently staying in a shelter in the Blue River pack. She is not responsive to attempts to integrate into society. I was hoping you could take some time off the stand and check out the fair with her and see how it goes."

Chef Page looked at the stand he left behind that was now staffed by two warriors from the Dark Howlers pack. Jane was standing behind them with her head lowered. He told her to wait, and she didn't move a muscle.

"What should I do with a child I barely know? Play games?" Chef Page asked.

Talia shrugged. "If that's what you want."

"You could take her to a stand that sells sweets. Kids like those," Tatiana said. "We can give you money to cover the expenses."

Chef Page lifted his hand. "With all due respect, Luna Tatiana, I have money for snacks. I just don't see why me. I have no idea how to deal with children who are grieving."

"You are the first person to whom Jane responded in weeks," Maddox said. He omitted the part with Marcy. "At this rate, the girl is at risk of losing her wolf. She is barely eating, and we tried everything in our power. You are our last hope that Jane's life could turn for the better."

"The worst thing is that she doesn't cooperate," Gideon said. "No one will blame you."

Seeing that Chef Page hesitated, Talia didn't want to push it. "It's OK if you are not comfortable with it. We were only asking. You can return to your stall and pretend that this discussion didn't happen."

"I didn't say I won't do it," Chef Page said. "But, how do you expect me to make her play games?" He told her, more than once, that she should go to the area for children and enjoy the fair, but the girl didn't leave.

Talia got an idea. "Let me take care of it. I just want to know if you are willing."

"Alright. Let's say you persuade her to go, and I accompany her. Then what?"

"Let's take this one step at a time and see how tonight goes," Talia said. "It goes both ways. If you want to meet her again, you are welcome to visit her in the shelter, or maybe she can visit you."

Chef Page went to return to his stall, and Talia reached into her backpack.

Damon was curious to see what Talia had on her mind, and his eyebrows shot up when he saw her pulling a small plush toy from there. It was Cinna.

Talia patted the plush puppy's head and looked at Damon. "I was thinking of giving it at one of the stalls where these are used as prizes, but this will be better. If it works." She gave Damon a kiss on the cheek. "Wish me luck! Watch over my backpack until I return."

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Chapter 879: The fair mixer (4)

Jane followed after Talia, away from the fair. They didn't go far, just enough for them to talk without shouting. Actually, Talia did all the talking as Jane was looking at her shoes and not saying anything.

"Is this your first time at the fair?" Talia asked Jane.

Seeing that Jane didn't respond, Talia continued, "I heard that you are not interested in going to the fair to play. Is it because you want to stay with Chef Page and help him?"

Jane nodded faintly.

"Ah, I understand," Talia said dramatically. "Sometimes, you want to have fun, but you must work."

Jane raised her head to look at Talia quizzically.

Talia puffed her cheeks. "To be honest, I'm feeling down lately, and I don't want to have fun. If it were up to me, I would stay in my bed all day and hope no one would disturb me. But I had to come here as it didn't seem right that I relax while everyone else was working. The one who wants to have fun is Cinna."

Jane's eyes fell on a plush toy that Talia was cradling in her arms like it was a baby.

"You see..." Talia lowered her voice, "It's Cinna's first time at the fair, and she would like to look around, but I can't take her because I'm busy. Do you know someone who can show her around and take good care of her? She is small, and I'm afraid she might get lost. It needs to be someone responsible."

Talia raised the toy to her ear.

"What did you say? You think that Jane is trustworthy, and you want to go with her? But she needs to work with Chef Page."

Talia looked at Jane and then at Cinna. "I know you like Jane, but she wants to help Chef Page at the stall. How can she take you? We need to find someone else."

Jane's eyes widened, and Talia could see the conflict on Jane's little face.

"Would you like to take Cinna to visit the fair? I can ask my friends to help out Chef Page so the three of you can go together. He could use a break as well. The man is standing there for hours. Can you make sure he has some fun and treats?"

Jane blinked, and a slight movement of her head told Talia that the girl was considering it.

Talia stroked the toy gently. "I love Cinna. She is very precious to me. However, I don't have much time to play with her. Cinna needs a good playmate. Are you willing to take her around the fair? If you promise to take good care of Cinna, I can let you have her as long as you let me visit occasionally."

Jane's eyes widened to the point of making full circles.

"What do you say, Jane? Do we have a deal?"

...

Talia leaned on Damon, and they looked at the crowd in the direction where Chef Page, Jane, and Cinna disappeared.

"Do you think I'm meddling?" Talia asked Damon.

"I think you are amazing," Damon said honestly. "That girl needed it, and so did Chef Page." And he got rid of that wretched toy also.

How Damon saw this, it was a win-win-win situation with him winning the most because Keith's spirit won't linger in their bedroom anymore in the form of a small plush puppy.

"What if it doesn't work?" Talia asked.

"Then, you keep trying. You care about people, and your intentions are pure, and that's what counts." He looked at her deeply. "You are an amazing Luna. You make it look so easy because your kindness and care for people come naturally."

Talia liked the praise.

"Do you want to eat ramen?" Damon reminded her. "It's probably cold by now. We should order another serving."

"Maybe later," Talia said. "I want us to see the games. Do you think that Blackie could get another sibling?"

Guilt swelled within Damon. "Kitten, about Cinna. I know it was your first toy and..."

"Cinna found a better home," Talia said quickly. "Jane needs Cinna more than I do. I thought that we could play some games and you could win a toy for our pup. His first toy."

"HER first toy," Damon corrected Talia.

Talia rolled her eyes. That was not the point. "What do you say, daddy Damon? Will you win the first toy for your child?"

Damon sucked in a sharp breath. There it was, that word... d-a-d-d-y.

"Of course," Damon responded after some time. "Our pup will have only the best her father can offer."

Talia laughed, mostly because she could feel Damon's happiness and anxiety that didn't fit his image of a scary Alpha, but it fit well with a man who was excited about becoming a father.

...

Talia asked Damon to walk around first. She wanted to see what games were there (and prizes) before they started playing.

There was mini golf, skeeball, Plinko, several varieties of ring toss, a huge Jenga, blind tasting where one had to guess the food that was placed into his (or her) mouth; one vendor had an aquarium where parents could catch a real goldfish for their kids, and there were sack races for couples.

Talia paused at the game where helium balloons were arranged, and if a player popped a balloon with a dart, he won whatever was in it. Not every balloon had a prize inside.

There was one enclosed area with arcades, pinball machines, foosball, and air-hockey tables.

Talia peered to see Jane and Chef Page at the vintage space invaders arcade game. They played a game with two players, and Cinna was tucked into Jane's t-shirt with her head peeking below Jane's chin.

"I told you, kitten," Damon spoke close to her ear. "You are an amazing Luna. Don't ever doubt yourself."

Talia's heart swelled. She didn't know how things between Chef Page and Jane would progress or if they would progress at all, but the two sad and lonely souls were not so lonely anymore, and that was a good thing.

Damon tugged Talia to move, and they continued exploring the fair.

Talia didn't know what Luna Michelle planned for the kids, and she was pleasantly surprised to see kids gathered at the booths with face painting and temporary tattoos. There was also a place where kids would get balloons twisted to form various objects.

Talia was in awe at the number of people gathered. Could it be more than one thousand? Probably. And the best part, everyone was in a good mood.

On the East side of the fair, there was an open area with swings, see-saws, and bouncy houses.

Around the kid-friendly area were benches and tables where grownups were sitting and keeping an eye on the little ones running around who were laughing and squealing in joy.

Talia leaned on Damon and looked at the play area dreamily.

'In no time, our kid will play here also,' Talia spoke to Damon through the mind-link.

Damon saw two kids wrestling next to the swings, and his expression stiffened. The idea of anyone being physical with his precious baby girl was unacceptable!

"Talia! I knew you would come to me!"

A childish voice sounded above the clamor, and Damon groaned. How did he forget about this little pest?

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Chapter 880: The fair mixer (5)

At Damon's rising hostility, Talia had to remind him, 'He is just a child.'

She turned to greet Ashton, who was running toward her.

Talia smiled at Ashton. He looked super-cute with whiskers drawn on his cheeks.

"Hi, Ashton. Are you having fun?"

Ashton grinned. "I am now." He threw a side-glance at Damon. "Thank you for watching over my Luna, uncle Damon."

Two elderly people approached them with urgency. Those were Luna Michelle's parents.

The old man stopped a few steps away, but the woman stood next to Ashton.

"We are sorry that Ashton is disturbing you," Ashton's grandmother said apologetically.

"There is nothing to be sorry about," Talia said. "Ashton is a wonderful child, and I enjoy his company."

Ashton looked at his grandparents. "Why are you apologizing? I did nothing wrong. I came to talk to my future Luna."

Ashton's grandmother glanced nervously at Damon. "You can't claim Luna Talia as yours, Ash. She is Alpha Damon's Luna."

Ashton's little brows came together as he looked at Talia seriously. "I am not old-fashioned. Once I am of age, I will accept you even if you have a history with other men."

Talia thought how he was adorable. "That is very generous of you, Ashton."

"I told you I will not mistreat you." He pointed his little finger at Damon. "If uncle Damon bullies you, let me know, and I will talk to him."

Damon's whole face twitched with annoyance. How dares that stinky boy talk like he was not there! He wanted to give Ashton a piece of his mind, but he knew that it would be of no use.

Damon's hand snaked around Talia's waist as he pulled her closer.

"Talia, let's go to the area where grownups are having fun." Damon glared at Ashton while talking stiffly, "We should leave kids where they belong. In the kid's area."

"But, you just came here!" Ashton protested.

Damon sneered. "You should go back to your pretend games, like other children your age."

Ashton puffed his chest. "It is obvious that I'm more mature than other children. They might be pretending, but I picked my Luna for real."

Talia was about to interfere in the oncoming squabble between two children when she heard Meg's voice in her mind, "Babies are coming!"

Talia ruffled Ashton's hair. "I need to be somewhere else. Have fun here, OK?"

Ashton grabbed her hand. "When will I see you next time?"

"I'm not sure. I will talk to your mother. Be a good boy and listen to your grandparents."

Ashton nodded reluctantly, and he frowned when he saw Damon's mocking grin.

"Don't let that old guy bully you!"

"OLD GUY!?" Damon squeezed through his teeth as anger rippled through him. The little snout crossed the line!

Talia gripped Damon's arm while speaking through the mind-link, 'Why are you arguing with a child? We should go to the pack hospital. Yasmin is about to deliver babies any minute.'

"You are lucky that Talia thinks your life is not worth harvesting," Damon grumbled at Ashton, and then he turned to leave with Talia under his arm.

Ashton glared at Damon, and he was about to shout something when a hand covered his mouth.

"Ash, please," his grandmother pleaded. "We are leaving in half an hour. Don't you want to use that time to play? Or should we get more food?"

Ashton pushed his grandmother's hand away and straightened his shirt.

"Ice cream. I want more ice cream. The big one with rainbow sprinkles."

His grandparents agreed immediately. Ashton already had too many sweets, but anything was better than provoking Alpha Damon.

...

On their way back to the car, Damon and Talia passed booths where they saw James and Cornelia bobbing for apples. At another booth, Amelia, Liam, Caleb, and Trisha were buying leather bracelets.

In front of the stage with live music was a clearing where people danced, some in groups and some as couples. Talia spotted Tony and Kalina, Maddox and Tatiana, Dawn and George, and Pierce and Daria swaying to the music.

Damon picked up Talia's emotions, so he pulled her toward the dance floor.

"We should go to the hospital," Talia reminded him.

"Babies will be born with or without us, and I want to dance with my Luna," he said.

Talia had no objections. The truth was that she wanted to dance with him as well.

Three songs later, Talia brought back the topic of the pack hospital, and they disappeared into the lively crowd. Damon wanted to use his aura and make people move to make way, but Talia told him that it wouldn't be nice.

Damon and Talia paused at the booth where Keith and Arya were shooting with air guns at moving targets.

Werewolves normally don't use weapons, so this was novel for both Keith and Arya.

The line behind them dispersed some time ago because Keith and Arya were super-competitive, and they were lost in besting the other, totally forgetting that this was a fair, and that others wanted a turn also.

"Are you guys having fun?" Talia asked.

Keith and Arya froze before turning to the voice to see Talia and Damon standing behind them.

"Yes," Keith responded with a bow, and Arya quickly lowered her gaze. "Thank you for sending a second shift so we could have fun at the fair."

"Meg mind-linked that it's close," Talia said. "We are heading to the pack hospital."

"Do you want us to go with you?" Keith offered.

Talia refused. "No need. Enjoy your evening, and don't forget to eat something." She was hinting that they should leave this booth for others to try shooting with an air gun.

At the mention of food, Damon remembered one thing. "I will order ramen to-go. We can take it for guys in the hospital also."

Talia approved. She remembered from the Summer Solstice event that ramen was delicious, yet she didn't get a chance to eat it, yet. "Do you think we should ask Chef Page to open a ramen restaurant in Darkbourne?" Then she can eat ramen anytime.

Damon shrugged. "You can ask him if he is interested in cooking noodles full time."

"Ramen is much more than cooking noodles."

"Whatever you say, kitten..."

Keith and Arya looked after Talia and Damon, who blended with the crowd.

"They don't look like Alpha and Luna," Arya said.

"That's what makes them special," Keith responded proudly. "They choose to belong with their people."

Arya poked Keith's ribs with her finger. Yes, Keith explained that his adoration for Talia was different from what he felt for Arya, and she knew it was true, but his tender feelings for another female stirred her jealousy.

Arya was still wrapping her head around the fact that Talia saved her life and how much Talia was responsible for bringing Keith and her together. Arya was not the one to owe favors, and it seemed that she owed Talia big time.

"Are we playing?" Keith asked Arya.

"I feel like ramen now. How about you?"

Keith had no objections. "Alright. Let's eat."

Keith's hand moved around Arya's waist, pulling her toward him. "How about we start with some appetizers? There is grilled corn and chestnuts."

"We can keep those for dessert."

Keith licked his lips slowly. "I have something else on my mind for dessert."

Arya's eyes widened when she realized that he was talking about her. But then... he was her cotton candy, so she could have him for dessert as well.

"Let's hurry up with food so we can have dessert."

Keith laughed because her words were bold, but she was blushing profusely. And he was happy.

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