

## The Alpha's Bride

### #Chapter 981: The hard truth (3)

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"Is Axel treating you well?" Valerian asked Talia while hoping she would talk about Sophia and Isaac so he could stir the topic to how they treated her and the whole Red Moon pack business.

"Axel treated me well before confirming we were related. He is my proxy and acts as the Alpha in my absence."

Seeing that Talia didn't want to talk about the bad things, Valerian decided on a different strategy. "Tell me about the pack."

"Before I took over as the Alpha, Sophia and Isaac were leading the Midnight Guardians pack. They believed that safety was in secrecy, so the pack members stayed mostly inside. I decided to change that policy, and now we have many new mated couples and a large number of pups on the way. Damon is helping me make it happen while keeping our people safe..."

Valerian was disappointed that Talia didn't confide in him and tell him the bad things she went through, but he also knew he was absent from her life. Was he worthy of her trust?

Talia spoke about opening the portal to the witches' realm when Damon woke up. He rested his chin on Talia's shoulder and listened with Valerian.

No one interrupted them, and they chatted until early morning when Travis came to check on Valerian.

"When can he leave the pack hospital?" Talia asked.

"His condition is stable, and he is recovering at a fantastic rate. If he promises not to exert himself, I will clear him to be discharged. I can visit him once per day to assure things are on track..."

...

Talia heard that Evanora and Axel were bonding in the library of the Guardians, while Edgar used this time to be with Yasmin and the twins.

Talia asked Axel and others to keep the news of Valerian's existence a secret and left it at that.

The next few days, Talia spent quite some time with Valerian, talking about anything and everything if she was not dealing with pack-related matters.

Valerian's favorite place was the garden, in a spot where he could sit directly under the sunrays that he had missed for two decades. He could walk with a cane now, and that was big progress. He didn't want to use a wheelchair, and being carried around was embarrassing.

Talia found Valerian sitting on the bench in the garden, with his eyes closed and head lifted to the sky as he soaked in the sun.

"Lunch will be served soon," Talia said.

He patted the spot on the bench next to him.

"Since I arrived here, I have asked you many questions. It's only fair that I answer yours."

Talia sat next to him gingerly, and she touched her necklace. She told him before that Astraea left it behind with a secret message that told Talia about her heritage. But there were so many other things she didn't know. "Will you tell me about mom?"

Valerian smiled dreamily. "She was the most beautiful woman I've ever seen."

Talia's expression fell.

"What?" He asked.

"You speak about her in the past tense. I was hoping... Never mind."

"You were hoping she is alive," he said, and Talia nodded.

"In a way, that's not wrong, but it's not right either. We were in a grave situation. I was lucky to take you to safety." Or at least he thought it was safe. "When I returned, Astraea was surrounded. We fought, but they were too many and..." He released a long breath. "They were after her, and she hoped that by sacrificing herself, they would leave me alone. She asked me to take care of you and used the last bits of her energy to protect me."

"So... she is gone?" Talia asked.

"Yes and no," he responded, and he put his hand on his chest. "It sounds crazy, but... I held her unmoving body, and I know she is gone, yet I can still feel the bond."

'It's not crazy,' Liseli spoke in Talia's mind. 'That was how Sapa and I were. Once the bond is established, it connects souls regardless of the distance, and the passing of time won't diminish it. Only if a soul dissipates completely will the bond be broken.'

Talia thought how that was romantic. "Her spirit lives."

Valerian smiled a little. "I like to think so. She was a strong female, mentally and emotionally. They captured me and wanted to enter my mind, but every time they tried to harm me, I could feel the energy that reminded me of Astraea. In the end, they couldn't do anything other than imprisoning me. I think they forgot about me. Life was uneventful until you arrived."

"Am I interrupting?" A deep voice came from the side, and Talia turned to see Damon approaching them. His deep blue eyes, full of emotions, smiled at her and made it impossible to look away.

"Never," Talia responded.

"It's time for lunch," Damon said, and Talia stood up. She offered her hand to Valerian because his legs were still unsteady, but he just looked at her with an unreadable expression.

"Natalia," Valerian called. "If you ever find yourself in a situation where you can save your mate by sacrificing yourself... don't do it. I know it sounds like the right thing to do, but living without a mate is worse than death."

"You said mom is not gone."

"I did, but... It's killing me whenever I think that I will never be able to see her smile, or hold her hand, or feel the sparks. The connection is there, but it's pulling me nowhere, and I feel lost. A big part of me is missing, and I will never get it back."

Talia's heart cracked, and she was glad that Damon put his hands around her.

'Lis,' Talia called her wolf. 'What can I do to comfort him?'

'You can't,' Liseli responded.

'You returned,' Talia said. 'Can't we do the same to my mother?'

Liseli didn't have an answer to that question. 'I don't know how I ended up being your spirit. Even if we can do the same for your mother, will your father be willing to accept a

spirit residing in another's body? The important point is that he just told you she suffered and used up her energy. We don't know what's left...'

"Shh..." Damon shushed Talia while pulling her onto him. "It's OK, kitten. I've got you..."

Talia didn't realize at what point she started crying.

"I'm sorry," Valerian said. "I didn't mean to upset you."

Talia's father or not, he made her cry, and Damon was NOT happy about this! "Talia is pregnant, and her emotions are unstable. Her impulse is to fix things and make others happy. You telling her about your grief which can't be fixed, is not helping." And if you are not helping, you should keep your mouth shut!

Damon scooped Talia into his arms and carried her inside. He passed the dining room and took her to their bedroom.

Damon laid on the bed with Talia and ran his fingers through her hair in silence while waiting for her to cry it out.

"I'm sorry for ruining your shirt," Talia said. It was wet from tears and snot.

Damon cocked an eyebrow at her. "It's a good thing I'm rich, so I won't ask you to buy me a new one, but I might ask for sex in exchange."

Talia slapped his shoulder, "How can you think about sex when I'm distressed?"

"I don't think about sex. I am thinking about you, and you are sexy, so my outside is pervy, but on the inside, I'm quite affectionate."

Talia rolled her eyes and pushed herself off the bed. She went to the closet to get him a fresh shirt so they could join the others for lunch.

"Don't act like you don't want it! Look at this sexy ass! I know you like it!" Damon shouted after Talia, and she bit her lower lip to prevent herself from laughing at the outrageous Alpha.

Damon could sense that her emotions stabilized, and he gave himself a thumbs up.

In the next moment, his eyebrows shot up. Why was Talia horny? Oh, he loved that she was pregnant!

He quickly pushed himself off the bed and went after her.

"Ah!" Talia cried when Damon hugged her from behind. She didn't feel his presence at all. "What are you doing?"

"You were thinking about my ass, didn't you?" His breath splashed on her ear.

"To be honest, I was thinking about all of you. Naked."

Damon released her, and it took him less than a second to remove all his clothes. "No need to think. Look, touch, kiss, bite, whatever you want, I'm available."

Talia could feel her cheeks heating as her arousal swelled.

They didn't come out of the closet for the next hour.

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Chapter 982: Tying up loose ends (1)

Later that afternoon...

After a brief meeting, Caden, Maya, Mindy, James, and Cornelia left the study, leaving Damon and Talia behind.

Talia was looking at her notes, and she circled the point about the upcoming Talia's Luna ceremony.

Mindy was advocating that they should make it like a human wedding where Talia and Damon will dress up elegantly and exchange vows in a lavish ceremony where they promise to be faithful and support each other forever.

Damon agreed about the lavish part. Only the best for his kitten. He said that he would leave it to the females to arrange, and he would give them his black card to pay for everything.

Mindy's eyes sparkled in a way that made Talia uncomfortable, and Talia took a mental note to discuss budget restrictions with Damon. She didn't want to risk Mindy driving them into poverty.

Talia had an idea what to expect because she attended Tatiana's party, and she hoped the evening wouldn't end with a fiasco of rogues attacking.

Mindy immediately said that the garden would need to be landscaped differently, and Maya suggested that they could have the ceremony by the lake. With canopies, flowers, balloons, and fairy lights, it will look fantastic, and it will provide space for everyone to attend. Cornelia said that witches could enhance the whole event with magic.

Talia wondered if Valerian would escort her down the aisle.

Talia thought how that was romantic, but Talia knew several ongoing issues could potentially taint the event.

With people leaving the study, Talia decided to discuss the topics that had been avoided so far.

"Damon," Talia called. "When will you visit Stephanie?"

Talia previously shared mind-images of her most recent conversation with Stephanie, so Damon was aware that Stephanie helped Guardians get their hands on him and that she was involved in the death of his parents.

It was difficult for Damon to face the truth, so he avoided meeting with Stephanie face-to-face. What were the potential outcomes? Would she cry, beg for mercy, or come up with a believable excuse? Nothing would change the fact that she betrayed him.

Just thinking about the gravity of Stephanie's actions made Damon's hands tremble, and he didn't trust himself to keep his cool.

Stephanie was one of the few people he trusted after his parents perished, and it was all a lie. Worse than a lie. She was there, comforting him, telling him how what happened was unfortunate, yet she was behind it.

"Do you think I'm a coward?" Damon asked.

"Considering the situation, I can't blame you for avoiding this matter. Do you want me to punish her?"

Damon refused. He didn't want Talia to deal with his problems. He needed to buckle up and deal with Stephanie, but it was hard. How long could he postpone this?

"Damon?" Talia called. "How about we do something else instead?"

"What?"

Talia walked to Damon and extended her hand to him, palm up.

Damon put his hand into Talia's and stood up to follow after her. He would ask her if she was game for some sexy time, but her serious expression told him it was something else.

"Where are we going?" Damon asked when they stepped out of the packhouse into the garden.

"We need to tie up loose ends, Damon," Talia said.

Damon's insides tightened when Talia stopped on a clearing at the far end of the garden. She faced him and extended her hands, and he knew she was about to teleport. Where to? He was afraid to ask.

Valerian saw Damon and Talia walking through the garden with serious expressions, and he didn't want to get their attention. He observed as they stood facing each other and holding hands, Talia's hair turning silver, just as her mother had. There was a wind with blue electric bolts coiling around Damon and Talia, and then they were gone.

...

In an apartment in the human city...

Tristan was sitting at the table with three other males. They were all rogues, playing poker and smoking cigars.

Tristan took a bottle of whiskey to refill his glass and frowned when he realized it was empty.

"Janine!" He shouted. "Get me another bottle!"

A head full of blonde hair peeked through the door. "That was the last one."

Tristan frowned. "Go and buy more."

Janine made a face. "Why don't you ask the new girl?"

Tristan's frown deepened. "Because I'm asking you. And her name is Lisa."

Janine quickly backtracked to show an innocent expression. "But she is getting ready to get groceries. I can ask her to add drinks to the list."

Seeing that Tristan didn't respond, she quickly went back down the hallway.

Janine balled her hands into fists. She hated Lisa because now she needed to share Tristan's attention.

Tristan's personality was unstable, and sometimes he would entertain Janine, but most of the time, he would focus only on Lisa, making Janine wait for another mood swing. It was exhausting. The only thing that gave Janine hope Tristan still cared about her was that Tristan didn't allow other guys to touch her.

Janine found Lisa in one of the bedrooms, setting up the bed.

"Tristan wants you to go shopping," Janine said icily.

Lisa rolled her eyes. Why don't they leave her alone? She tried escaping twice, and both times she was caught and ended up with a beating. They held her always inside, and when Tristan left, someone would keep an eye on her. Somehow, Tristan knew when Lisa wanted to escape his grasp, and she didn't dare act rashly.

If not for the stupid mate bond, she would hate Tristan forever! And she did, but whenever he came close, smiled, and touched her while whispering sweet nothings, Lisa would melt away like an enamored teenage idiot. Lisa knew that it was just the bond. She knew that Tristan was despicable, and he didn't deserve her, but she was too weak to fight the bond on her own.

Lisa was aware that she needed help. Unfortunately, Stephanie blocked her completely, and Lisa was not strong enough to reach out to Damon or anyone else from the Dark Howlers pack. Lisa suspected Tristan had some way of blocking the pack link, but she knew that if she snooped around, it would only earn her more beating.

Lisa was stuck, but not an idiot. She knew the only way to survive was to wait for the right chance. Until then, she needed to listen to Tristan, and she tried to stay out of others' way, but Janine was shamelessly throwing herself at Tristan even after finding out that Lisa was his mate.

To Lisa's horror, Tristan would give in to Janine occasionally, causing Lisa inexplicable pain. Nothing was worse than feeling the betrayal of the mate bond, but Tristan didn't seem to care much. His wolf was feral. There were days when he would treat Lisa well, and days when he would ignore her, and then there were days when Lisa wished to be dead.

But no matter how Tristan treated Lisa, she had a belly full of grievances when it came to Janine.

"Does Tristan want me to go shopping? Or you?" Lisa asked while patting the comforter to smoothen out the creases.

"Does it matter?"

Lisa turned to look at Janine. "Oh, it does. Because one is my mate, and the other is a flea sticking to my mate. Guess which one I will obey."

Janine's eyes flashed in outrage. She hated when Lisa reminded her that Tristan had a mate, and it was not Janine.

"Do you dare to disobey him?"



"I would never disobey my mate," Lisa said. "But I do not need to listen to someone who is below me."

Janine's face turned ugly, and she raised her arm to strike Lisa when a gust of wind exploded in the room.

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### Chapter 983: Tying up loose ends (2)

"AHH!" Janine shouted as the wind pushed her back, and Lisa held onto the bed to stabilize herself.

Damon looked around the room, and his brows came together when he spotted Lisa.

'Why are we here?' Damon asked Talia through their mind link.

'Don't tell me you forgot about Lisa.'

It's not that he had forgotten about Lisa, but he didn't want to think about her.

Seeing that Damon didn't say anything, Talia spoke again, 'We know that she refused to cooperate with rogues. No one deserves to suffer in an abusive relationship. And also, I was hoping that coming here would bring us to Tristan. He should have valuable information.'

Damon didn't want to waste time on Lisa but getting his hands on Tristan was something he would consider worthwhile.

"Damon!" Lisa cried when she identified one of two figures which appeared out of thin air. She didn't recognize Talia because her hair was silver, and she paused at the sight of Damon's black eyes, but she didn't think much of it. That was definitely Damon. "Get me out of here. I will do anything."

"You will?" Talia asked, and Lisa's eyes widened as she took a better look at Talia's face. Silver eyes were different, but the rest was familiar.

Memories of Talia suppressing her on the town square of Darkbourne resurfaced, and Lisa quickly bowed her head. "Please. I know I did wrong. I will do anything. Just... take me with you. I don't want to stay here."

"Who are you?" Janine hissed while patting her dress down. She looked at Talia with a scrutinizing frown, and her eyes flashed in delight when she spotted Damon. She gave him a look over, and she cleared her throat before asking seductively, "How did you get here, stranger?"

Talia saw red.

"Ahh!" Janine cried when Talia's aura pressed on her, and Janine fell to her knees.

"Your friend?" Talia asked Lisa.

Lisa sneered. "She is the bitch who is sleeping with my mate."

"Do you want revenge? Beat her up. I will hold her down." Talia offered.

Lisa wanted to say yes, but she backtracked. Beating up Janine won't achieve anything. Lisa's anger was with Tristan and with the Moon Goddess for giving her such a bad mate. And with Stephanie for abandoning her.

Lisa spent her teenage years with her aunt, and she seldom asked for anything from Stephanie. Lisa told Stephanie that her mate was bad news and that she wanted out, but Stephanie rejected her and left her in this hell. What kind of a mother does that?

"I just want to leave," Lisa said. "When I'm far enough, I will break the bond, and she can have him."

'Do you believe she changed?' Talia asked Damon through their mind link.

'I believe that she wants out,' Damon responded.

"Is Tristan here?" Talia asked.

Lisa nodded. "Tristan and three more are in the living room. They are his henchmen, but I don't think they would risk their lives for him."

"You bitch!" Janine hissed from the floor. She tried to shift into her wolf form, but it was not working. What the hell?

Lisa ignored Janine. She was focused on Talia now. "... I was the one who told them you were going to the Blue River pack with Damon. Mom asked me to tell them more and..."

"I know," Talia interrupted Lisa's next words.

"I'm sorry for that and everything else. If you give me a chance, I will make it up to you. I know things about Tristan and his group and..."

"No need," Talia refused. "There is nothing you can do to fix the past. But I want you out of my future."

Lisa's face fell. "What do you mean?"

Talia looked at Damon, silently telling him to take over.

"Let's talk about this later," Damon said. "I want a word with Tristan." Damon pinched Talia's chin and pecked her lips. "Wait for me here, kitten."

"Alright," Talia responded.

Talia turned to look at Janine.

'How is she different from normal she-wolves?' Talia asked Liseli.

'Her wolf is feral. That gives her a nasty temper, and she has no loyalty or compassion. She thinks only about her own needs.'

Wolves are social creatures and being part of a pack gives them purpose and direction. Without it, their wolf will turn feral, and that was a road without going back. That was why werewolves were terrified of being exiled from their packs. Most of the packs wouldn't take in exiled werewolves, and if they don't find a new home soon, their wolf will turn feral. Only rogues would accept such a wolf, and that was another type of hell.

Talia turned to Lisa. "You said she sleeps with your mate. You suffered a lot."

Lisa lowered her head in embarrassment. "Can we not talk about it?"

"We don't need to talk about it. However, bottling up grievances will cause you mental scars. You need to let it out."

"There is no point in crying or screaming. No one listens." Actually, it would just get her into trouble. "What will happen to me now?"

"It will depend on Damon," Talia responded. "If it's up to me, I would send you to a shelter in the Blue River pack."

Lisa frowned. "You think I should go to a shelter?"

"Another option is for you to go to your aunt in the Lightclaw pack, but I believe that everyone knows what you and your mother did. If you go to your aunt, people won't look at you kindly, assuming that your aunt wants to take you in. I know that shelter sounds bad, but it's a place where people go to start over. You can learn new skills and become independent."

The commotion was heard from the outside, and Damon entered the room while dragging bloodied Tristan by the collar of his shirt.

Damon tossed Tristan on the floor, and Janine let out a muffled scream when she saw Tristan's horrid appearance. If not for shallow breathing, he would look dead.

Talia closed her eyes to confirm that other than the four people in the room, there was no one else alive in the apartment.

"We will take this guy for questioning," Damon said, and he turned to Talia. "Can you take us back, or should I call someone to pick us up?"

Talia was not sure if she could do it, but she didn't want to get close to Lisa or that rogue. "How about you call Caden to send someone, and I will extract information from this guy? Lisa will need a ride."

Damon nodded in agreement and got his phone.

Talia turned to Lisa. "Are you serious about cutting your ties with this guy?" Lisa nodded without delay. "I recommend you break the bond now. Otherwise, you will feel his pain."

"I, Lisa of the Dark Howlers pack, reject you, Tristan, as my mate... ugh..." Lisa bent and fell to her knees while clutching her stomach.

"Accept her rejection," Talia said sternly. Her Alpha command shook Tristan's mind.

"I... Tristan... Accept your... rejection..." He said with difficulty and then his mouth opened in a silent scream.

"Ahh!" Lisa cried, and she opened her eyes when she realized that the pain had stopped faster than it came. The silvery light surrounding her matched the color of Talia's hair and eyes, and Lisa bowed her head. "Thank you, Luna."

Talia approved of Lisa's attitude.

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Chapter 984: Starting over

"Someone will be here in half an hour," Damon said to Talia while pulling a chair to the middle of the room.

"This is for you, kitten," Damon said softly, and he swatted the invisible dust from the seating cushion before gesturing for Talia to sit. "You should rest."

Talia didn't object. She enjoyed it when Damon went the extra mile to make her comfortable.

Talia's smile faded as she focused on Tristan, who was sprawled on the floor.

Tristan was still reeling from the impact of breaking his bond with Lisa when he felt a pressure on his mind that threatened to squish his brain. The only thing he could see were Talia's silvery eyes staring him down, making him feel like she could see all of his secrets. And she did.

Damon stood next to Talia and looked in Tristan's direction absentmindedly. Talia was right. Tying up loose ends made him feel better. Damon hoped that Talia could get something useful from Tristan as they had so much missing information.

What was the connection between rogues and the Guardians? Who was involved in kidnapping members of the Midnight Guardians pack? Was this connected? Were experiments on people with abilities just a horrid rumor, or was there truth to it?

Lisa was catching up her breath as she pushed herself to a seated position, and Damon threw a side glance her way.

'You should pack your things,' Damon said to Lisa through the pack link.

'I have nothing.'

'You can grab anything worth taking. These guys won't need it. You have ten minutes.'

Without delay, Lisa moved out of the room.

A minute later, Tristan started foaming at his mouth, and Talia slumped in the chair.

"Kitten!" Damon panicked and squatted by her side.

"I'm OK," She assured him.

"How can this be OK? Do you need more energy? Use mine!"

"No, no, it's just..." Talia released a shaky breath and looked at Damon sadly.

Damon could feel hairs rising at the back of his neck as Talia's expression darkened. It was like facing a deadly predator or maybe just royally pissed off Talia.

"Kitten?"

Talia's silvery eyes showed black streaks as she squeezed through her teeth angrily, "If you make me watch as you fuck another woman, I will..."

A series of snaps were heard, and Tristan jolted with each sound, and then his body deflated against the floor as a pool of blood under him expanded.

"I would never," Damon said with all the seriousness in the world. "You know I wouldn't."

Talia's chin shivered, and the black streaks from her eyes disappeared. She leaned her forehead on Damon's shoulder and sobbed quietly as images of Tristan beating Lisa and doing all kinds of atrocities were flashing in her mind.

Damon cursed under his breath. He knew that Talia was about to look into Tristan's memories, and he thought it was a good idea because they would find out what he had been up to, and he totally forgot that rogues were despicable and that Talia would see a lot of bad stuff.

He should have known better.

Damon sat on the ground, further from the blood, and pulled Talia to sit on his lap.

"It's OK, kitten. I've got you." He touched her chin to make her look at him. "Angry, sad, happy, or anything in between, show them all to me. I won't love you less."

Talia knew that he was trying to cheer her up. She put her hand on Damon's cheek. "Thank you for being my mate."

Damon tilted his head and kissed her palm. "Those are my lines."

Janine did her best to diminish her presence. By now, she understood a few things. Those were Alpha Damon and Luna Talia (aka Alpha Natalia). Tristan was dead, and the power couple that appeared with a gust of wind was about to take Lisa away. What about Janine? She hoped that Damon and Talia would forget about her. Should she play dead?

...

Owen was driving through the traffic of the human city, and Zina was in the front passenger's seat.

Lisa was sitting in the back of the car, clutching a backpack she had taken from the apartment. It had cash, a change of clothes, and some trinkets she thought would be useful to sell.

She also found some photos and notebooks that Tristan kept hidden, and she gave those to Talia and Damon.

Lisa didn't understand why they let Janine go, but it was not her place to pry into those things. She learned that knowing too much can bring more harm than good. Besides, she was focused on getting out of there, and she didn't have the capacity to worry about others.

"How come you picked me up? Did you become a warrior?" Lisa asked Zina. Lisa knew that Zina was working in the kitchen as Stephanie's helper.

"We picked you up because we were shopping nearby," Zina said and looked at Owen dreamily. "I am not a warrior, but my mate is a General." Zina tilted her head so that Lisa could see the mark on her neck.

Owen smiled smugly. He loved when Zina was showing off that he was her mate.

Lisa reached for the left side of her neck. When Tristan accepted Lisa's rejection, it was burning, but Lisa didn't have time to see what was going on there. Was Tristan's mark on her neck gone? Lisa hoped that was the case.

"Is he from another pack?" Lisa asked.

Zina confirmed. "Owen was part of the Red Moon pack."

Lisa heard that the Red Moon pack was gone. "It's surreal to think that such a big pack just disappeared."

"We've got so many new members!" Zina exclaimed. "The packhouse is packed." She giggled at her choice of words. "But that's just temporary while their dwellings are ready. Wherever you look, there is new construction, and we are building a whole new town in our territory. Everyone is excited."

"I heard that Alpha Edward fell in the Alpha challenge," Lisa said.

"Yes. It was intense!"

"You were there?"

"Mhm... Owen and I had front-row seats. George defeated Alpha Edward like it was nothing." Zina turned back to look at Lisa. "George is Dawn's mate. He is the first commander in the Dark Howlers pack, and he is the Alpha of the Frostcrest pack. I couldn't believe when Dawn told me that she and George are second chance mates..." Zina's voice trailed. "Sorry. You probably don't want to hear about mates, considering what you've been through."

"It's OK," Lisa said. "Whatever happened is behind me."

"That's the spirit, Lisa," Zina said. "The shelter in the Blue River pack is a fantastic place. They have all kinds of programs and classes that will help you bounce back. And who knows, maybe you will get a second chance mate. George and Dawn are happy..."

Lisa stared through the window as Zina's voice faded into the distance. What second chance mate? What happy together? Considering her history of men, it would be best if she stayed single forever.

Lisa hoped that she could leave all this behind her. Even before Tristan, she was not happy. She thought Tony was the one, but it all turned out to be a lie. Even her mother ditched her, and her aunt didn't reach out since Lisa left the Lightclaw pack. Maybe starting over was not a bad idea, but this time as a single she-wolf.

Eventually, Zina realized that Lisa was not listening, and she stopped her chatter.

Zina looked at Owen, and she regretted that they had to cut their date short for this. They started with brunch in a human city and then went sightseeing and shopping, and they were about to end the day with dinner and a movie, but then Caden asked if they could drop Lisa at the shelter in the Blue River pack. As a warrior, Owen couldn't refuse, but that didn't mean Zina was not salty about it.

Ever since they recognized each other as mates, Owen and Zina had one obstacle after another, and then disturbances, and so much work, and she was really looking forward to this day off, damn it!

'We will make up for this,' Owen's voice sounded in Zina's head through the pack link. He noticed that she was pouting. 'Beta Caden said we get the next two days off.'

'Will George allow it? With me away, Dawn will need to help more in the kitchen.'

'Beta Caden will deal with George. As soon as we drop Lisa off at the Blue River pack, we are free, and the next few days are ours and ours only. I booked a hotel with full room service, so we won't need to get out.'

He wiggled his eyebrows, and Zina smiled foolishly. Two days stuck in a hotel room with Owen sounded like heaven.

She lowered her seat. 'Wake me up when we arrive at our destination. I want to sleep through this task which is in the way of me enjoying time with my mate.'

Owen stifled a chuckle. His chamomile-infused mate was fantastic, and he would pull the car to the side of the road and jump on her, only if Lisa was not there.

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### Chapter 985: Tying up loose ends (3)

Stephanie was sitting in her cell in a daze.

She did not remember how she got here. There were hazy memories of her sitting at the lakeshore, but the next memory was of her coming to her senses in the dungeon of the Dark Howlers pack.

Stephanie knew that she waited by the lake with the intention of Talia finding her there, and then Stephanie would tell her to go to the bottom of the lake, just as the instructions said. Stephanie was not sure if she had accomplished her task.

She thought that if Talia didn't show up, no one would know about her intentions, and she wouldn't be in the dungeon. On the other hand, if she succeeded and Talia went there, Stephanie would either be punished or released, depending on how Damon interpreted Stephanie's actions.

Stephanie didn't know how many days had passed as there were no windows, and the only time door opened was when warriors brought food and took empty plates and utensils. She asked them what was going on, but no one said a thing. But even without any news, Stephanie guessed that Damon was fine because if anything happened to him, they would either release her when a new Alpha took over or if the pack fell apart, they would stop bringing food.

The Guardians promised not to harm Damon, and she was confident that things would be cleared out soon. Damon might be greaving now, but he will come around and see that this was for the best.

Stephanie raised her head when the door of her cell opened.

Two warriors appeared.

"Alpha wants to see you," one of them said sternly, and Stephanie pushed herself up.

They didn't handcuff her or restrict her otherwise, and Stephanie thought that was a good thing.

The moment she stepped outside, Stephanie squinted when daylight assaulted her eyes, and she felt a nudge as one of the warriors pushed her right shoulder.

"Move."

"Where to?"

"You will see," he responded and pushed her again.

Stephanie moved in that direction, following a narrow path. After some time, the path was gone, and she walked among bushes and trees, steadily climbing up.

The sound of water churning was clearer as the trees became scarcer.

Stephanie emerged on a clearing speckled with wildflowers such as yellow mahonia, pink hellebores, and purple violas resilient to the cold temperatures of early winter. A river was going through the middle of the colorful clearing, which ended with a waterfall on the opposite end.

"Go on," a warrior said while gesturing toward the right. There was a lonely oak tree, and she could see Damon sitting on the grass with Talia on his lap.

She was focused on Damon and Talia, and only when she was a few steps away she spotted a black rectangle-shaped marble tombstone with a curved top edge. It had engraved, 'In memory of loving parents, Jacob Blake and Violet Blake.'

This was Stephanie's first time coming here. Not because Damon didn't allow her. When he asked her to come with him about a decade ago, she said that this was for family members, and she didn't consider herself as family. At that time, Damon thought Stephanie was modest and grieving, so he didn't push for it. But now he knew better.

Damon and Talia didn't look at Stephanie, and she was not sure what to do.

She turned to the back to see that the warriors were gone, but she could feel their gazes on her back.

Damon thought he had calmed down by now, but now that Stephanie was in his visual range, he wanted to shout at her, to rip her apart, and to break down and cry; all at once. Luckily, Talia's proximity calmed his raging emotions, so he was able to suppress the swell of emotions.

Talia could feel Damon's internal turmoil, and she let him hold her, knowing it helped. He needed to confirm without a doubt that he was not alone and that she won't betray him. Talia opened her bond fully so he could feel her love and devotion, and that he was her everything.

"What do you have to say for yourself?" Damon asked Stephanie.

"About?"

"About what you have done."

Stephanie released a long breath. "Whatever I did, everything I did, was for the sake of this pack."

"Was it?" Damon asked. He placed Talia gently to sit on the grass and stood up to face Stephanie.

Talia's brows came together in worry, but she forced herself to stay on the side and let Damon handle this. He needed to do it himself. Only like that would his demons be pacified.

"How can you claim that it was for the sake of the pack when you betrayed your Alpha and Luna?" Damon asked.

Stephanie pressed her lips into a line. "Betrayed? Aren't you fine?"

"Fine? Is this what you call fine?"

Stephanie's eyes widened when she realized that Damon was pointing at the gravestone.

"That was an accident," Stephanie said with urgency. "Jacob was not supposed to die."

"An accident? Is that what you call what you did?" Damon squeezed through his teeth. "My mother trusted you. She thought of you as her sister. I trusted you. This whole pack trusted you!"

"I know you are upset, but Violet wanted to go to them in order to save the pack. She was the Luna, and it was the right thing to do. I didn't act against her wishes."

"LIES!" Damon roared. "My mother loved her mate, and she loved me, and she would never do anything to harm us. By going to the Guardians willingly, she would betray the mate bond, and that stands above everything else, even above duty toward the pack!" Damon's chest was heaving angrily. "But you wouldn't know that because you never sealed the bond with your fated mate."

"How do you...?" Stephanie's voice trailed.

"You don't need to know from where I've got my information," Damon said to Stephanie dryly. He didn't want to disclose that Talia looked into her memories.

The fact that Beta Gil was not Stephanie's fated mate was concealed well.

Jacob wanted a strong Beta, and everyone knew that mated werewolves were stronger than unmated ones. Also, mated werewolves were less prone to distractions like women and drinking, so Jacob announced to his three close friends that no matter what their abilities were, his Beta would need to be mated because everything else could be learned given enough time and practice.

Gil was the best warrior at the time, but without a mate, someone else would become Jacob's Beta.

Desperate for a quick solution, Gil reached out to Stephanie. They agreed to be chosen mates, so she let him mark her with an excuse of how it was the best thing to do for the pack. Like that, Gil became Beta, and Stephanie was in the packhouse, directly supporting Alpha and Luna, just as she wanted.

Other than that, Talia found out more incriminating information about Stephanie.

Stephanie was working as a spy for the Guardians even before she became Gil's mate. She was aware that the Guardians would want powerful females for breeding and powerful males for experiments and that even humans were involved. Unfortunately, those memories were more than two decades in the past, and Talia couldn't get all the details precisely, but she was confident that Stephanie was involved to some degree.

Damon and Talia hoped to find more evidence in the library of the Guardians, something concrete they could work with. Axel and Cornelia were tasked with finding those, while Damon and Talia focused on dealing with the present issues.

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Chapter 986: Tying up loose ends (4)

"You thought what you were doing was right," Damon said to Stephanie. "Did you tell yourself the same thing when you drugged me and let the Guardians take me, so I become bait for Talia?"

Stephanie's eyes darted to Talia, who was standing behind Damon. "She seems to be fine, and so are you."

"Do you know why?" Damon asked, and he continued before Stephanie responded, "The Guardians are dead. My mate and I killed them all." It was close to the truth.

"Impossible," Stephanie said under her breath. "They have abilities and are powerful, and..."

"And now they are gone," Damon interrupted her. "Did you think I will praise you for the treason you committed? You put me, my mate, and my unborn pup in danger. Combined with what you did to my parents, that's three generations of Alphas. Because of you, Alpha Jacob and Luna Violet are dead. Just as we defeated the Guardians, my parents could have done the same, but they never had a chance."

"I did what was best at the time."

"NO!" Damon shouted. "You did what YOU thought was best at the time! What gives an Omega the right to think she knows better than her Alpha? We are leading this pack as Alpha and Luna for a reason. Your options are to follow us or to leave."

Stephanie lowered her head. "I will leave."

"Too late."

Stephanie looked at Damon warily, and her eyes widened in horror when she felt his Alpha aura pressing on her.

"Killing me won't fix anything!" Stephanie said with panic in her voice.

"I won't kill you. Yet," Damon responded icily. There were fates worse than death, and if Stephanie thought this would be easy, she was gravely mistaken.

"Stephanie of the Dark Howler pack," Damon spoke while using his aura. "I, Damon Blake, the Alpha of the Dark Howler pack, find you guilty of the highest treason against your Alpha and Luna. As a punishment, I banish you from my pack."

Stephanie fell to her knees, clutching her chest as she felt a gap where the pack bond used to be. It was painful, but the truth was that Stephanie was prepared for worse.

"Thank you for showing mercy," she said in a strained voice.

"Mercy?" Damon sneered. "The Dark Howlers pack knows of your betrayal. I will notify all other packs that if anyone else takes you in, they will be going against the Dark Howlers pack. You have half an hour to leave the territory of the Dark Howlers pack, or you will be hunted and killed on sight."

Stephanie looked up at Damon, and her expression changed in slow motion as she realized what was happening. With her being banished and no one taking her in, she was doomed to become a rogue. She will suffer as her wolf turns feral, and there will be nothing she can do about it. And once she becomes a rogue, everyone will set to kill her. Even her own wolf might turn against her.

"They wouldn't hurt you," Stephanie said pleadingly. "If they got their hands on Talia, they would leave us alone. I did it for you. Didn't you say that you always put the pack first? I have been watching you for more than a decade working hard for this pack and everyone in it. Are the lives of thousands less worthy than one female? You know what I did was right. You can find another mate, and you can have other pups, but you can't replace the pack!"

Talia felt that Damon's control was snapping, and she grabbed his hand, which was trembling as the darkness started spreading around him.

It took Damon a second to acknowledge the sparks of their bond where they touched, and he opened his palm to allow their fingers to interlace. He held her firmly as if she was his lifeline, the only thing preventing him from destroying everything in sight... and she was exactly that and so much more.

"A powerful Alpha doesn't choose between his mate and his pack because he will save them all or die trying," Talia said while her silvery eyes made Stephanie unable to breathe. "You forgot that Damon is not alone. He has his warriors and allies, and he has me. You had no right to take away Damon's choice on the matter. Even with you backstabbing him, he still saved us all." Unfortunately, Damon's parents were not so lucky.

Damon was moved by Talia's words that were enforced by the pure love and complete trust she had for him.

"You have twenty-nine minutes, Stephanie," Damon said. "From one minute ago, you are an outsider without authorization to be here. I suggest you start running. If my warriors catch you, they won't grant you a swift death."

Stephanie opened her mouth to say something, but then she closed it.

Damon watched as Stephanie scurried away, and he waved at the warriors who were hiding nearby to go after her with, 'Make sure she leaves the territory.'

Damon turned to the gravestone and stared at it. His legs shook like the fatigue of ten sleepless nights crashed on him, and he fell to his knees.

"Mom, dad, you heard it all. I'm sorry it took me this long to find out who betrayed you. I hope that with this, you can rest in peace."

Talia got down on her knees and hugged Damon tightly.

"It's OK," Talia said softly. "I've got you."

That's what he would normally say to Talia to comfort her, and he wanted to be her rock all the time, but this time she offered comfort, and he took it.

Damon leaned his forehead on her shoulder, and then he nuzzled her neck as he buried his face into her hair while fisting the back of her blouse desperately.

His shoulders shivered, and Talia pretended not to notice he was crying.

Talia could feel Damon's grief and guilt. It was like his parents had died all over again. She guessed that he was replaying in his mind the last moments with his parents and many scenes which happened after that with Stephanie.

He was blaming himself for not seeing it sooner. For not realizing how toxic Stephanie was. He was taking the burden that shouldn't be his to carry, and Talia's heart cried for him.

The strong and willful Alpha looked so soft and fragile at the moment, and Talia was moved that he allowed her to see him like that, vulnerable. It was a sign of ultimate trust, and she loved him even more for it.

After an unknown measure of time, Damon pressed a kiss on her neck. "Thank you, kitten," his lips moved against her skin.

"You are a wonderful man, Damon Blake. I am honored you are my mate, and this pack is blessed to have you as their Alpha."

"Keep talking," Damon said, and Talia could hear he was smiling.

"I would like to talk to your parents," she said, and he loosened his hold on her so she could turn sideways.

"Mr. and Mrs. Blake," Talia started officially. "Damon and I are expecting our first pup. I didn't discuss this with Damon yet, but I was hoping that if it's a girl, we will call her Violet, and if it's a boy, it would be Jacob."

Talia turned to Damon. "What do you think?"

Damon glanced at the gravestone briefly, and then he looked at Talia seriously. "Now that you said it in front of my parents, I would be an ass if I objected."

Talia's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "You don't like it?"

Damon broke into a bright smile. "I love it."

"You do?"

"I do." He loved everything about her, and he couldn't wait to be a father.

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Chapter 987: Changes for the better

A month had passed...

New buildings in the Dark Howlers pack territory were being completed one by one, and newcomers from the Red Moon pack were not newcomers anymore. They were leaving the packhouse and other temporary accommodations as they moved into their new homes, and they all had jobs.



It was an adjustment compared to what they had in the Red Moon pack, but it was not hard to make changes when it was an upgrade.

Some even expressed a desire to open their own businesses with storefronts in Darkbourne.

Damon converted one receiving room on the first floor of the packhouse into an office. It was used exclusively for paperwork related to new buildings, businesses, supplies, and other things related to the recent influx of pack members.

Talia loved to go through the documents, fascinated with all this behind-the-scenes work necessary to make the pack function.

Talia was surprised that Chef Page submitted a request to open a ramen restaurant in Darkbourne. The request itself was not surprising. However, she saw that besides listing his adopted daughter, Jane, as a co-owner and part-time employee, there was one more name on the document, Clarissa.

"Who is Clarissa?" Talia asked James, whose head was barely visible from behind the documents on his desk.

James glanced at the paper in Talia's hand. "She is an Omega who came from the Red Moon pack."

Maya bobbed her head and smiled slyly at Talia. "Yes, yes. It's exactly what you think it is. Malia strikes again!"

"No way!" Talia said in disbelief.

"Yes, way!" Maya responded. "Chef Page found his second chance mate. You should see how adorable they are, always trying to hold hands and touch each other. And they are both so caring toward Jane. If I didn't know better, I would think that Jane is their biological daughter."

"Aww..." Talia's chin was shaking. After hearing how Lulu's mother abandoned them and then Lulu died, Talia wished for Chef Page to be happy. Talia thought that Chef Page bonding with Jane and adopting her were good things, but him finding his second chance mate went beyond Talia's wildest dreams.

"Enough!" Damon grumbled while waving at Maya to go away. He grabbed the document from Talia's hand and put it in front of James. "Expedite this, so it's done as soon as possible."

James cocked an eyebrow at Damon. "It's done. The only thing missing is your signature."



Damon's expression stiffened, and he grabbed a pen that Maya was holding so he could sign it. "There. Done. It's approved."

Talia looked at Damon dreamily. "We should go to their grand opening. I would love to eat ramen."

"Which one? Pork? Chicken?" Damon asked.

Talia licked her lips. "I like their combo that has a bit of everything."

"Let me ask Chef Page to make you ramen and send it here," Damon said without missing a beat.

Talia gaped at him. She didn't mean right now!

But Damon's eyes had already lost focus, and she knew there was no point in arguing.

With Omegas from the Red Moon pack accepting the Dark Howlers pack as their new home, the word spread that Alpha Damon was not Black Demon and that living conditions for Omegas were favorable. Due to this, several additional groups of Omegas decided to join the Dark Howlers pack from the crowded shelters in the Blue River pack.

The pack was growing in numbers, and the borders between the allied packs were fading with each passing day. Damon, Talia, Maddox, Cristian, and Tony collaborated to protect their borders.

The previous packhouse of the Red Moon pack was within the territory of the Lightclaw pack, and Tony was the Alpha in charge of protecting its neutrality.

Ex-Luna Layla accepted Talia's offer, and she was staying in that packhouse with her fated mate, Chester, and a handful of Omegas. Layla reached out to James, inviting him for a visit because his father wanted to meet him in person. James said he was not ready for that step, and they left it at that.

James was now the youngest high-ranking member ever, the first one to assume a position of a Gamma before reaching adulthood. James was pleased with the respect he was getting and happy that Erik, Petra, and Zack were still hanging out with him like equals. James couldn't wait to end his daily duties, so he could join Cornelia for cuddles, snuggles, and sex.

The Gamma couple was staying in a suite on the second floor of the packhouse in the Dark Howlers pack, and they were planning to transform an adjacent room into a nursery.

Damon and Talia made several visits to the Midnight Guardians pack to verify things were going well and to give Axel a break from Alpha duties so he could be with his mate and kids.

Per Valerian's request, Axel didn't reveal to his parents that Valerian was alive and recovering in the Dark Howlers pack.

Axel was keeping an eye on Sophia and Isaac as he suspected that they aided in kidnapping Yasmin and the twins and delivering them to the Guardians. However, the ex-Alpha couple denied any involvement, and Talia refused to deal with them, saying that they were Axel's problem. She didn't want to interact with Sophia and Isaac.

Before the fight with the Guardians, Cornelia and Amelia were close to figuring out how to open the portal. When Edgar (aka the portal expert) joined them, they successfully connected the Silver Flame Coven in the witches' realm to the castle that belonged to the Guardians, now officially named the Silver Flame Castle.

Evanora and Edgar spent most of their time in the Silver Flame Castle, and they made a few short trips for Evanora to experience life in human cities.

Declyn and a few other Guardians were around, mostly observing the changes without interfering. Since Axel and Evanora didn't find conclusive proof that the Guardians were involved in experimenting with people with abilities, Talia suspected that the lingering Guardians hid the evidence. However, without proof, Talia didn't want to spill more blood, and Evanora agreed that witches would be keeping an eye on them.

About fifty witches from the Silver Flame Coven volunteered to stay in the Silver Flame Castle and participate in restoring the balance to nature.

Everyone was busy.

Damon and Talia spent most of their free time bonding and planning for their baby's arrival. Damon's old room was devoid of furniture, with a fresh coat of pale green paint, and they were discussing ideas on how to decorate the nursery. Talia's stomach was showing a bit, and Damon was super excited.

Damon used to run his hand through her hair a lot, but now his hands would often find their way to her stomach and stay there. Talia thought how he was adorable.

Every few days, Damon and Talia went on a rogue-hunting mission while using Janine.

Talia would focus on Janine as a destination and teleport there with Damon. As expected, they would end up in another lair full of rogues, and Damon and Talia would take them out with ease while "accidentally" allowing Janine to escape.

Janine was not capable of surviving on her own, and during her time with Tristan, she learned of many locations where rogues were hiding. Talia could extract that information from Janine's mind, but there was no guarantee that rogues would be present in that hideout, so they let Janine lead them there.

That was Talia's idea, and Damon loved seeing this devious side of his kitten.

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### Chapter 988: Finding Olivia (1)

As Talia's public Luna ceremony was approaching, Mindy, Maya, Trisha, Cornelia, Amelia, Kalina, and Michelle were official party organizers for the upcoming party of the century.

Seven females divided work among themselves, determined to make it massive, lavish, and worthy of the strongest Alpha couple that ever existed in the history of werewolves. It was a big deal.

Tatiana didn't allow her growing stomach to make her a spectator. She was THE designer for Talia's wedding gown and her bridesmaids' dresses. To Maddox's irritation, Tatiana's assistant (aka Mario) was supervising outfits the males will wear for the ceremony, which meant that the pesky pink-loving pipsqueak was spending a lot of time with his strawberry-infused Goddess.

Mindy was the overall supervisor of preparations, and other females had their tasks assigned.

Maya was in charge of invitations.

Talia looked at the list of people who RSVP'd and then at the list of people who were yet to respond, and Maya noticed Talia's frown deepening.

"Is something wrong?" Maya asked.

"Olivia," Talia responded. She couldn't find her long-lost friend on the list at all.

Damon told Talia that they located Olivia in the Shadowbite pack and that Maya and Caden would handle it, but Talia didn't hear any updates.

Maya's eyes shifted as she avoided Talia's gaze.

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

"Caden and Caleb were not successful in contacting her," Maya said.

"Is she not there? Or is she ill?" Or dead? Talia didn't dare to ask this last question aloud.

Maya puffed her cheeks. "That's the Shadowbite pack. They are not kind to outsiders. If she is a male, things would be different."

Talia cocked an eyebrow suspiciously. "How different?"

"You know how the Red Moon pack was horrible to Omegas?" Maya asked, and when Talia nodded, Maya continued, "Well, the Shadowbite pack is worse. They treat females as trash."

Talia stood up, and Maya grabbed her hand with, "Where are you going?"

"To talk to Damon." She could use their mind link, but Talia wanted to do this face-to-face.

"Can you let it go?" Damon was the one who told Maya not to talk about this with Talia because he didn't want to upset her.

"How can I?" Talia asked and pried her hand out of Maya's hold. "If you found out that your friend was being mistreated, would you let it go?"

"You don't know if she is mistreated," Maya said right away.

"If that's the case, the Shadowbite pack has nothing to fear."

"Are you going to start a war over one female?" Maya asked, and she shrunk when she realized her question hit a nerve.

"Of course not," Talia responded dryly. "How could the life of one female compare to the whole pack?"

"That's not what I meant!" Maya shouted, but it was too late. Talia had already left the room, and Maya had a bad feeling about this.

Maya's eyes lost focus for a moment as she mind-linked Damon. 'Talia is heading your way. She asked about Olivia, and when I didn't tell her, she decided to talk to you.'

Maya could hear Damon groan in frustration, and she was glad he didn't ask more questions.

Talia found Damon on the training grounds, talking to his Generals about the latest changes in training. As of recently, the Dark Howlers pack was something like a training center for warriors of allied packs, and they had units visiting from the Midnight Guardians pack, the Blue River pack, the Spring Leaf pack, and the Lightclaw pack.

Damon turned to see Talia walking toward him with Keith and Arya two steps behind her. Those two were like Talia's shadows. A bit annoying and borderline creepy, but reliable.

"Kitten," Damon greeted her with a smile, and he was glad that she didn't pull back when he kissed her forehead because he could feel her mood that ominously prickled his skin.

The Generals greeted Talia with a bow, and then they made themselves scarce.

"What brings you here?" Damon asked.

"Olivia."

"What about her?"

"Did you know that Shadowbite pack is not allowing..." Talia released a sharp breath. "Of course, you knew. Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't want you to be upset."

"I am upset already, so out with it."

Damon gave up. "We tried to reach out to them diplomatically, and they shut us out. Her father is now in the Lightclaw pack, and even he said that he didn't talk with Olivia in years."

Talia frowned. "How is that possible?"

"Kitten," Damon said seriously. "When mates recognize each other, the female goes with the male and leaves her old identity behind. They live together, and he will provide for her, but that doesn't guarantee she will be treated as his equal. Right now, Olivia belongs to the Shadowbite pack with her mate, and we have no right to interfere."

Talia understood that, but... "Did Caden see her?"

Damon shook his head. "Even this information was gained after negotiations. They don't care that I'm Alpha Damon and why our warriors went to meet with Olivia."

"They don't care about you?"

Damon looked at Talia helplessly. She was so innocent and unspoiled that he wanted to put her under a glass bell so that nothing would corrupt her. "My word is the law here, but every pack controls their own territory, and if we force our way in, it's considered a declaration of war. Every pack is different, and we shouldn't force on others our definition of what's right."

Talia pursed her lips. She knew that just because they were powerful, that didn't mean they could boss around others. Wouldn't that make them oppressors? They would be worse than Alpha Edward and his cronies.

"I don't care about their pack," Talia said. "I only care about Olivia. She was my only friend while I was in the Red Moon pack, and she made my life there bearable. As a girl hiding in the attic, there was nothing I could do, but now I am Alpha Natalia, your Luna. Surely, I can at least check on my friend."

With this, Damon confirmed that Talia wouldn't let this go. "What's your plan?"

Talia smiled a little. "I want to see her and extend the invitation for her to attend my Luna ceremony. Her mate will also be invited. If she says she doesn't want to come, that's fine."

"What if she wants to come and her Alpha doesn't allow it?"

"That's ridiculous," Talia snapped. "They might be closed off, but he can't tell their people if they can attend a party."

"He can," Damon deadpanned. "Alpha can close the borders and prevent anyone from going in and out, and he doesn't need to provide a reason. His territory, his rules. He could even detain us, and if we don't cooperate, it will be war."

"We can go there without disturbing their borders. No one will know," Talia said while giving Damon a meaningful look, and he knew she was talking about teleporting there.

Damon rubbed his face with force. She could pinpoint Olivia as the destination, but there was no way to know if they would end up in a dense forest, in the middle of the training ground, or in Olivia's bathroom (while she was using it). Damon could see this going wrong in so many ways!

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## Chapter 989: Finding Olivia (2)

Damon could see that Talia was set on visiting her friend. Talia said she wanted to ensure that Olivia was alright, but what if she wasn't? What if Talia sees things that will upset her? And also... "Let's say we go to the Shadowbite pack, and their Alpha welcomes us. He might even allow Olivia to come to your Luna ceremony. What if he punishes her when she returns?"

"Will he do that?"

"It is a possibility." A strong one. Alpha of the Shadowbite pack might be helpless in front of Damon and Talia, but he will unload his pent-up resentment on the Omega in question.

Talia looked at Damon sadly. "I know your words are reasonable, but you are only making me more worried. I understand that Olivia has another life now. My life changed also, but that doesn't mean I will forget about people who were kind to me." Talia released a long breath. "I won't go there without you. But I am asking you to reconsider. I have this nagging feeling that I should see Olivia and that if I don't, I will regret it. Can we just check on her? Please?"

Damon pushed an unruly lock of hair behind Talia's ear. "Was I ever able to say no to you, kitten?"

"You are not going without us," Keith said from the side, and he didn't flinch when he saw that both Damon and Talia were frowning at him. "This is about Luna's safety. After we went there, the Shadowbite pack was alerted of our intention. It would be foolish of them to think we gave up. I am confident that their security is tightened and that they are keeping a close eye on that female."

Arya nodded in agreement with Keith's words, and Damon's frown eased.

"What do you suggest?" Damon asked Keith, who quickly came up with a plan.

"We form a unit and ask witches to teleport us close to their border." He didn't want to leave Talia from his visual range, but he never saw her teleporting more than one extra person, and asking her to take both him and Arya would be a stretch. "We all have scent-concealing herbs and will lay low. The two of you can proceed with your plan, but if anything is amiss, mind-link us, and we will charge in." Keith lifted his chin smugly, obviously proud of his plan.

"A unit?" Talia asked. "That won't be necessary. We will be there only a minute regardless of Olivia's response."

Damon was about to protest when Talia added through their mind-link, only for Damon to hear, 'And let's imagine they spot us and try to capture us. Will you play along with that charade? Having other people around only means we won't be free to use our abilities because we don't want to harm our people.'

Damon smiled a little, 'Since when are you so reckless?'

Talia's smile matched Damon's. 'Since I'm hanging out with you.'

Keith's eyes darted from Talia to Damon, who stood facing each other and smiling and holding hands, and... Keith's expression fell when he realized that the wind picking up was not normal.

"WAIT!" Keith shouted, but the electric tornado lasted only a second before it was over. Damon and Talia vanished.

"FUCK THIS!" Keith shouted in frustration. "I QUIT!"

"What do you mean, you quit?" Arya asked.

"THIS! THIS!" Keith was pointing at the spot where Talia and Damon had been standing a few seconds ago. "How are we supposed to protect her when she goes who-knows-where without us? I would rather babysit a flock of falcons!"

Arya looked at Keith helplessly. She was also vexed that Talia just disappeared on them (literally), but there was nothing they could do about it. And did Keith say he was babysitting Talia? If Damon heard that, Keith would be punished. Talia might be their Luna, but she was also the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack. The rumors were that Talia was the most powerful Alpha in existence. Keith's insinuation that he was babysitting Talia could be interpreted as a claim that he was more powerful than Talia. Blasphemy.

"Trust in our Luna," Arya said. "She is with the Alpha. He will keep her safe."

Keith closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths to calm his emotions. "You are right. While our Alpha and Luna are reckless, how about we go to Darkbourne and grab an ice cream?"

Arya wanted the ice cream, but... "Shouldn't we notify Beta and Gamma about where our Alpha and Luna went? If things escalate, someone will need to do damage control."

...

~ the Shadowbite pack ~

A gust of wind subsided, and Talia squinted at their surroundings as the dust settled.

They were in the forest, next to a single-story cabin.

'CLACK!'

Talia turned just in time to see heavy shutters closing quickly, and she glanced at Damon.

'A female closed it,' Damon said. 'I didn't see the face, but fingers were thin, and it gave me that feeling.'



Talia didn't doubt Damon. She closed her eyes to sense the surroundings. There was no one in the proximity, but she confirmed there was one person inside the house. Who could it be if not Olivia? Talia was excited.

'KNOCK-KNOCK'

Talia knocked on the window shutters that had closed less than a minute ago.

"Olivia?" Talia called.

No sound was heard, and Talia looked at Damon questionably.

"Maybe we should try the door," he said with a straight face.

Talia circled the cabin while ignoring Damon's chuckles that followed her.

Talia knocked on the door several times, and Damon took a few steps back, thinking that maybe his presence was scaring the female.

Talia knocked a few more times, and she was on the verge just opening the door when it creaked ajar, just enough for an eye to peek through the gap.

"Olivia?" Talia called.

The female frowned. "Who are you?"

"Talia."

After a second of hesitation, the door opened enough to reveal a face.

Talia's brows came together in a frown. Her light brown hair was messy, and she looked like she had lost a considerable amount of weight, but that was definitely Olivia. She was wearing worn-out clothes, a t-shirt and jeans, and she had a tan-colored apron.

Talia's heart tightened when she realized that Olivia was looking at her without signs of recognition.

"Don't you remember me? I was an orphan, staying in the attic of the packhouse of the Red Moon pack. You would bring me food and books and teach me how to read and..."

"Talia."

"Yes. Yes," Talia said enthusiastically.

"Why are you here? Is your mate from this pack?"

"No. Can we talk inside?"

Olivia hesitated, and her eyes widened in shock when Damon stood behind Talia. He didn't want to interrupt, but they couldn't stay outside for long without being noticed. Even if no one was physically there, werewolves have very good vision and can spot them from a distance. There was also a possibility that they triggered some security or were within the range of cameras.

Before Damon could say anything, Olivia bowed her head and pulled her shoulders together to protect her neck.

"He won't harm you," Talia said quickly. "This is my mate, Damon. Can we come in?"

Olivia took a step back, silently giving them an OK to enter, but she didn't raise her head.

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