

Alphas Bride 111

Chapter 111 - Fireworks

Talia had no idea how long she cried in Damon's embrace. By the time she calmed down, his designer's silky shirt was messed up with her tears and snot, and the sunset happened a long time ago.

"I'm sorry...", Talia said awkwardly.

She just cried and scary Alpha held her and even comforted her, and she ruined his shirt. That was beyond embarrassing.

She wiped her nose with the back of her palm, unsure where to look. Talia didn't remember when she cried the last time, and now she made a spectacle out of herself.

"There is nothing for you to be sorry about, kitten.", Damon responded while wiping her cheeks with his fingers. He really wanted to kiss those tears away, but he feared that he might freak her out.

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Talia was in distress, and this was not the right time for him to make a move, but it was the right time to clarify a few things.

"I am sorry for not returning when I said I will. The meeting dragged for longer than I expected."

Talia looked up at him. "Meeting?"

"I told you that I have meetings in the afternoon, didn't I? And you assumed that I found myself a woman." Damon pouted. He really felt wronged because this time he didn't fool around, yet Talia thought he did.

Damon never lacked women. Just one look and they would swarm around him. They didn't ask questions or set demands, and they treated his proximity as a privilege. That's how Damon used to live so far.

It's not that staying away from women was difficult. After all, none compared to Talia.

But he didn't know how to treat this delicate girl who was sitting on his lap. She was pure and beautiful and easily frightened, and he didn't want to scare her away.

Damon didn't want to lie to Talia, but if he tells her the truth, she will definitely run away, and he will never find her. Is there some middle? Damon was not sure.

Maybe if he tells her things little by little, she will accept him without being overwhelmed. Yes, that might work.

But that approach will take time, and today, Damon was blindsided.

He assumed that Talia won't be happy because he didn't come as promised, but he never dreamed of the possibility that Talia will leave the festival with that wretched coach who will get his punishment later when Talia is not around. Damon didn't forget.

Damon's brain scrambled a million thoughts a second while trying to find a way to prevent Talia from leaving again like that.

"Talia", Damon called in an official tone. "I know that I didn't do much to deserve your trust, but I promise that I will never lie to you. Next time when you hear something unpleasant, give me a chance to explain. OK?"

"Explain?", Talia repeated. "Are you saying that what I heard are lies?"

Damon exhaled heavily. Of course, those are not lies.

"I can't fix the past, Talia. My promises are only about now and the future."

Talia thought how that makes sense, but... "Why would you do that?"

Damon smiled a little. "Because you are Mrs. Blake."

Talia opened her mouth to say something, but then she closed it. She had no idea what to say to this Devil who was teasing her again. Is there any point to talk? No matter what she says, he will either twist it or dismiss it, so arguing is a waste of energy.

Damon's gaze fell on Talia's lips and for the millionth time, he was thinking about kissing her right there.

He cursed internally. He kissed so many women, and now when it counts, he was not sure what's the right timing.

'When it's right, you will know it...', Damon's wolf spoke in his head.

Damon understood it as 'the timing is NOT right'.

OK. No kissing, but hugging is fine.

Damon tightened his hold on Talia, pulling her to lean on him.

Talia put her hands between them, and he could see the horror in her eyes.

Damon was exasperated. What happened?

They were having a moment, and now she was pushing him away.

"Stop!", Talia squeaked.

"Why?"

"Because I don't want my face to be stuck in snot."

Damon realized that she was talking about his shirt.

In one swift move, Damon pulled the shirt over his head and tossed it on the side.

Talia inhaled sharply the scent of the forest and dark chocolate that overtook her senses.

"There. All better.", Damon said with a grin and wrapped Talia in his embrace.

Talia stiffened.

Damon was naked from the waist up! How can this be better!?

"Damon?", Talia called weakly.

"What?"

Her eyes darted at his exposed chest that was only an inch away from her face. "Can you let me go?"

Damon had no intention of letting her go. "Don't tell me that one flimsy piece of fabric is making a difference. Besides, all my important parts are still covered. I remember applying medicine all over you and I didn't complain. Am I that hideous that you don't want to touch me?"

Talia was speechless. How did he end up flipping this situation to sound like he is the one being bullied?

Should she just give up and lean on him? But that was bold, and she wished that she drank one more beer because then she would probably have the courage to plaster her face on Damon's chest. Unfortunately, that was not the case.

"Of course, you are not hideous.", Talia said in a small voice while trying to explain herself. "It's just that... I never touched a guy like this and I'm not comfortable. Can you let me go, please?"

Damon paused for a moment and then his lips lifted into a smile. Talia said it. She never touched a guy like this... and if she never touched a guy's chest, that means she didn't touch any other part either.

She was absolutely pure and his to spoil, and if she had any idea how much that turned him on, she would never say such a thing.

He really wanted to push her down on the grass and corrupt her in every way possible.

Damon took Talia's hand into his and kissed the inside of her palm.

The kiss was chaste and long, and she felt his hot breath on her palm, and Talia's face was on fire.

Damon inhaled the sweet citrusy scent of freesia while delightful sparks danced on his lips, and he placed her palm on his chest, pressing it with a little force so that she can't pull her hand away.

"There. Now you have touched me. Hold it until you get comfortable."

Talia's eyes were open so wide that they nearly came out of their sockets.

She was utterly flustered.

Talia was sitting on the lap of half-naked Damon and her hand was on his rock-solid chest. His skin was smooth and warm, and she could feel his strong heartbeat under her palm, and if someone told her that she will find herself in this situation, she would call that person a liar.

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'BAM!'

Talia jolted when a loud explosion sounded nearby and she instinctively stuck close to Damon with her fingers clutching his back as the night sky turned fiery red.

Damon chuckled while welcoming this sudden proximity. Talia was glued to him, and he didn't mind, not even a little bit.

Before Talia resumed breathing, another explosion erupted, this one colored the sky golden... and the next one turned it green.

Talia stared at the vibrant night sky, and her lips stretched into a smile.

This was the first time for her to see fireworks in person.

One color followed after another in rapid succession, sometimes several fireworks exploded at the same time, in a pattern Talia couldn't follow, but she loved it very much.

The majestic aerial display was launched from the opposite side of the lake, that was bordering Darkbourne.

Talia was completely lost in the fantastic view of colorful explosions, unaware that she was still sticking to Damon, and the breathtaking experience was enhanced by the reflection on the calm surface of the lake.

"Do you like it?", Damon's voice sounded close to her ear.

"It's beautiful.", Talia breathed.

"It is."

Talia peeled her eyes from the fireworks to look at Damon and she met his icy-blue orbs directed at her.

Damon's face was turning from yellow to green and then red as it reflected the fireworks, and then it hit her... Oh, gosh! Is it possible that he was talking about her, and not about fireworks?

There was a moment of stillness when Talia thought that Damon can see straight into her soul and read all her thoughts and desires. It made her heart beat so wildly that Talia wondered if Damon can hear it over the fireworks.

The way he looked at her made her feel all kinds of funny things in her stomach; it made her feel important, needed, desired, no one ever looked at her that way and she hoped that she never wakes up from this dream.

Talia held her breath as Damon inched closer to her, and then she felt his soft lips pressing on her cheek.

"I'm glad you like it, Talia.", Damon said in a husky voice. He was so close that his lips moved against her skin as he spoke, and then he kissed her again.

Talia closed her eyes and inhaled a shaky breath that filled her system with the scent of the forest and dark chocolate, and she held onto him tightly because she became lightheaded.

If there was a chance that she previously imagined his lips at the top of her head, and on the forehead, this was definitely real, right there, on her cheek... super-close to her lips. Almost there. Almost.

Damon inched away and chuckled when he noticed that Talia's eyes are closed. Even with the fireworks throwing colors on her face, he could see that Talia was beet red.

Damon tapped her nose with his index finger. "Open your eyes, kitten. You don't want to miss the grand finale."

Right on cue, massive explosions sounded and shook Talia's insides as the whole sky was set on fire with vibrant colors, and Talia realized that Damon's grand finale comment was about the fireworks.

Talia bit her lower lip in embarrassment because part of her hoped that the finale he mentioned might be about more kisses, on the lips, maybe.

She let out a long breath and chided herself. Why was she thinking about kissing the Devil?

Chapter 112 - Numb

Today's incident told Damon that he needs to win Talia's heart and her trust because just saying that they are mates won't be enough.

Without feeling the bond, Talia could run away from Damon when she feels threatened, and he will need to assure Talia that he will be there for her no matter what.

How will he accomplish that? Damon had no idea. He decided to ask Caden and Maya for advice tomorrow, but for tonight, this was good progress and the night was still not over.

For Talia, sitting on Damon's lap with his arms around her, came with a sense of safety and belonging, and he managed to make her nervous at the same time. His hold was comforting and warm, yet her insides shivered. It was unbelievable and contradictory.

When Damon asked her earlier that day what she wants as a reward for being the MVP of the tournament, Talia was thinking about a date with him, and this... isn't this kind of a date?

Talia didn't know if this means anything to Damon, but she was confident that she will remember this evening forever.

Damon cradled Talia in his arms, and she leaned on him completely as they enjoyed the fireworks and each other's company in silence.

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"Should we go to the festival?", Damon asked Talia once the fireworks ended.

Talia looked at Damon questionably, and he clarified. "I told you that I want to see the festival with you in the evening, and it's evening, so... Unless you are tired or not in the mood, we can go."

Talia blinked while processing his words. It seems that this date wasn't over yet, but there was a problem... "What about your shirt?" It was ruined with her snot and definitely not wearable. It was some silky material and Talia was not sure if it can be washed at all.

"Is there something wrong with me going like this?", Damon asked innocently.

"Well... no... but...", Talia stumbled over her words. She knew that werewolves don't shy from nudity and that going topless for a guy is not a big deal even if he is human, but this is a family-oriented festival and in a such social setting, he should cover up.

Besides, Damon is attracting attention as-is. If he goes into the town topless, Talia wondered if he will cause a riot.

Everyone would be staring at Damon (and at her if she is close to him). How can they enjoy the festival then?

Seeing that Talia couldn't find the right words to express her thoughts that were completely exposed by her expression, Damon chuckled. "Don't worry, kitten. Of course, I will get something to wear as long as you are willing to go with me." He paused to observe her face. "Are you willing to come with me?"

Talia stared into his eyes that smiled at her and she said, "OK", without realizing it.

Damon tilted his head and Talia understood that she should get up first.

Talia scooted out of his lap before standing up and Damon hissed.

"What's wrong?", Talia asked with urgency when she saw him frowning.

"My legs are numb."

"Oh...", a sound escaped Talia's lips. Well, she was sitting on his lap for a while. No wonder his legs are numb. "I'm sorry."

Seeing Talia's concern, Damon got an idea.

"If you are sorry, help me."

Talia extended her hand toward him, and Damon stared at it like it's a foreign object.

"What's that for?", he asked.

"Uhm... I want to help you get up. Take my hand."

Damon cocked an eyebrow. "I can't feel my legs. Unless you can carry me, there is no point in me getting up."

Talia had to agree with that logic. "So, how can I help?"

"You can massage my legs to improve blood flow.", Damon said matter-of-factly. Seeing that Talia didn't react, he added, "You don't have to. In a few minutes, I will be fine. Waiting a little bit is not a big price to pay in exchange for using me as a cushion all this time."

Talia was not sure if he was joking, but she was aware that she used the big scary Alpha as a cushion to sit on and he comforted her while she ruined his shirt, so it would be normal to help, but... "I don't know how. I never massaged anyone."

Damon couldn't believe that it worked. "Come here." He beckoned her to come down.

"It's mostly my thighs...", he started explaining as Talia got on her knees next to him. "Put your hands on them and apply pressure while making small movements to stimulate blood flow... you can press harder, this feels more like a tickle... yeah... that's good..."

Talia was squeezing his thighs and she had no idea if she was doing it right, but he said that it was good, so she continued.

Talia's hands moved timidly at first, and then with less reservation. She was pressing and kneading, and the delicious sparks of the bond prickled Damon's nerve endings through the fabric of his pants.

Damon wished that she moves her hands just a bit higher because it felt really good.

He was never so turned on. What would happen if she holds onto his shaft? Just the thought of that made him groan.

Talia paused her movements. "Let me know if I'm hurting you."

Damon cleared his throat and gestured to Talia to continue. "I will."

He looked at Talia's earnest expression and exhaled helplessly. They have a long way ahead of them.

Damon wanted to plop backward on the grass and enjoy the experience of Talia's hands on him, but he feared that if he lays back, Talia will see the bulge which will reveal his arousal. That would freak her out. Definitely.

On the bright side, while Damon was in a seated position, Talia's face was close to his and he could observe the smallest movements of her facial muscles. Gorgeous. He could look at her all day and not get bored of it.

Talia noticed that Damon was observing her intently and she felt heat creep up her neck. Ah, she was getting flustered again!

It was just the two of them, on the soft grass, in the darkness, with tall rocks on one side and a lake on another, and the expansive forest encircled everything. Distant sounds from the festival would drift their way with the breeze, and Talia realized that the atmosphere was very intimate.

Talia could literally feel the heat radiating from Damon's body, and she didn't dare look at him, but she knew that his intense gaze was fixed on her.

Talia couldn't believe that with Damon she could lower her guard completely and feel safe, and then there was this tangible anxiousness as she anticipated his next move.

"Is this enough?", Talia asked after some time.

"It will do, for now. Thank you.", he said in a husky voice.

"Don't mention it." Really, don't mention it.

Damon stood up and Talia picked up Cinna (aka the plush toy puppy) and the insulated lunch bag.

She was looking at the beer cans that were left behind her and Keith, but her hands were full.

"Should we pick up the cans so that we don't leave trash?"

Damon frowned at this question. He didn't want to touch anything that was related to Keith.

"I will send someone to clean this up.", Damon said stiffly and then he offered his left hand to Talia. "Let me hold something for you."

Talia gave him the lunch bag and he quickly kept it in his right hand, before extending his left one toward Talia again.

Damon smiled when Talia put her hand in his without a word and their fingers intertwined naturally.

Little by little, she was getting used to him. Holding hands. Hugs. Sleeping together. And soon, there will be more. Much more. He couldn't wait!

They walked for less than a minute when Damon stopped.

"Just a moment", he said and let go of her hand.

Talia watched him go behind a tree and a second later he returned while pulling a dark gray t-shirt over his head.

"Where did that come from?", Talia asked.

"We have stashes of clothes in the territory of the Dark Howlers pack. Anyone who ended up shifting without backup clothes can help himself. If humans see naked people emerging from the forest, they might start a nudist colony here and we don't want that."

Darkbourne is a town of werewolves, and a few humans who live here are mated to werewolves, hence aware of their existence. Having something that will attract a large number of humans into the area is not advisable because the existence of the werewolves is a secret that's keeping them safe, and all werewolves abide by this rule.

Talia looked at him with a small frown. "If you had clothes handy, why were you topless there?" She gestured toward the direction from where they came.

Damon smirked. "How else would you get used to touching me?"

"I didn't get used to touching you.", Talia was quick to respond.

"Of course, only one session won't be enough.", Damon said matter-of-factly. "We will need to practice more."

Talia was speechless. She really didn't know what to say, so she kept quiet.

They resumed walking while holding hands and Damon saw Talia holding the plush puppy with great care. He had to ask, "From where did that toy come from?"

"Keith won it for me at the fair.", Talia responded without thinking.

Damon felt the fire of fury brewing in the depths of his belly. "Did he now?"

Talia didn't notice the change in Damon's mood.

"Yes. At the ring toss. Isn't she cute?" Talia smiled at the toy and rubbed the puppy's head on her cheek. "I didn't have toys growing up. I love how soft she is. Her name is Cinna. That's short for Cinnamon."

Damon's heart cracked when he heard that Talia didn't have toys as a child. He was determined to win for her a bunch of toys at the festival and then he will buy her more.

He loved to see Talia happy, but he couldn't approve an item that came from another man.

Damon glared at the plush puppy while thinking what kind of an accident Cinna will encounter soon.

Chapter 113 - The Summer Solstice Festival (11)

Talia was apprehensive about getting into Darkbourne while holding hands with Damon, but quickly she realized that it was not a big deal.

The streets on the outskirts of Darkbourne were dimly lit, so no one paid attention to one hand-holding couple.

When they emerged to the streets where the festival was held, it was lit up well, but it was packed with people, so Talia and Damon melded with the crowd where many held hands in order to stay with their group.

Also, while they were making their way toward the town square, Talia saw several guys with the same dark gray t-shirt as Damon was wearing. Those were guys who came from the patrol and didn't bother to go home and change.

With Damon suppressing his Alpha aura unless someone took a serious look at him, he was easily mistaken for a regular warrior.

"Let me know if some game or food interests you.", Damon told Talia and she nodded in response.

Damon thought of another thing. "Don't let go of my hand, kitten. But if we get separated, meet me at the clock tower." He really didn't want to risk losing Talia, and he hoped that she won't leave on her own.

Damon and Talia moved from one stall to another, and Talia observed everything with interest.

They visited more than twenty stalls when Damon realized that Talia didn't ask for anything.

He facepalmed. Of course, she didn't ask for anything. Talia is the girl who left the kitchen hungry because she was uncomfortable, and that proved how Talia is used to denying herself not only pleasures but necessities also; Talia would never ask for a thing even if she wants it.

Damon opted to pay attention to Talia's nonverbal signs of interest, but it was hard because he never paid attention to what a woman wanted, and Talia followed after him without trying to slow him down or speed up the pace.

Two stalls later, a man was selling grilled chicken on a stick. Customers could pick one of five sauces that will be lathered over the grilled meat.

Damon perked up when Talia closed her eyes and took a deep breath as a warm smile spread on her lips.

"We will take it.", Damon spoke to the vendor.

"Which one?", the man asked while gesturing toward sauces. His eyes were on the meat that was grilling, and he didn't look at the faces of his customers.

Damon really had no idea which sauce to pick, but he knew that if she asks Talia, she will say that any is fine.

"Two of each."

Talia observed as the vendor neatly wrapped each flavored type into a separate aluminum foil before placing them into a box that had a handle. There was even a small compartment on the bottom of the box that held napkins. Talia was fascinated.

Only when handing the box to Damon, vendor realized. "Alpha! It's an honor."

Damon waved at the man, indicating that he shouldn't fuss about it. "How much for these?"

"They are on the house."

Damon didn't like this. Yes, things in Darkbourne are free for Damon, but he wanted to show Talia that he can provide for her. Damon feared that if he just takes freebies, Talia will think bad of him. After all, if this was any other customer, that vendor would earn money.

Without a word, Damon fished a fifty-dollar bill from his pocket and kept it on the counter of the stall before taking the box with grilled meat.

"Let's find a spot to sit...", Damon said, and Talia tugged his hand to get his attention.

She looked at a group of people who were standing nearby and eating. "I think that this should be eaten on the go."

Damon didn't think about it. If he did, he wouldn't buy so many.

A moment later, he got an idea... "Alright. Let's stand on the side."

Damon opened the box and held it for Talia to pick first.

She took a bite from the chicken skewer that was drenched in a tangy barbecue sauce when she heard Damon saying, "Since my hands are full, you will need to feed me."

Talia chewed in slow motion while wondering what she got herself into this time. But his hands were busy holding her lunchbox and the box with grilled chicken, so it made sense.

She reached to swap sticks with chicken, to offer Damon the one she didn't bite on, and Damon moved the box out of her reach.

"I want to take a bite from that one." Damon gestured with his chin toward the skewer Talia was holding.

Talia hesitated and Damon leaned to bite on the meat while Talia stood and watched in disbelief.

Yes, they ate together (and even fed each other) many times, but standing like this super-close in the crowd and Damon eating from the same skewer was unexpectedly intimate and Talia's heart skipped a beat. Aren't the two of them like a couple? Like a real couple?

Talia saw that Damon had a smidge of the sauce at the corner of his lips and Talia wondered if she was also messy. That was possible.

Her tongue darted left-right to pick up any residue sauce and Damon stared at her.

He really wanted to kiss her thoroughly.

Damon wondered, how is it possible that he is aroused no matter what Talia does? Just being close to her makes him half-hard and he was sure that he was losing his mind.

He knew that it was the mate bond, urging him to get close to Talia, urging him to claim her as his, but he couldn't act on those feelings without freaking out Talia so Damon chanted silently that he needs to wait. They are definitely getting closer and even though this is much slower than he wants things to happen, they are moving in the right direction and that should be enough. It has to be.

One by one, Talia and Damon finished all skewers and neither of them paid attention to the flavors of the sauce or the texture of the meat, because both of them were lost in the soothing feeling of being together that mixed with anticipation of what is to come.

Damon's competitive spirit was at its highest when he saw the ring toss game and he threw a malicious side-glance at the Cinna.

There were several pegs of various lengths, with the tallest one at the front, and shortest at the back.

"What's needed in order to get the biggest toy?", Damon asked the vendor who was at the ring toss game.

"Five out of five, on the furthest pegs...", his voice trailed. "Alpha! You don't need to..."

Damon raised his hand to stop him from talking.

This was about Damon showing his superiority compared to that measly coach who dared to covet Talia, and he didn't need any concessions to achieve that... other than clearing up the long line of people who waited to play the ring toss game.

One glare from Damon made twenty-something people who stood in line to disperse, leaving only the current player sweating bullets, unsure if he should finish his turn or scam right away.

Damon was pleased with this outcome. He gestured toward Cinna while talking to the vendor. "That toy. Is it the biggest one?"

Talia frowned at Damon's question. Cinna was about ten inches tall, and there were obviously bigger toys on the display.

"Oh, no, Alpha.", a female voice came from behind the vendor, and only then Talia and Damon noticed a young woman with a flattering smile on her face.

"That toy looks like it came out of the third level for the prizes, and we have five.", she said while batting her eyelashes at Damon.

Damon groaned internally. Who was this woman and why was she flirty with him in front of Talia?

Damon decided to ignore the woman and focus on the guy. "How much for a round? Give me rings and show us your biggest toys. I want her to pick one." Or all of them.

Damon put his hand on Talia's back and pushed her to stand in front of him, to the obvious disappointment of the woman who was inching closer to Damon with every step while hoping to offer more than just services related to the ring tossing game.

"Really, that's not..." Talia's rejection was interrupted when her eyes landed on a plush toy that was about twice the size of Cinna.

This toy was a wolf with black fur and blue eyes, just like the wolf from her dreams. Talia dreamed of him on the night when she fell asleep in the forest, and she dreamed about that wolf several more times.

He was big and intimidating, but gentle and somehow she knew that he won't hurt her; he was there to protect her.

"Did you see something you like?"

Damon's question made Talia blush. She wanted to deny it, but she ended up nodding.

Damon was elated. Talia likes something and he will get it for her!

Damon leaned closer to Talia and his breath splashed on her ear, "Which one, kitten?"

Talia jolted to look at Damon with panic on her face. Why did he call her kitten? It's one thing if he is teasing her when it's just the two of them, but this was in public. What if someone heard? Sure, he spoke in a low voice, but most of the people around them are werewolves with enhanced hearing.

But Damon's gaze was unwavering and the longer she looked at him, the more anxious she got, so Talia responded, "The wolf."

Chapter 114 - The Summer Solstice Festival (12)

When Talia said that she wants a wolf plushie, Damon glanced at the toys that were hanging on the wooden wall behind the ring toss game.

"I see five of them. You will need to be more specific. Or do you want all of them?"

Talia was quick to shake her head. "Not all. Just the black one."

Damon's eyebrows shoot up when he realized which toy caught her eye. Isn't that almost like mini-him?

But he never showed himself in front of Talia in his wolf form except for that one time in the forest when she was sleeping. Can this be a coincidence? Or did someone tell her about his wolf? Damon decided not to overthink it.

Damon spoke to the vendor who was eagerly waiting to serve his Alpha, "The black wolf. If I throw all five rings on the furthest posts, the toy is ours. Right?"

The vendor confirmed.

Damon took a few seconds to aim, and then all five rings fell neatly on the furthest post, one by one.

Seeing Talia look at him in awe, Damon grinned victoriously.

Eat that, you measly coach!

Ah, this felt more satisfying compared to when he defeated Alpha Roderick who dared to challenge him three times.

In Damon's opinion, the only thing that could make this better would be if the measly coach (aka Keith) was right there, watching his image being completely trampled by Damon's victory with Talia as a witness.

Damon took the wolf plushie from the vendor before handing it to Talia.

"Take good care of him, Talia.", Damon said.

"I will. Thank you.", Talia responded with a dazzling smile, and then she buried her face in the neck of the black wolf plushie while squeezing him in a hug.

Damon's lips twitched.

He really wanted to be that plush toy right now.

Why was Talia always reserved with him, like he has some disease, yet this toy got a full-hug and a face-rub treatment?

"Look, Cinna, this is your brother.", Talia said. "He is bigger, so he will be your big brother, Blackie."

After a moment of surprise, Damon stifled a laugh. Talia sounded like she adopted a child. Well, he can play that game.

"Blackie Blake.", Damon said with finality.

Talia was flustered. First Keith said that he is Cinna's father, and now Damon gave Blackie his last name. Somehow, it all sounded like much more than a kind gesture of gifting a toy.

"His fur is black, so Blackie seemed appropriate..."

"And I won him for you, so he will have my last name." Damon inched closer to Talia and added with a murmur. "And yours, Mrs. Blake."

Talia inhaled sharply.

She would prefer if he stops teasing her with labels like a kitten and Mrs. Blake, but at the same time, it made her feel warm and fuzzy whenever he called her as such, and she didn't want him to stop. Ever.

With their hands getting full, Damon asked for a large bag from the vendor and they kept Talia's lunchbox and two plush toys inside, for Damon to carry.

Talia had difficulty letting go of the wolf toy, but she knew that Damon would keep it safe, and she was already planning to cuddle with Blackie to sleep.

Their next stop was at the stall that sold corn on the cob.

Damon was getting corn for the two of them, and Talia stood one step behind him while thinking how this definitely looks like a date. A real one. Her first one.

"Talia!", a scream came from the side a moment before Zina and Dawn came to greet her.

"We saw you at the game this morning.", Dawn said excitedly. "You looked like a dominatrix with all those guys kneeling in front of you."

Talia had no idea what dominatrix was, but before she could ask for clarification, Zina was talking.

"Congratulations on being the MVP of the tournament! Niiiiice...", Zina sang this last word.

Only then Talia noticed that Dawn and Zina were slightly wobbly, and their gazes were unfocused. It was faint, but even with all the scents mixing in the air, Talia could pick up the alcohol. Well, it's a festival.

"Thanks.", Talia responded. "Where are you two going?"

"We are going to the bonfire to dance.", Dawn responded and pointed at the garland of flowers that was hanging around her neck.

Zina was also pointing at her garlands. She had three of them. "Do you want to join us? Our roommates are already there."

Talia glanced at the back to see that Damon was now paying for the corn.

She was not sure about the dancing, but she definitely wanted to see the bonfire and the ritual where women dance for the Moon Goddess. However, Damon was right there, and she didn't know if he will be willing to go.

Ever since Damon told Talia the story of how unmated girls dance around the bonfire, under the moon, for the Moon Goddess to see and to bless them with good mates, Talia was dreaming of doing the same.

Talia was in a predicament. She didn't want to separate from Damon, and at the same time, she was confident that if Damon shows up among a bunch of unmated women who are looking for a man... that won't end up well.

Can she go with Damon, without him, or should she just give up on going?

"I don't know.", Talia said helplessly.

"Come on.", Dawn urged her. "Every girl should dance for the Moon Goddess at least once. How else will you find your mate?"

Both Dawn and Zina froze and stared behind Talia and Talia knew that Damon was back.

Dawn and Zina were not sure what was more unbelievable... that Damon was there with two corns in his hand, or that he nodded at them in greeting without suffocating them with his presence, or that he stood next to Talia like he belongs there.

"You want to dance for the Moon Goddess?", Damon asked Talia. He had no intention of hiding that he overheard their conversation.

Instead of answering Damon's question, Talia's stomach filled with knots when she saw Dawn and Zina gaping at Damon.

Oh, nooooo... Dawn and Zina now know that Talia was here with Damon! Why didn't she think about the possibility that someone will recognize them?

Talia was carried away by the mood and handholding and she totally forgot about the rumors that will spark from this. And it's only a matter of time before princess Marcy, or Cassie, or many others who are coveting the position of Damon's Luna hear about this.

"We are sorry, Alpha.", Dawn and Zina said in unison and lowered their heads. They were tipsy, but not so much that they didn't realize their mistake. They shouldn't be so casual in front of Damon.

Damon was focused on Talia, like no one else existed. He saw that Talia's mood dropped, and he assumed that it was related to dancing. "I would like to see you dancing around the bonfire."

Dawn and Zina exchanged quick glances. They were not sure what's going on, but Alpha was talking gently to Talia, and they understood that pleasing Talia means they won't be punished for disrespect.

"We will be happy if you join us!", Dawn said to Talia and Zina nodded in agreement.

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Damon found a spot on the side and told Talia, "Dance as much as you want. Whenever you are done, I will be right here."

Zina gave one of her garlands for Talia to wear.

"How did you end up with Alpha?", Dawn asked in a whisper as the three of them moved toward the bonfire that was already encircled by many women who were twirling and swaying in the beat of the music.

Talia's mind stuttered for a moment, and then she got an idea.

"As the MVP of the tournament, I get to spend some time with him. We had a chat and I watched him play a game before he bought corn. It's nothing more than that. Please, don't get strange ideas or you will get me in trouble."

Talia didn't want to say how she was sitting in Damon's lap, and she cried and ruined his shirt and then watched fireworks, and the kisses on the cheek... ah, the kisses! And she would never say that he calls her kitten, or Mrs. Blake, or that they are sharing a bed for the last few nights.

Anyway, it will probably sound like bragging, so Talia thought of using her newly acquired MVP status as a good explanation.

The girls were walking away, but Damon was able to hear them with his Alpha hearing. He frowned.

It seems that Talia didn't want to admit how close the two of them are.

Damon shook his head helplessly. Every woman who got into any kind of contact with him would brag and exaggerate just to make herself sound important, yet Talia made him feel invisible.

Damon was not sure if Talia concealed the nature of their relationship because of his status, or her insecurities, or his past... maybe all of it combined. He refused to believe that it's because she doesn't like him.

Thanks to the mate bond, Damon could sense Talia's emotions and he was aware that her timid heart was his for taking, but he needed to be careful about it, or risk adding another scar on her already bruised soul.

The only thing he was not sure about was how to accomplish such a feat without messing it up.

Chapter 115 - Sketchy Strangers

Talia stared at the bonfire while standing at the edge of an irregular circle made out of dancing women, and she didn't move.

"Come on.", Zina tugged Talia's hand. "There are no rules. Just move while thinking about your perfect man. The Moon Goddess will respond when the timing is right."

Her perfect man? Talia pressed her lips into a line when Damon's image flashed in her mind.

Realistically, Talia knew that Damon was far from perfect, but she also knew that he was doing his best for his pack, and he saved her from the attic, and that had to count for something.

Damon was moody and he loved to tease Talia, but he was also gentle and caring and she saw him working seriously, and he held her when she was crying, and he took her to the amusement park, and he stood up for her when the nutritionist mistreated her, and... there were many things Damon did right.

At the end of the day, Damon was fighting his own battles, just like everyone else, but what made him stand out among all other men was that he never used his position to force Talia into anything against her will. And he smelled nice.

Talia was aware that Damon was off-limits, but if not him, then who? Keith? Pierce? Liam? Her options were rather limited because she didn't interact with many men... if she excludes the soccer players.

After giving it some thought, Talia decided not to think about any man, and to focus on the spectacle in front of her because this was about Talia, and not about a man, even if that man is Alpha Damon.

Dawn was already in the middle of the action, waving her arms and wiggling her hips. It was out of rhythm and comical, but Talia admired the fact that Dawn didn't care. She looked happy. Free.

Talia craved for that freedom where no one will look at her as a reason for bad things happening, where no one will punish her for the things she didn't do, or judge her, look down on her, where she can make her own decisions and won't depend on anyone.

Inhaling deeply, Talia stepped into the crowd of women, raised her arms, and closed her eyes while allowing the music to take her places she never visited before.

Damon's presence didn't go unnoticed, no matter how far he was from the bonfire and how much he suppressed his aura. But lower-ranked females (and males) didn't dare to approach him without permission, and regardless of how much they looked at him, Damon's gaze was fixed on one figure that was swaying in the throng of others.

It was easy for Damon to recognize Talia. She was the picture of elegance, moving at the beat of her own music, glowing brighter than the fire which towered above her.

To Damon, it looked like Talia was the only woman there, dancing only for him to see. Breathtaking.

Damon used every bit of his willpower to resist the intoxicating urge to go there and claim Talia as his in front of everyone to see.

Alpha Maddox's warning was sounding at the back of Damon's mind and Damon knew that he probably shouldn't come to the festival with Talia, because people are watching him and someone will notice Talia, but the Alpha in Damon refused to hide. If he can't protect his Luna, no one can.

Damon didn't realize when it happened, but he decided that Talia will be his Luna and the only thing he still needed to figure out was how he will announce that news to his pack and to Talia.

'Alpha!', the voice of general Ryker sounded in Damon's mind. 'We have a situation on the North-East of Darkbourne.'

Damon frowned. That was close to where he was. 'Where are Betas?'

'Beta Caden is at the West border investigating a group which tried to sneak into our territory, and Beta Maya is on the main road, South entrance to Darkbourne, handling the situation of three individuals who came with fake IDs.'

Damon puffed his cheeks. He knew that this would happen. Every time the Dark Howlers pack is hosting a celebration, there are groups of werewolves that are trying to get in and cause a commotion. That's why they increased security, and Damon knew that if his general is contacting him, it must be important.

Most of the people present in the crowd are werewolves, but it's inevitable that some are humans.

The priority of Damon's warriors is to maintain safety without disrupting the festival because big commotion will be a stain on their competence to secure their own territory, and it also might expose them to humans.

'What's the situation?', Damon asked Ryker through the mind-link.

'We found two werewolves hiding in the forest. They were communicating with someone, and refuse to say with whom, but I suspect they are part of something bigger.'

Damon looked toward the bonfire, and he could see that Talia was enjoying.

He didn't want to interrupt her, but he couldn't leave this issue unattended.

His warriors can't make others talk, but Alpha has his aura that can make others submit and force them to obey.

Damon decided.

'I'm on my way.', Damon told Ryker.

If Talia had a mind-link, Damon would notify her that he will back in a bit, but that was not an option and if he went there, it would cause a commotion.

With no better option available, Damon mind-linked Dawn and Zina, 'Watch over Talia. I will return in a bit.'

He was not sure what to do about the bag he was carrying. If there is an issue where a general requested for Alpha to come, the probability of Damon shifting into his wolf form was high and he didn't want to risk losing or damaging the toy he won for Talia.

Damon glanced at the group of guys who were standing nearby, and he could sense that they are from his pack. "Keep an eye on this bag. It belongs to the MVP of the tournament."

The guys nodded in understanding, and no one dared to ask why would Alpha hold onto a bag for Talia or why they needed to babysit it.

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"What's the situation?", Damon asked general Ryker when he approached the group.

Two men were on the ground, kneeling with their arms behind their heads, surrounded by Ryker and three other warriors.

Ryker lowered his head in respect and responded, "We noticed them acting suspiciously and we followed them into the forest. They were exchanging messages with someone by using this...", Ryker handed a cellphone to Damon and continued, "I contacted Gordon to come and crack the passcode so that we can see the message history. He should be here shortly."

Damon knew that this spells trouble. Why would a werewolf need a cellphone? It's either because they were communicating with someone who doesn't belong to their pack or because the other person is not a werewolf.

Damon told his warriors to step aside, and then he turned toward two men who were kneeling on the ground.

"To which pack you belong?"

They groaned when Damon released his aura to suppress them.

Yes, Gordon (aka the IT wizard) will crack the passcode, but that will take time, and this was faster.

"The Halfcrest pack", one of the guys responded with difficulty.

"You are far away from home.", Damon said. "Why are you here? With whom were you communicating?"

Damon increased his pressure because he didn't have time for idle chit-chat. He wanted to be done with this and to return to his spot. Ideally, he will return before Talia notices his absence.

Two minutes later...

Damon's mind was working a million thoughts a second while thinking about how to deal with the situation.

The captured duo was part of a larger group that had a task to come to Darkbourne and spy on what's going on during the festival.

Damon knew that there is a mastermind behind whatever the perpetrators were up to because the two guys that were captured had spotty knowledge about their accomplices, saying that only the group leader knew how to contact everyone, and whenever they found information of interest, they were to notify their group leader.

They had a task to mingle with locals and find out as much as possible about the current situation in Darkbourne. That was not unusual, Damon was aware that spies are everywhere.

Their leader also told them to keep an eye on a few individuals; Alpha Damon, Beta Caden, Beta Maya, and the mysterious girl with copper-colored hair that was close to Damon (aka Talia).

Damon gritted his teeth while thinking how Cassie and Alpha Richard will pay for this. How dare they put a target on Talia's back!? It was one thing when Maddox told Damon about it earlier that morning, but now that he heard it from some sketchy strangers, Damon felt the urgency to deal with the situation.

Another worrisome thing was that the leader of their group was contemplating getting his hands on Talia.

The guys confessed that they saw Damon with Talia during lunch, but they were not sure if she is the target because she was the MVP of the tournament and other Alphas were also present. However, when they spotted Damon and Talia in the evening, that confirmed Talia is the girl they were looking for.

Damon's heart was racing. If they were following them, doesn't that mean they know that Talia is at the bonfire?

Chapter 116 - The Safety Drill

"We need to go...", Dawn told Talia while tugging on her arm.

Talia was swept away in dancing, and she needed a moment to comprehend that Dawn and Zina were next to her, urging her to leave.

She had no intention of going anywhere without an explanation.

"Where are we going?", Talia asked.

"Alpha mind-linked us.", Zina said in a hushed voice. "Everyone who can't fight needs to move to safe houses. He told us to take you with us."

"What? Why?"

"We don't know why.", Dawn said. "As Omegas, we need to follow orders. There is a security issue, and we can't fight. If we linger and things escalate, we will only be in the way."

Talia looked around and noticed that the number of women dancing reduced visibly. Does that mean the festival is over? What about Damon?

Talia glanced in the direction where Damon was, and she only saw a bag where he used to stand.

"Come on, we need to move.", Zina pulled on Talia's hand. "Don't run. We don't want to alert outsiders. You never know if troublemakers are watching us."

"My bag...", Talia cried while looking behind, in the direction where Damon used to stand.

"Leave things. Safety first.", Dawn said and pushed Talia to move.

Talia moved robotically while anxiousness swelled inside her.

Troublemakers? What if something happens to Damon? What if he gets hurt?

Talia was never in such a situation, and she had no idea what to expect.

"Do these things happen often?", Talia asked.

"Don't worry too much.", Dawn said with a comforting smile. "It's probably nothing."

Talia didn't believe her. "If it's nothing, why do we need to leave?"

"Our Alpha doesn't want to risk anyone's safety. We have these drills regularly. They will investigate and let us know when it's OK to return to our routine."

Talia didn't like this. She didn't like it, not even a little bit.

Why does she need to hide?

Sure, she can't fight, but hiding and waiting for things to settle while Damon and others are risking their lives didn't sound right.

She was imagining a fierce fight and numerous guys jumping on Damon and her heart ached. What if baddies have weapons? What if there are too many of them?

Yes, Dawn and Zina said that it's nothing, but if it's nothing, why would Damon leave that bag behind?

The bag! What if someone takes it?

Blackie and Cinna are there, and the insulated lunch bag that has food and juice and a hundred dollars in ten dollar bills that Stephanie gave her and Talia still didn't get to use any of it.

How can Talia face Stephanie if she loses that bag?

Cinna is her first toy ever and Blackie is a plushie that Damon won for her.

Each and every item in that bag was precious to Talia and she had to get it.

But Talia knew that Zina and Dawn won't let her go back. They were moving through the people on Alpha's orders and Talia used the crowd to give them a slip.

Talia moved to the left to disappear between the people and then she turned and dashed back to get her bag.

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Damon worked swiftly with his warriors. With children, elderly, and non-fighting members out of the way, and many warriors mixed among the people, they could easily identify their own pack members. That didn't guarantee that some of them are not traitors, but it narrowed down the list of suspects significantly.

Damon also reached out to Alpha Maddox, Axel, and other Alphas, asking them to do the same.

In less than one hour, Damon had five people sent to the dungeon to be interrogated.

Damon was pleased to confirm that one of those five people was the main contact to two sketchy characters that general Ryder caught in the forest.

Damon's men knew that the priority will be to find out why those men were at the festival and with whom they worked. Damon was confident that he will get a report as soon as they find something, no later than the next morning.

It was not the first time for the Dark Howlers pack to go through this exercise as it's not uncommon for them to have spies infiltrating and rogues attacking.

This was like a fire drill but with werewolves and on a scale of a whole town.

With that business settled, Damon mind-linked Zina and Dawn to confirm their location and to tell them to stay put, and then he went to go to the safe house, to get Talia.

Dawn and Zina were contemplating escaping the safe house, or maybe escaping the planet, but they had a feeling that they can't escape their Alpha no matter where they go.

He told them to watch over Talia and to take her to the safe house, and they failed. The two of them huddled in the corner and waited for their doom.

Dawn and Zina looked like their souls were about to leave their bodies when Damon appeared at the door. Most of the people left the safe house by now, so it was just the three of them in the room.

Damon glanced around and his face darkened. "Where is she?"

Zina inhaled a shaky breath. "We lost her."

Damon was sure that his ears malfunctioned. "You what?"

"On our way here...", Dawn spoke in a shaky voice. "We lost her. We went back to find her, but it was in vain. Talia disappeared."

Damon told himself not to panic. Even he was unable to find Talia (more than once), so he shouldn't expect that two Omegas could accomplish where he failed.

Actually, Talia escaped under Damon's nose (more than once), and even his own warriors had difficulty finding her. She might be weak and skinny, but Talia is not easy to capture.

It was only about one hour, and his warriors were surrounding the Darkbourne, checking everyone who was entering and leaving the perimeter, via the road or through the forest.

Damon was confident that Talia was still in town. Every person living in Darkbourne belongs to the Dark Howlers pack. If Zina and Dawn lost Talia, there is a chance that someone else offered Talia a place to hide. After all, Talia is the MVP of the tournament, and many would recognize her as such.

Damon was confident that Talia is somewhere of her own free will. If she was in distress, he would feel it through the mate bond.

But, where could she be?

"Where did you lose her? Did she say something?"

Both Dawn and Zina shook their heads at Damon's questions.

A second later, Dawn froze. "The bag."

"What bag?", Damon asked.

"The bag you were holding. Talia wanted to go and get it, but we told her to leave it behind."

Damon chided himself internally. How could he forget about that bag?

He remembered how Talia hugged the wolf plushie, and he also remembered the worn-out Cinderella book that Talia brought with her from the Red Moon pack. Talia didn't have many things, but she cherished each and every one of them.

Damon was confident that Talia would jeopardize her safety for those trinkets. Damn it!

He was running all the way to the clearing where the bonfire was.

The bonfire was subsiding, but there were still a few dozen women dancing, and another group of giggling females joined in the fun.

The festival was ongoing without a hitch.

Damon went to the spot where he left the bag, and he was disappointed to see that the bag was missing.

Did Talia take the bag?

If she did, or if she didn't, that didn't change the fact that Damon was out of clues on where to find Talia.

'Steph? Are you in the packhouse?', Damon mind-linked Stephanie.

'Yes.'

'Did Talia come back from the festival?'

'I don't know. Why?'

'I took her to the bonfire. She wanted to dance for the Moon Goddess. We had a safety drill and I lost her.', Damon explained.

'How can you lose her?'

Damon didn't feel like explaining everything so he went with a short version, 'I told two Omegas to take her to the safe house, but she was not there. Can you check her room?'

'There is no need to check.', Stephanie said.

'You know where she is?'

'No. But you should.'

Damon didn't get it. 'What?'

'Talia is a responsible girl. If she was with you, she wouldn't leave without telling you. Think. Where could she be? Is there any place where you would look for her that she knows about it?'

Damon frowned. What place? The playing fields? Keith's screwing hideout? The ring toss game? The...

And then it hit him.

'Steph! You are brilliant!'

'I know. I know...!', Stephanie grumbled, but Damon could hear that she was smiling.

Damon was back to running, this time toward the town square.

The town square was still packed with people. Music and scents of food filled the air, and the mood was merry.

Damon weaved his way between people and then he stopped to look at a lone figure standing below the clocktower.

Talia was holding the bag in front of her and twisting the handle nervously with both hands. Her eyes would dart over the faces of people just long enough to confirm that it's not Damon, but not too long to attract attention.

She was thinking about the security issue. If it was serious, how come all these people are still having fun like nothing is happening? And she was worried if Dawn and Zina will dislike her for giving them a slip, but Talia was worried the most about Damon.

What if something happened to him? What if he got hurt? What if he forgot about her?

A small breeze caressed Talia's cheeks, bringing to her the familiar scent of the forest and the dark chocolate, and she looked in that direction expectantly.

And there she saw him, standing unmovingly, unbothered by the people around him, looking back at her, like it's just the two of them in the world.

Talia stared as possessed while Damon walked toward her without breaking eye contact until he stood only half a step away from Talia and towered above her.

"Hi, kitten...", he murmured. "I'm sorry I left without notice. Something came up."

Talia's lips lifted into a smile as relief replaced her anxiety. It was Damon. It really was him. He came to find her, just how he said he will.

"You said that if we separate, I should wait here."

Damon nodded faintly. "Thank you for waiting."

"Thank you for coming to get me."

Talia inhaled sharply when Damon engulfed her in his embrace. She didn't expect that, not with all the people milling all around them.

Reluctantly, her hands moved around Damon, and she hugged him back.

"I will always come to get you, kitten, no matter where you are.", Damon whispered close to her ear and Talia smiled a little.

Chapter 117 - The Date Is Not Over

Damon drove to the packhouse without letting go of Talia's hand.

He knew that by hugging Talia in the town square, some people might have seen them, but he didn't want to dwell on it. People will find out about Talia one way or another, and it's not like he was not seen in the company of women.

The only thing that puts Talia in danger is the fact that she is his mate, and at this point, only Maya and Caden know about it. Damon trusts that they will keep that information for themselves until they come up with the right way to announce it to everyone.

As long as his enemies see Talia as any other woman who caught his eye briefly, they won't bother to make a move against her, no matter what Alpha Richard offers them. By the time they figure out that Talia is much more than a temporary entertainment, Damon will figure out something.

He didn't want to lock Talia in her room (or in his) and staying away from her was impossible.

An additional good thing coming out of this is that guys like Keith, Liam, and Pierce will know to stay away from Talia or risk invoking Damon's wrath because no Alpha would share a woman.

Talia was staring at the road ahead blankly and her mind was floating in fuzzy memories from the festival. Damon came to get her, and he hugged her right there. It was a warm reunion that made her heart flutter.

The sight of the packhouse made Talia press her lips into a line. The date was over.

She told herself not to be greedy. It was a wonderful evening, and she should be grateful that Damon brought her to the Dark Howlers pack and Talia got to attend the festival and experience food, music, and games that were filled with laughter and good mood. And she also got two plush toys.

Talia touched the garland of flowers that was around her neck, and she remembered Zina's words, "After you are done dancing for the Moon Goddess, you should give the garland to the man you fancy. It will let him know that you are interested, and he might return your feelings." The way Zina waggled her eyebrows told Talia that she was not talking about emotions, but more about feeling each other out. Well, werewolves are promiscuous.

There was no way Talia would be so bold to give it to Damon. Talia decided to let it dry and preserve it as another memento of the evening, as proof that it really happened.

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Like every time before, when they reached the packhouse, Damon opened the door for Talia and offered her his hand to take.

Talia paused for a moment, knowing that this is the moment before the spell wears off. Damon will help her out of the car and when their hands separate, the magic will be gone.

And there it was. Talia stepped out of the car, and Damon closed the door with his free hand and then he let go of her.

Talia felt the absence of his touch, but she didn't dare to move and ask for more. She already got much more than a girl like her should have.

For Talia, the whole day was wonderful with a few hiccups here and there, but overall, it was one of the best days ever and she was confident that she will remember it forever.

Damon jogged to the back of the car to retrieve from the trunk the bag that contained Blackie, Cinna, and the insulated lunchbox.

He returned to stand next to Talia and when he reached for her hand, Talia inhaled sharply.

"Are you OK?", Damon asked.

"Why... This...", Talia was not sure how to voice her thoughts. Her heart soared when he held her hand again, but... "Is this OK?" Talia glanced at their connected hands.

"Why wouldn't it be?"

"What if someone sees us?", Talia asked in a whisper.

"Is that a problem?"

Talia was flabbergasted. Is it a problem? Yes! A big one! If someone sees them and his wannabe-Lunas find out, Talia will be in trouble. But even with that, Talia gripped his hand tightly, afraid that he will let go.

She knew that when they do it in private, it's fine because no one will find out. And she told herself that no one paid attention to them holding hands and hugging at the festival because it was crowded.

Now, in front of the packhouse, there was no crowd, but no privacy either.

She was not sure what to do.

"Ah!", Talia exclaimed when Damon scooped her with his arms and carried her into the packhouse, princess style.

"Let me down!", Talia said with an urgent whisper.

The main lights were off, but werewolves don't have problems seeing with minimal lighting.

Damon spoke close to her ear, "Everyone is in their rooms. If you are noisy, someone might come out to investigate. If you don't want people to see me carry you as my bride, you should not make noise." And then he kissed her cheek and continued walking up the stairs.

Talia's eyes darted around nervously. Just as Damon said, no one was in the visible range and Talia held her breath and prayed silently that no one comes out of their room to see them.

She relaxed when they reached the third floor, but then she tensed again when Damon walked straight into his room.

Why didn't he let her down in the hallway so that she can go into her room?

Talia gave up on trying to figure out Damon.

He was always unpredictable, but tonight topped the charts.

Damon didn't come to the festival when he said he will. Instead, he showed up while she was with Keith by the lake. At that time, Damon looked ready to commit murder, but then he held her while she cried, and he didn't complain when she ruined his shirt. They walked back to the festival while holding hands, and they ate chicken from the same stick, and he won a black wolf toy (aka Blackie) for her. Talia really had fun up to the point when Damon went to deal with some security issue and she was anxious while waiting for him... but then he came back and hugged her there in the middle of the town square, next to the clock tower, and now he even carried her upstairs.

Talia stumbled when Damon lowered her to stand on the carpet in his bedroom.

Damon's arm wrapped around Talia's waist to stabilize her, and then he touched Talia's cheek with the tips of his fingers.

He really wanted to kiss her thoroughly.

"We should get ready for sleep. Do you want to shower first, or should I?"

Talia took a moment to compose herself before asking, "Is there a need to take turns?"

Damon's eyebrows shoot up. "You want us to shower together?"

Talia nearly choked on her non-existent saliva. "No, no... I meant... I can shower in my room, and you shower here."

"That won't do, Talia.", Damon said seriously. "You see... I sent a message that you should be in the safe house, but you were not willing and ended up lost. Do you know how worried I was? I'm not leaving you out of my sight."

Talia pressed her lips into a line. Somehow, she thought that he will not bring up that point.

"I was not lost. I knew exactly where I was."

Damon's expression stiffened. "That's not the point. I need to know where you are. How else am I going to ensure your safety?"

"But you knew where I was.", Talia retorted.

Damon exhaled helplessly. She had a point, but he had a point also, damn it!

He wanted to scold her for putting herself in danger, but he couldn't. The way she looked at him innocently with her gorgeous, honeyed eyes, only made him want to kiss her and to hold her and...

Damon leaned lower and pressed his lips on her cheek. He took a deep breath, inhaling the addictive sweet citrusy scent of freesia.

"I suggest you shower first.", Damon's low voice splashed on her face, making her hairs stand on ends. He was close. Too close.

Talia blinked rapidly. Did he really think that she will go into his bathroom and undress? She didn't have clean clothes to change into. Or was he thinking that she will come out in a towel? That thought was overwhelming. She needed an exit strategy.

"Kitchen."

Damon straightened his back and looked at Talia in confusion. Was she planning to shower in the kitchen? "What?"

Talia gestured toward the bag that Damon kept on the floor. "There is a lunchbox with food. I need to keep it in the fridge, so it doesn't go bad. Assuming it's still good." Talia mumbled this last part.

Without an icepack, the insulation of the lunchbox can keep the contents chilled for a few hours, but this was the whole day. What if the quiche went bad? Talia was saddened at the thought of food being wasted.

"What do you have inside?", Damon asked curiously.

Talia took a moment to remember. "Two quiches, apples, a juice, and a granola bar."

"Instead of taking it to the fridge, how about, we have a snack?" Damon gestured toward the double French doors that led toward the balcony. "The weather is nice. How about we eat there?"

Talia's eyes widened. It seems that tonight's date was still not over.

Talia swiftly took the lunchbox and draped the garland of flowers, that was around her neck, over the bag, and then she followed Damon to the balcony.

Chapter 118 - Late-night Snack On The Balcony

On the balcony off Damon's bedroom, there was one bistro table and one chaise that was used last time more than a year ago. Luckily, those few Omegas that are allowed on the third floor for cleaning purposes were doing their job well and everything looked like new.

Damon didn't entertain people on the balcony, actually, the whole third floor was off-limits to people other than the Alpha family. On a few occasions when he came to the balcony, it was to clear his head or to drink until his head muddled.

But now he was there with Talia, and he was happy that there was no more furniture because Talia had to sit next to him on the chaise.

Talia opened the lunchbox and took the quiches out. After giving them a careful sniff, she offered one to Damon. "It didn't go bad. Will you tell me about the security issue that happened tonight?"

Instead of accepting her offer of food, Damon moved to lay on the chaise behind Talia's back.

"Feed me and I will tell you."

Talia shook her head at the playful Alpha who wanted to be served, and she broke a piece of quiche with her fingers before putting it into his open mouth.

While chewing, Damon spoke, "I left the festival when I got the message that my warriors found two guys sneaking in the forest nearby. They admitted that there were more of them in the town. It's a protocol that non-fighters leave the perimeter before we make a move to capture the intruders. It reduces the chance of them taking hostages. We found five individuals who were at the festival without proper authorization and they are now in the dungeon being interrogated."

Talia didn't want to know what being interrogated meant. She put another piece into his mouth before asking, "Why were they in the town?"

While thinking about how to answer, Damon reached for the quiche that was in Talia's hand and broke a piece to put in Talia's mouth which she readily opened.

Damon was glad to see that Talia was used to him feeding her. There was no awkwardness, only the pleasant comfort of being together.

Damon didn't want to scare her, so he stuck to a generic response. "It's not the first time we get spies during events. As for what they were looking for, I will know more in the morning." He didn't lie.

Before she could question him further, Damon asked something that was bugging him from that morning. "Did Travis ask you to be the team spirit?"

"No. It was Keith. The girl who was supposed to be the team spirit was unavailable, and I was right there so... it happened."

Damon thought how that makes sense. Keith is the coach, after all.

"But you were there because of Travis." Damon wanted to confirm.

"No. Keith invited me to come on the field." Technically, it was Liam and Pierce, but they only conveyed Keith's message.

Damon felt that he found out something important. "Did you know Keith from before?"

Talia confirmed. "I've met him yesterday at the training center."

"You were at the training center?"

"Maya took me."

"Maya took you.", Damon responded stiffly. He thought that Maya was only behind Talia drinking at the Shifters nightclub, but it seems that Maya did more than that.

"And? How was the training center?"

"It's great.", Talia responded while putting another bite into his mouth. "I really like what you have there. I got to try the treadmill, and I met not only Keith, but Lulu, Sandy, Pierce, Liam, and Caleb. They are soccer players, Sandy is the goalie. Lulu's father was the one who worked at the ramen stand..."

Talia stopped talking when Damon put a bite of quiche in her mouth.

Damon was not interested in hearing about Sandy or Lulu. He just got three more guys on his radar. Pierce, Liam, and Caleb. Soccer players. That means those three were in the bunch of sweaty scoundrels who dared to touch Talia's hand with their dirty hands and sagging lips.

"Tell me more about your morning. I saw what happened on the field. What did you do during breaks? Did someone bully you?", Damon continued probing with the intention to find out who all dared to get into a touching distance with Talia.

"It was a bit overwhelming.", Talia admitted. "I am not used to being so close to people. Hand holding was uncomfortable but when I saw that they really believe it will bring them good luck, I told myself that it's not a big deal. If I grew like a normal girl, I would be fine with holding hands..."

Damon's heart cracked. It was easy to forget that Talia grew up alone, hiding in the attic, in the second biggest pack of werewolves.

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Damon reached to hold Talia's hand and she stopped talking as their fingers intertwined naturally, like they belong together.

"Is this making you uncomfortable?", Damon asked.

"No.", Talia admitted.

Damon smiled. "Good. I am aware that my actions sometimes push you out of your comfort zone, but I hope you will let me know if I push it too much."

A wave of warmth swelled from within Talia and she had to ask, "Why?"

Damon didn't get it. "Why, what?"

Talia inhaled a choppy breath before asking, "Why are you so nice to me?"

Considering his looks, position, and reputation, Talia was aware that Damon can have any woman he wants without trying. She knew that what she heard during the parade was the truth, and it's not just that. Everyone told her that Alphas are sleeping around, Damon included.

Talia guessed that Damon could easily pick a woman and engage in carnal activities until morning, yet he spent time with her without doing anything inappropriate. Far from it. Damon was considerate and kind and Talia enjoyed it very much.

She didn't want this spell to break, but she was also aware of how what Damon did with her doesn't fit his character, and Talia was questioning his motives. If it's one day or two, she would think that it's some form of charity, but it was ten days already and the more Damon's kindness lasted, the more Talia was getting wary of him. What does he want from her? The only thing Talia had was her body, and she didn't believe that Damon would be attracted to her because there were many she-wolves that were more alluring.

Talia's question caught Damon by surprise. Why is he nice to her? How should he answer that question?

Damon pushed himself into a seated position, putting them at the same eye level.

He liked that Talia noticed how she was getting special treatment.

Unfortunately for Damon (and Talia), even though hundreds of women experienced Damon deep inside their vaginal cavity, Damon was an absolute novice in ways of romancing a woman.

Damon would always speak his mind because he didn't care if he hurts the feelings of the other party, but with Talia, it was different. What if he scares Talia and she runs away?

Instead of answering Talia's question, Damon decided to probe the situation.

"What are you hoping to hear, kitten?"

Talia hoped that Damon won't notice how much her insides trembled with anxiety. "The truth."

"Will you believe me if I tell you that I want you to be my Luna?", Damon asked without missing a beat.

Talia's eyes widened in shock and a second later, she frowned a little, convinced that he was teasing her. With so many promising Luna candidates, why would he pick her?

There. She finally gathered the courage to ask the question that was burning her for some time, and he ended up spouting nonsense. She should have known. All this was a game for him.

Damon could feel Talia's disappointment, but he didn't know how to fix it. "I don't think you will believe me, no matter what I say."

Talia let out a long breath and lowered her head, knowing that he was right.

She chided herself. Why did she ask that question?

If he said something nice, she wouldn't believe him, and if he said something nasty, the mood would be ruined. But no matter what he said, she already ruined the mood.

Was she so used to being miserable, that she couldn't accept these Band-Aids of happiness that Damon provided?

Damon touched Talia's chin, making her look at him.

"Don't give up on us, kitten. I said that I can't convince you with words, but that doesn't mean it's hopeless."

"What do you mean?", Talia breathed while wondering if she heard him right. It almost sounded like they are a couple. A real one. This whole evening was just unbelievable. Or maybe she drank much more beer than she thought, and she passed out at the lake next to Keith, and all this is just a drunken mish-mash happening in her head.

"I will show you.", Damon said. "I want you to stick close to me and keep your eyes open. Watch me carefully and every day you will reveal more of you why I'm nice to you until eventually, you get answers to all of your questions. How does that sound?"

Talia's brows furrowed. How did that sound? Horrible! Talia spending more time with Damon sounded like a recipe for disaster. It sounded like a massive heartbreak that would make her crippled for life.

But she found herself unable to say 'no' to Damon.

He was unstable and unpredictable and sometimes scary, but against all reason, Talia fell for him, and she was like a moth that couldn't resist his flame.

Was it because his deep voice made her insides tremble? Or because his icy-blue eyes were full of sincerity and definitely not icy? Or because she was addicted to his scent? Or because of this sense of security that enveloped her, against all reason, whenever Damon was close?

"OK.", she breathed, and then she put another piece of quiche in his mouth.

Chapter 119 - The Blessed Garland

When Damon and Talia returned to the room, Talia kept the now empty insulated lunchbox on the side and Damon watched with interest as Talia put Blackie and Cinna on his bed.

Based on Talia's previous experience, she guessed that Damon is in his cuddly phase and he will make her sleep in his bed, so she was preparing for it, starting with her two plush toys.

If her guess was wrong, she was ready to go across the hall, into her room.

Damon frowned at the two toys that were on his bed. Blackie was fine, but why the hell was that Keith-related mongrel (aka Cinna) on his bed?

His mind exploded. Does this mean that Talia will sleep in his bed without him pulling any tricks? Well, that's progress.

Damon reminded himself not to comment on it. Other than proving to Talia that she is important to him, he also had a mission to make her open up and admit her feelings.

Thanks to the mate bond, Damon knew that Talia was into him. At first, he thought that those are his feelings, but now he was confident that they are Talia's emotions. She likes him. She likes him very much. However, due to her insecurities, Talia sees herself as inferior and there was no way that she will act on that attraction. That combined with her inexperience and shyness meant that Damon needed to step up his game, but he was not sure if he can do it without doing too much and too fast and as a result, scaring Talia.

Damon remembered Caden's words, Talia can feel the pull of the mate bond. Not strongly like Damon, but she can feel it. And that's why she is still in the packhouse. She can't leave him. As long as he doesn't mess up big time, Talia will stay with him.

Damon noticed that Talia was holding onto the garland made out of flowers and looking around.

"Do you need something?", Damon asked.

"I would like to keep it properly. Sofa is not a good place because the flowers might stain it." She was thinking that if there is no good spot here, she would keep it in her room.

Her eyes stopped on the side table that was next to the open balcony door, and she moved in that direction.

Damon was quick to step on the right, blocking her path.

"Is that the garland you had around your neck while dancing for the Moon Goddess?", Damon asked.

Talia responded with a nod.

"What will you do with it?", Damon continued probing.

"I want to let it dry. The open door will provide necessary airflow so that flowers don't go bad. If I apply hairspray on it, it can be preserved for a long time."

"Preserve? Shouldn't you give it to a guy you like?"

Talia's breath hitched and she quickly lowered her head, fearing that Damon will be able to read in her expression things that should never be revealed.

"Talia?", Damon called.

"Yes?", Talia responded without looking at him. She could see his legs moving closer, stopping only a few inches from her.

Reluctantly, Talia looked up and when she met his piercing gaze, her heart skipped a beat.

Damon smiled a little. "I watched as you danced. It was beautiful. Did you know that was for the Moon Goddess to bless your love life? You are supposed to give that garland to a guy you like, and the Moon Goddess will increase chances that the guy will respond favorably."

Did she know about that? Of course, she did.

But the man in front of her was Damon, Alpha of the Dark Howlers pack, the guy she likes, and there was no way that she will tell him that.

Talia inhaled in slow motion until her lungs were filled to the brim with air before responding, "I don't have a guy I like who would return my feelings."

Damon felt like facepalming. What kind of nonsense answer was that?

Damon could feel her emotions through the mate bond, and he knew very well how his proximity impacts her.

"How about you give it to me?"

Talia jolted. "What?"

"You said that you don't have a guy to whom you would give the garland, and I didn't get any so... how about you give that garland to me?"

Talia swallowed a mouthful of air. "This should be given to a guy I like."

Damon's patience was cracking. "Do you have a guy you like more than me?"

She didn't want to lie, but how can she tell him the truth? She will only make a fool of herself and probably open up for more heartbreak.

Seeing that Talia had no intention to answer his question, Damon held Talia's wrists gently and lifted her hands up, guiding them to place the garland above his head, and then to slide it lower until it was settled around his neck.

"Can I keep it?", Damon asked, and Talia nodded in response, her hands still rested on his shoulders even though he released her wrists.

Damon's fingers caressed delicate blooms of the garland, and Talia's eyes followed those small movements like she was fearing that she will miss something important if she blinks.

"Thank you. This is my first time to get a garland that was blessed by the Moon Goddess."

Talia didn't believe him. "Really?"

Damon confirmed. "This is my first one."

He didn't lie. The first few years after he came of age and girls would give him garlands, Damon was a greenhorn Alpha, determined not to tie himself to any woman, so he just rejected them. After that, garlands stopped coming, because no woman was bold enough to attempt where all others failed. In addition to that, Damon was not at the bonfire because he was busy doing things he didn't want Talia to find out.

"I experienced many first with you, kitten."

"You did?"

In slow motion, Damon lowered his head and kissed her cheek. It was a gentle long press, without any tongue or moisture. Just softness of lips on skin. And then he kissed her again, this time a bit closer to her lips.

"Thank you for the garland. I will cherish it." He murmured and she felt his lips on her cheek again, before he asked, "Will you help me preserve the flowers?"

"Yes", Talia responded in a whisper.

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Damon moved away, and Talia opened her eyes only to see his icy-blue eyes locked on her with intensity that made her dizzy. He was close, very close.

"You gave me these flowers, yet I didn't give you anything in return.", Damon said.

"You gave me Blackie.", Talia reminded him. And these kisses and many moments I will cherish forever.

Damon's thumb traced her lower lip and he swallowed hard. "That's not enough, Talia. Tell me what you want. Anything. I will make it happen."

"You already gave me more than I ever dreamed of.", Talia said honestly.

"Don't be silly. You deserve so much more."

He really wanted to kiss her.

"I really want to kiss you, but..." He licked his lips nervously. "I fear that you won't like it. I fear that you will reject me. Tell me, kitten... can I kiss you?"

Talia stared at him while wondering if her ears were playing tricks on her.

Did Damon just say what she thought he said?

A kiss?

At that moment, Talia was struck with a realization of how much she hated herself.

She hated the girl who was always running away and hiding. She hated the girl who was observing others from the sidelines and longing for normalcy. She hated the feeling of inferiority and being invisible. Bullies, injustice, hunger, weakness, helplessness... Talia hated it all.

The only thing she wanted was to be happy.

Talia didn't believe in happily ever after. The only thing certain in life was that everything will pass, good and bad. It's a never-ending cycle and just how she got out of that attic and out of the reach of Anna and Marcy, this happiness will also subside and be replaced with something else.

Talia wondered, is she so afraid of life that she will rather refuse a brief moment of happiness because she doesn't want to be sad when it comes to an end?

And there was Damon. An unstable Alpha who somehow got a residence in her heart, asking her if he can kiss her.

Damon is tall and handsome, and his icy-blue eyes were full of emotions and there was some anxiety as well. Was he afraid of rejection? Talia was not sure. But she knew that if he really wanted to kiss her and she passed on this chance, she would regret it for the rest of her life.

Damon watched in silence as Talia closed her eyes while lifting her head toward him, like a sunflower who was searching for the sun.

The whole world stilled.

A million butterflies ran rampant in Damon's stomach, and he was not sure if those were his emotions or Talia's, but he knew that he was a nervous wreck.

Damn it! He kissed girls a million times before, and now when it counts he was so anxious that he was at risk of passing out.

Chapter 120 - The Kiss

Damon cupped Talia's cheeks in his palms and took a moment to confirm her lack of resistance which told him that she was willing.

He wanted to taste her from the moment they touched for the first time in the kitchen of the Red Moon pack. Damon still remembered that initial shock when he sensed the fantastic sparks of the mate bond for the first time and he wondered how it will feel when they kiss.

Well, here it goes.

Their lips connected, and Damon's insides jolted when delicious sparks shook his system like never before. This was different. Normally, sparks would start from the point that touched Talia, but this electrical flurry was ignited in the middle of his chest, awakening every cell in his body, and removing from his mind anything that's not related to Talia.

Her lips were softer than he expected; warm and velvety and he struggled to keep the kiss gentle and not devour her right there because he didn't want to act like a savage.

Talia subconsciously gripped Damon's shoulders to steady herself. She was not aware that her hands were there since she put the garland on him.

Talia relished the feeling of Damon's lips pressing against hers, and she was trying to commit every fraction of that experience into her memory.

His proximity. His scent. The way his arms held her in place firmly, but without much force.

Her first kiss. Her first real kiss. And it was with Damon!

It was a chaste kiss without tongue or teeth, but it still made her dizzy.

Damon inched a fraction and his breath splashed against her lips, "Breathe, kitten. Through your nose."

Talia's eyes snapped open, and she inhaled sharply. She really forgot to breathe.

But, why was Damon still so close? Isn't the kiss over?

Damon let out a low chuckle at the sight of her flushed face. His eyes were full of joy and there was something predatory in there as well.

His arms circled around Talia as he pulled her closer, and the moment her body slammed against his, Damon dove for another kiss.

This kiss had more urgency in it, showing how much he was waiting for this.

Ten days.

It's been ten endless days since Talia came to the Dark Howlers pack. During that time, Damon watched Talia sleep, smile, eat, talk, pout, and no matter what she did, he always wanted to get closer, close enough to touch her and to taste her, imagining how it will be, and he was not disappointed.

She tasted better than what he imagined.

Sweet, inviting, welcoming, his. Only his.

Talia's scalp went numb.

She thought that the first kiss was amazing, but this was on a totally different level.

It was not just lips pressing on each other, there was movement, and she felt Damon's tongue grazing her lips before he sucked her lower lip gently, and then he licked her again.

Talia was in a daze. Was this really happening?

This was not just about the lips. Oh, no. This was also about Talia's body pressing against Damon's and the way he embraced her resolutely with his palms firmly holding onto her like she was the most precious thing in the world; like he will never let go of her.

Passion. Possession. Belonging.

Can so many things fit into a kiss?

A lone tear escaped her eye. Is it wrong to be this happy?

For her, this was a big deal, but what about him?

Talia pushed those doubts away, determined to think about it later and to enjoy this while it lasts because it might be her only chance to experience a man holding her.

She was trying to mimic his movements, wondering if it was good enough.

Damon sucked on Talia's lip and bit it and she let out a small moan that spurred him to do it again before soothing that spot with his tongue.

He licked her lips and pushed a bit in-between, asking for deeper access, and her lips parted in response.

She was like clay in his hands, moving on an instinct, without strength to resist this astonishing affection that was foreign to her.

Damon's hand disappeared into Talia's hair, to hold the back of her head as his tongue started exploring her mouth and Talia's eyes snapped open in surprise at this sudden intrusion.

Damon's tongue caressed her little one once, twice, inviting her to join him in the quest for deeper intimacy.

The flavor of dark chocolate overtook her senses, urging her to eat him up. How could she resist?

Talia's hands laced into his silky hair as she responded to his kiss with more confidence by the second.

Talia feared she will burst from bliss that was coursing in violent waves through her body and causing pressure to build in her groin area.

With every passing moment, Talia kissed him harder, deeper, with a fervent need she never knew before as her body stirred with a desire to get closer, much closer than they were. And then she moaned. Did that lewd sound come from her?

The scent of Talia's arousal hit Damon hard.

Only now, with Talia in his embrace, with her scent and her flavors seeping into him, Damon fully understood how perfect she was for him. No woman will ever compare to Talia.

Damon let out a low groan from the back of his throat and he couldn't bring her close enough.

He was starving for the fragile woman who was kissing him back with all her might, but instead of getting satiated, his hunger was only increasing more. Will he be able to step on the brakes and not rush into things?

Through the haze of his need, Damon could feel Talia's emotions. They were pure, unspoiled, and he wondered if he was worthy of something so delicate he could only describe as ethereal because Talia was too perfect for this world.

Damon regretted that he didn't save himself for her. What was the point of numerous women he embraced, when they only brought him empty pleasure that dissipated the moment he got his release?

But maybe he needed all those women in his life in order to understand how special Talia is.

With the taste of Talia, Damon confirmed without a doubt that no other woman will ever be enough. It's only Talia. His mate. It will always be only her and no one else.

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Damon laid on the bed while cradling sleeping Talia in his arms.

His lips were stretched into a smile that was impossible to erase.

Damon was grateful for the strengthened mate bond because it allowed him to sense Talia's emotions clearly. Peace. Happiness. Belonging.

Damon wanted to ask his wolf if this clarity is because their bond is stronger or because they are so close physically, but his wolf was contently snoozing at the back of his mind and refusing to answer Damon's summons.

With nothing else to do and too excited to sleep, Damon reflected on the turbulence this day brought him.

During the games in the morning, Damon was helpless while watching other guys getting close to Talia to hold her hand. And then he felt pride when she got called out as the MVP of the tournament; happy about sharing ramen with her, anxious to be late due to the meeting that dragged, enraged when he saw Keith getting close to her, sad while she cried in his arms, joy when he won a toy for her, awe as he watched her dance around the bonfire, worry when he couldn't find her, and then peace and belonging when they reunited... and it all culminated with the kiss that opened his mind to another dimension where colors are brighter and the world revolves around Talia.

Everything related to Talia was mind-blowing and he couldn't wait to see what the next level will bring.

Damon really wanted to kiss her again, but he didn't want to wake her up, so he held that urge back.

Damon remembered the moment when Talia's dainty fingers fisted his hair while pulling him closer, and she let out the sweetest moan ever into his mouth. At that time, Damon feared that he won't be able to control his hands from exploring her body, and there was another part of him that was hard and ready and eager to explore Talia's depths. But he didn't want to go there. Not tonight.

They made amazing progress and Talia opened up to him wonderfully, and he reminded himself not to rush.

Talia's long sigh pulled Damon out of his thoughts, confirming that she was finally in deep sleep.

Damon's eyes moved to the edge of the bed where two plush toys were resting. He moved his leg carefully and after one swift flick of his foot, Cinna was on the floor.

Damon smirked victoriously while settling back next to Talia.

There was no way Damon would allow anything Keith-related on his bed with Talia!

Damon thought about getting a similar toy and replacing this one, but it was not about the toy, it was about its importance. He didn't want Keith's spirit to hover around Talia and Talia said it clearly, this was the first toy she ever got, and Damon knew that it was precious.

Damon had a sour taste because he missed getting Talia her first toy. That was supposed to be him, and not Keith, damn it!

If he was not stuck in that stupid meeting, he would be with Talia and he would get her many toys.

Just thinking about Cinna made Damon's insides churn. Was Talia's dazzling smile directed at Keith when he gave her the plush toy? Probably. That image can be erased only with the elimination of that toy, and Keith. Well, dealing with Keith will be easy for Damon, but what about the toy?

He still didn't figure out how to get rid of that mutt without alarming Talia, but he will come up with something. Soon.

Damon returned his attention to Talia.

He observed Talia's face in silence while relishing the fact that their hearts beat as one. She really was his other half, the half he didn't realize he was missing until now, and he will be damned if he allows Alpha Richard or Cassie or Elder Parker or anyone else to jeopardize this piece of Heaven he found.