

## Chapter 16 - Understanding The Bond

Damon stopped in the middle of the garden and took a deep breath in search of Talia.

The wind mixed in the scent of freesia with hydrangea and roses and scattered them in random directions, and... "Shit!", Damon cursed under his breath. "I lost her."

'Why did she leave?', Damon asked his wolf.

'Maybe because you scared the soul out of her.'

Damon was confused. 'I scared her?'

'The girl is abused and jumpy, yet you sneaked behind her. You prevented her from leaving, held her while demanding that she answers your questions, so yes. You scared her. And that was only the last five minutes. The first time you met, there was another she-wolf sucking you off and you shouted at this precious one to stop. It's not the best first impression, if I may say.'

Damon cursed internally. He didn't want to think about the unpleasant things.

He was unable to get Talia's image out of his mind. Damned mate bond!

An idea hit him... 'Isn't she my mate? Why did she run away from me? If we are mates, she should have a need to get close to me, to touch me, yet I could see her desire to escape.'

'I don't think she knows we are her mate.'

'Is it because she is too young?', Damon guessed.

'That's not the problem. She is small and skinny, but I'm confident that she is over eighteen years old.', his wolf paused, unsure how Damon will take this information. 'The thing is that... I can't sense her wolf.'

'She is a human?', Damon asked with a frown.

He never thought of having a mate, and he definitely didn't think that the Moon Goddess will arrange a human for him. They are weak and fragile, just like Talia.

How can a powerful Alpha have a human for a mate?

She would be like a crystal figurine in the middle of the room full of angry elephants.

Damon's wolf was pleased to confirm how among all the emotions, Damon wished to keep Talia safe. It was a step in the right direction.

'No, the girl is definitely a she-wolf. There are cases when someone was harmed or neglected, the wolf would sacrifice himself in order to protect the human part. Considering the injuries on her body, I could see that happening. And she was skinny and looking hungry.'

Damon shoved his hand in his hair. 'I scared her away and she didn't get food...' He felt like crap. 'How do I fix this?'

'What do you want to fix, your majesty?', his wolf asked sarcastically. 'Your plan is to shag Marcy and leave. Did that change? Do you want to find the girl, say sorry for being a jackass, and take her out for dinner?'

Damon groaned in frustration and stared at the dark forest in the distance.

He had no intention of dining and entertaining Talia or any other woman. He didn't want to get involved further. His mind was telling him to stay away from the girl with the copper-colored hair because with every second passing she was changing him in ways he didn't like.

Damon craves control. He needs to be in charge, and Talia's existence is doing the opposite.

He told himself to stop thinking about her and to move on. Can he stay away after getting a taste of her addictive scent? And the sparks upon touching her were phenomenal.

Damon came out for a run, and now he didn't feel like running. He wanted to find Talia, but he had no idea where she disappeared. And even if he found her, Damon wouldn't know what to say.

All this was super-confusing.

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In the morning...

'Are you guys up?', Damon spoke to Caden and Maya through the mind link.

'We are now.', Caden grumbled.

They have an understanding that nights are reserved for privacy between Caden and Maya, and unless it's something important, Damon will not disturb them.

Technically, it was morning, but it was way too early.

'The reports from Europe are still not ready. It's just past 5 in the morning.', Caden said, assuming that Damon was impatient to find out dirt on Marcy. 'We should receive them soon. I will call our men to confirm the status.'

'That's not it.'

'Did something happen?', Maya asked.

'Caden, you come to my room?'

'Coming...!', Caden responded after a brief pause.

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"What's going on?", Caden asked when he closed the door behind him. It took him a moment to realize that Damon doesn't look good. "Are you OK? Were you attacked?"

Caden's eyes darted through the room and it took him a second to spot two pieces of torn fabric on the floor. Panties.

Caden shook his head in disapproval. "I know you have good stamina. But don't get drained this much. You look like dog vomit."

Damon was not in the mood to explain. He had other things on his mind. Things that kept him up the whole night.

He tossed and turned in bed, and nightmares kept him awake.

Damon dreamed about the copper-haired girl crying as dark shadows choked her. Damon wanted to help her but no matter how much he slammed into the invisible barrier between them, he couldn't get through. His shouts didn't do anything, yet he heard her every whimper clearly and he jolted out of his sleep every time the dark shadow hit her hard, drawing blood.

Eventually, he gave up on sleeping and went to shower, trying to clear his mind but he was still restless so he decided to call Caden and try to get some answers.

"How did you feel when you met Maya?"

Caden's smile froze. What kind of a question was that? Damon always mocked the mate bond. Something was fishy.

"Is Marcy your mate?", Caden guessed.

Damon waved his hand impatiently. "Just answer my question."

Caden puffed his cheeks while thinking. "Attraction, sparks, happiness. I needed Maya to be happy so that I can be happy. I mean... I thought I was happy before, but after I met Maya I realized that I was clueless."

Damon shoved his hand into his messy hair. All this happiness talk didn't make sense.

His wolf said that the girl is his mate, but the only thing Damon got was a fit of rage when he saw her hurt, inability to find her, and a sleepless night. None of them are happy.

"Did you ever think about resisting it?"

"Resisting Maya?", Caden asked in surprise. "Why would I do that? She was the best thing that ever happened to me. I waited for her, exactly her, for more than two decades. I would be an idiot to reject her."

"Reject her...", Damon mumbled.

"Yes. You can't resist the mate bond.", Caden explained when he saw Damon's perplexed expression. "The more time you spend with your mate, the bond is getting stronger. The only way to stop it is if you cut it at the root by rejecting your mate, and she accepts. But only idiots do that."

"What if Maya is in danger because of you? What would you pick? Her safety or your happiness? What if the only way to keep her safe is to reject her?"

Caden frowned. What's up with Damon? It looked like he lost his marbles.

"What kind of nonsense is that? I can't be happy if Maya is harmed in any way. Her safety comes first. However, if we are apart we won't be happy. Rejection will harm us both so we might as well face that danger together." Caden scrutinized Damon. "I answered your questions, and now you answer mine. What's going on? Did you spend the night so deep in two pussies that they made you stupid?"

"I don't know what's going on.", Damon responded irritably. "When I figure it out, I will let you know."

"Alright.", Caden agreed. He knew that if Damon doesn't feel like talking, he won't say more. "We are leaving after breakfast, right?"

Damon hesitated. Can he really leave without seeing the copper-haired girl again? Just one more time, to make sure her bruises healed, and maybe to touch her again and confirm that those sparks are real and he didn't imagine it.

"Let me think about it. We might stay longer. I will talk to Alpha Edward after breakfast, and it will depend on that conversation."

Caden exited the room, leaving behind Damon who was lost in thoughts.

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