

Alphas Bride 181

Chapter 181 - Back Home

At the Lightclaw pack, after settling things with Cassie and her father, Damon and Talia went to their room to pack. It was time to go home.

On their way out, Talia and Damon were greeted by Mindy, Maddox, Kalina, and Tony who all looked at Talia with renewed interest. Her performance while deciding punishment for Cassie impressed all of them.

Mindy, Kalina, and Talia exchanged hugs while reminding each other that they will meet soon at the Dark Howlers pack.

During the travel back home, Damon didn't let go of Talia's hand unless it was absolutely necessary, and during the plane ride, she sat in his lap.

They kept the chat light and didn't make out, but his intense gaze came with a silent promise of many pleasures to come, and Talia's insides trembled in anticipation.

Talia was lost in her thoughts about the recent events, and she didn't realize at what point they reached their destination.

~ Dark Howlers pack ~

Damon stopped the car in front of the packhouse and exited the car first, to open the door for Talia.

His boyish grin directed at her made Talia's insides melt into emotional mush. She was absolutely smitten.

Damon offered Talia his hand palm up, and she placed her hand into his without hesitation.

After closing the door behind Talia, Damon went to the back of the car to get the suitcase out of the trunk, and this time, Talia knew that the magic was not over and that Damon will take her hand and walk into the packhouse together with her. And he did.

They arrived in time for lunch, and Talia's enthusiasm dwindled when she saw Stephanie and Maya, both in low spirits. It didn't seem right to be happy when two other people in the room had dark clouds above their heads.

It took Talia a moment to remember that Maya was suffering because Caden was away, and she guessed that Stephanie's bad mood must be related to Lisa.

They had moussaka for lunch that day. Normally, lunch is very simple because everyone is busy, so it's usually either leftovers or sandwiches (or sandwiches made with leftovers), but now Damon and Talia returned from their trip, so Stephanie wanted to make something.

"Is Lisa here?", Damon asked while putting food into Talia's plate.

"She's in her room since last night.", Stephanie responded with finality that indicated she didn't want to talk about it.

Lisa locked herself in her room and refused to come out. It was understandable that Lisa was upset with Tony finding his mate and Kalina getting the party that Lisa always wanted, but Stephanie wished that Lisa sees how the reality can't be changed and that drifting between sorrow and anger is harming only Lisa. Tony was out of Lisa's reach and Lisa needed to snap out of it.

Stephanie hoped that Lisa will cry it out, and move on. Eventually.

"How was the party?", Maya started the chit-chat.

"Party?", Damon asked and made a face like he was thinking about something intently.

Other than spending time with Talia, eating, dancing, and wanting to go to their room as soon as possible, he didn't remember much. Damon never chatted about things he deemed insignificant, and he didn't want to talk about the only things that were important (Talia's sweet pussy milking his cock and Talia crying his name breathlessly). That was for him and Talia to know. Private.

"I'm not the best person to comment on the party, but I'm sure Talia has stories to tell. She made a friend and she secured us a tribute from the Steelbite pack."

Talia smiled at Damon's words. She made a friend, Kalina.

Maya was interested in the second part. "What tribute?"

Maya wondered, why would Alpha Richard give them tribute?

Talia shook her head with a smile, indicating that it's not a big deal. She didn't want to talk about Cassie. "Damon needs to negotiate the tribute. When that happens, you will know more than I will."

It was the first time for Talia to attend such an event, and she thought how everything was amazing, especially Damon's company. He made everything better. However, considering Maya's and Stephanie's low mood, Talia didn't feel like raving about her good time, so she shared a few reserved points about Kalina, decorations, food, and she mentioned that Mindy was there also, and Talia left it at that.

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After lunch, Damon and Talia went to their room and Talia immediately started unpacking the suitcase and putting things into the hamper.

"Why are you doing that?", Damon asked. That's something an Omega can handle, later.

Talia assumed that Damon was eager to get to work, and as his assistant, she should accompany him.

"It will take only a minute.", Talia said. "I will shower quickly and head to the study..." Her voice trailed when Damon hugged her from behind.

He buried his face in the crook of her neck and took a deep breath, allowing her sweet citrusy scent of freesia to fill up his system.

"I could also use a shower. How about we do it together?"

Talia's cheeks ignited fiercely. She told herself to calm down. After all, she was with Damon in a tub. Twice. A shower won't be a big deal. Right?

Five minutes later...

Talia realized how wrong she was. Sure, she took a bath with Damon twice, but no matter how much they touched and kissed, the bubbly water provided some resemblance of decency by obstructing the clear view of their private parts, yet now in the shower, it was just the two of them, nude, with droplets falling on them and not providing any coverage.

Damon was right there, at her arm's reach, in his naked glory, and she fought mightily to look at his face and not at his erection.

Damon could feel her shyness, anticipation, arousal, and he wanted to devour her right there, under the shower.

He wondered, would Talia be so reluctant if she knew how he feels about her? But really feel, without any doubts, through the mate bond.

He was aware that just telling her won't do much because she probably won't believe him.

Little by little, he was chipping away her insecurities and he hoped that soon she will realize how amazing she is and stand proudly all the time, and not only when she is fighting against injustice.

Damon squeezed shower gel on the sponge and handed it to Talia. "Will you wash my back?"

Talia nodded in small jerky movements and grabbed the sponge.

With him turning his back on her, Talia exhaled the breath she was holding, and she washed him in circular movements while admiring the majestic landscape of his back.

Talia swallowed audibly when her eyes settled on his perfect ass. She was confident that if she drops a coin there, it will bounce a few times how firm it is.

Everything about Damon was hard, other than his lips and hair. She confirmed that.

Talia remembered that at some point during the previous night she was holding onto that glorious ass while Damon was thrusting into her.

She pressed her legs together while chiding herself silently. Why was she having those thoughts? Was she hoping it will happen again? Of course, she was, but she was too shy to admit that... even to herself.

Damon released a sharp breath and turned to face her flustered expression.

"You did good, kitten."

Talia was surprised by this sudden compliment. "I was just washing your back."

Damon shook his head. "That was good also, but I was talking about our stay at the Lightclaw pack. I was impressed."

"By what?"

"By everything."

His intense gaze made her breathy.

Damon took a step towards her, and Talia took a step back on an instinct.

He cocked an eyebrow. "Are you avoiding me, kitten? Should I leave?"

Damon stepped back and Talia grabbed his hand. She didn't want him to leave.

"I'm not avoiding you. It's just... I wasn't expecting you to be this close."

"But I want to come closer.", Damon said in a whiny voice. "Can I?"

Seeing her nod shyly, Damon asked, "What else can I do?"

Her heart thundered in her throat, and she feared that it might jump out.

"Whatever you want.", she said in a whisper as arousal swelled inside her.

Damon hummed ambiguously. "I want you to continue washing me."

Talia paused. She thought that he will want to kiss and touch her, yet he asked for a washing service. Was he teasing her or was that huge erection just for decoration?

Damon took the shower gel and flicked the sponge out of her hand.

"Use your hands, kitten."

He squeezed the thick bluish liquid into her hands that came together, and he moved closer to Talia so that he can press his palms on the wall behind Talia, trapping her between his arms.

Talia lathered gingerly Damon's pecs. Every rotation of her hands made her a bit bolder as she went lower toward his rock-hard abs.

Damon closed his eyes and enjoyed the delightful sparks of their bond that danced over his skin wherever she touched him.

Talia was lost in the daze because Damon was super-close and she also got to feel him out freely, and only when she reached his navel did she realize that there might be a problem and all her courage sizzled away.

"Why did you stop?", Damon asked with a devious smile on his face.

Talia sheepishly looked up to meet his eyes that challenged her.

"Continue washing me, kitten. All of me."

Chapter 182 - Steamy Shower

The bubbles from the shower gel were all washed a long time ago, but Talia didn't dare to ask for more.

Talia's hands parted to move over Damon's hips while avoiding to touch his erect cock that waved at her as Damon shifted his weight from one leg to another.

It was intimidating and inviting at the same time.

Her hands moved robotically as her brain stuttered and she was not sure if she wanted to escape that shower enclosure or to feel him out... everywhere.

"Don't you want to touch it?", Damon's husky voice sounded close to her ear.

She knew very well what that 'it' was because she was staring at it. Did she want to touch it?

Talia told herself that this was not a big deal. After all, that thing was inside her, more than once, and Damon kissed and caressed (and licked) every part of her body, and it was wonderful. Wouldn't it be normal if she does the same thing to him?

Talia knew that once she overcomes the invisible barrier of her shyness, being with Damon is natural, and their every intimacy is pleasing, addictive... and she really wanted to make him feel good but... can she do it?

What if she makes a fool of herself?

No. That won't happen.

Damon never teased her for lack of experience. Whatever they did, he was caring and patient, and Talia couldn't stop herself from falling for him more.

Thanks to the mate bond, Damon was aware of Talia's doubts and desires. That super-cheat allowed him to act without worry that he was doing something against her will.

His biggest wish was for Talia to feel the bond with all the benefits it provides, so that she can be aware of how much he craves for her and that in his eyes, she can't do wrong.

Damon put his hand over Talia's, and slowly guided her toward his erection.



Talia held her breath when he pressed on her hand to wrap her fingers around his shaft that was throbbing to feel her touch.

Damon hissed as the sparks of the bond danced over his cock.

"Is this OK?", Talia asked in a small voice.

She barely touched him, yet he made that sound. Did she hurt him? But if it hurt, why did he squeeze her hand around his erection further?

"Everything you do is amazing.", he said honestly.

Damon moved her hand to pump his shaft.

"I am yours, kitten. Do with me whatever you want. If you are not sure if something is right, I will guide you."

Damon released her hand and spoke in a strained voice. "That's it, kitten... You are doing wonderfully..."

Encouraged by his words, Talia continued moving her hand and she didn't need to lean closer to see every nook and cranny of his magnificent cock that was throbbing in her hand.

Damon's body arched over hers, providing shelter from the warm water that fell on them and she could see a drop of precum forming at his tip.

Everything smelled of dark chocolate. Mouthwatering.

Talia wondered if it would taste good. When they kiss, Damon's flavor of the dark chocolate intensifies. Will it be the same with this?

Guided by her curiosity, Talia leaned and gave it a lick.

Damon inhaled sharply and somehow, Talia knew that it made him feel good, so she licked him again, and again... and then she took him into her mouth and Damon released a barely audible "Ah".

Talia hummed as her tongue twirled around his tip. He was delicious.

The skin of his cock was smooth, and it moved under the pressure of her lips and tongue, while the shaft was hard and hot, and it all tasted of dark chocolate with a hint of manly muskiness.

Damon groaned and Talia looked up while wondering if he liked what she was doing, and she met his unfocused icy-blue eyes full of lust staring back at her under the half-closed eyelids, making her feel that he will devour her at any moment.

He was handsome, powerful, vulnerable, and absolutely lost in the pleasure she was giving him.

Talia marveled at the feeling that she can bring him to such a state. It was the newfound power she had over him.

She smiled a bit and continued sucking and licking, and pumping with her hand the base of his shaft that didn't fit in her mouth.

Damon stared at Talia, lost in the sensation of her mouth and tongue around his shaft, and it was all amplified by marvelous sparks of their bond.

She was kneeling in front of him, absolutely focused on sucking him off and he never saw anything sexier in his life.

That was Talia. His mate.

The whole experience was enhanced by the knowledge that it was her first time. Damon knew that considering his past, it was not fair to gloat about being her first in anything. She was too pure, too innocent, too unspoiled, too perfect for him. But there she was, on her knees, giving him one more of her firsts, and it was wonderful.

Talia was his and he wanted to claim her completely.

Lost in his madness, Damon's fangs came out and he knew that if this lasts much longer, he will lose control and mark her.

He wanted her to stop so that he can catch a breather, but at the same time, he didn't want her to stop. Ever.

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Consumed with his desire for more, faster, stronger, Damon gripped a handful of her hair and started thrusting into her mouth.

Talia's eyes opened in shock because he didn't move so far.

He was holding her head and thrusting every time a bit further. Did he think that the whole thing will fit? No way! But then he hit the back of her mouth and she gasped, and Damon used that opportunity to shove his cock down her throat.

Talia didn't think that was possible, but then... it was.

Damon was groaning in pleasure, and she felt a wave of heat hitting her core with every move he made, and she thought that she might orgasm just by sucking him off.

Talia really wanted to reach between her legs and to give to her aching pleasure but that small caress she needed to push her over the edge, but she was too shy to do so, so she grabbed Damon's firm ass

and dug her nails into him, focusing mightily on matching the pace of his thrusts with movements of her tongue.

Talia swallowed on a reflex. Her tongue squeezed his cock against the roof of her mouth, and she felt under her palms the moment when Damon's buttocks stiffened.

Damon wanted to pull out, but Talia held him in place, and he didn't really want to pull out, so he thrust one more time firmly, dissolving halfway in shivers.

Talia's moan mixed with his groan when he released his seed at the back of her mouth.

Chocolate. Dark chocolate.

Damon's chest heaved as he watched her licking him greedily like she was savoring the best delicacy ever.

"Fuck, Talia!", Damon squeezed through his teeth when he twitched as the tail of his release caught him unprepared.

His every orgasm with Talia was better than the previous one, better than any other, muddling his brain and making him addicted to Talia, but the only thing he could do was crave for more. It was that good.

Damon grabbed her shoulders and pulled her to stand up, pinning her against the tiled wall of the shower enclosure with his body.

"You are perfect. You are mine. Made for me. Say that you are mine, kitten!"

His words were order and a plea at the same time. If she denied him this, he feared that he might suffer a mental breakdown. He needed her more than air. He needed confirmation that she was his. Only his and no one else's.

"Yours.", she said, amazed by Damon's intensity and how much it turned her on.

Damon kissed her sloppily, tasting himself on her tongue and he was not surprised how well their flavors mixed because he knew that he and Talia are perfect together in everything. It's supposed to be that way.

He cursed under his breath when his hand reached between her legs, and he felt how wet she was.

Spurred by her arousal, he was unable to wait any longer.

Damon grabbed Talia's buttocks and lifted her, and he hummed in approval when her legs wrapped around his waist. She knew what to do. His kitten is a fast learner.

Talia gasped when he entered her.

Talia was aware it was coming, and she welcomed him eagerly because she was really turned on and aching for a release, but his impatience caught her by surprise.

There was urgency behind his every thrust, and Talia fought to catch the smallest of breaths as he guided her to Heaven expertly with the movements of his hips.

"Sing for me, kitten...", Damon growled lowly. "Let me hear you call my name."

Talia's mind was a mess. What singing? But she understood that he wanted her to say his name and she opened her mouth to say it, but only a moan escaped her lips.

"Da... Dam... Damon... DAMON!"

Talia ended with a cry while clinging onto him, for the whole Universe to know how good it felt to fall apart in his arms.

"Fuck!", Damon cursed loudly as her orgasm washed over him and his ass buckled, making him come in ecstatic waves like he didn't release a load in her mouth just a little while ago.

## Chapter 183 - Dinner In Bed

Talia and Damon didn't move as their heavy breathing stabilized.

Talia was draped limply over Damon, with her head on his shoulder and her legs around his waist, and she was grateful that he held her because her whole body felt like jelly.

Damon nuzzled Talia's neck with his nose, and he gently kissed the spot where his mark will come, while enjoying every sigh that escaped her lips.

They both shivered when he pulled out.

Damon helped her get back on her feet and he saw his seed trickling down her legs.

"Hold onto me, kitten...", Damon murmured.

Talia leaned on him obediently with her eyes closed, enjoying the sensation of him rinsing her body under the shower.

His hands moved over her skin so gently that she was not sure if he was really touching her.

This was not a scary Alpha, and not a moody either. This Damon was an affectionate lover and Talia couldn't believe that she got to see this side of him.

After turning off the shower, Damon wrapped Talia in a towel and carried her into the bedroom.

Talia smiled when he lowered her on the bed with care and the fire in his eyes told her that they were not done. They were far from done.

Damon unwrapped the towel slowly with a grin on his face, like a child opening a present.

He arranged tender kisses over her body, starting with her breasts and going down her abdomen, and when he buried his face between her legs, Talia was not sure if she was his present, or he was hers.

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It was late in the evening when Damon entered the bedroom with a tray full of food for him and Talia.

He was wearing only shorts and Talia couldn't stop staring at his exposed torso.

How can a man be so handsome?

Damon's cocky smirk told Talia that he noticed her ogling at him and she quickly lowered her gaze.

Talia scooted into a seated position and pulled a bedsheet around herself, to cover her bare body.

As the tray in his hands came closer, Talia observed leftover moussaka, and there were fresh salad and dinner rolls, still warm with a wedge of butter on the side, and bowls with grapes and walnuts.

Talia was mouthwatering at the sight of food and her stomach rumbled. She was hungry.

They spent the whole afternoon indulging in carnal pleasures and cuddling, and it was past dinnertime.

Talia was not complaining. Every moment was wonderful, and she was not achy either. Damon would make sure to lick her down there between lovemaking, and Talia concluded that his saliva healed her soreness, leaving her with only an addictive post-orgasmic buzz.

As much as Talia enjoyed this intimacy with Damon and having him only for herself, Damon didn't do any work, and neither did she, and it would be a miracle if Stephanie and Maya couldn't guess what Talia and Damon were doing all afternoon (and evening) in the bedroom. How embarrassing!

Talia loved the idea of dinner in bed with Damon, but... "Is it OK for us to eat here? What will others think?"

Damon cocked an eyebrow at Talia. "We can eat wherever we want. As for others..." He paused for a second before continuing, "It's just Steph and Maya, and both of them are too busy with their issues to notice where we are."

Talia wondered if she was overthinking. Sure, it was her first time to be with a man and experience these activities, but what about...? She didn't want to finish that thought.

Talia heard many rumors about Damon and at least some of them are bound to be true, and if she allowed doubts to creep in, it would spoil this happiness she was experiencing, and she already made peace with the fact that everything is temporary, happiness included, and she will enjoy this no matter how long it lasts.

How many women can say that they experienced such exclusive care by an Alpha? And Damon was much more than just an Alpha, he was the man who captured her heart, and she was irrevocably in love with him.

She took a deep breath and pushed all stray thoughts at the back of her mind, deciding to focus on the present.

Talia observed as Damon expertly cut holes in dinner rolls and filled them with butter. She wanted to do something also, but she knew that Damon made a point about feeding her, so she waited patiently.



She accepted a bun from Damon and took a bite. The bun was warm, and the butter was rich and melty, and it was perfect. Talia closed her eyes and moaned softly.

When she opened her eyes, she saw that Damon was staring at her intently, and she felt the urgency to talk about something, or they will end up rolling in the sheets again. It's not that Talia was against that, but she wanted to eat first, or she might pass out during sex due to starvation.

"Is Steph worried about Lisa?", Talia asked, snapping Damon out of his lustful daze.

"Steph is always worried about Lisa.", Damon responded matter-of-factly. "Steph feels guilty for staying here while Lisa was at the Lightclaw pack, and because of that she is overcompensating."

"Isn't she just worrying about her daughter?"

"I don't blame Steph for wishing that Lisa is happy, but if Steph was firmer with Lisa before, it wouldn't reach this point."

His clipped tone told her that the topic was over.

Damon's comment went beyond just Lisa crying over Tony and Kalina. Every once in a while, Lisa would have some issues and Stephanie would stress about it.

Werewolves care for their offspring, but Stephanie was coddling Lisa like she is five years old.

Damon disliked that Lisa was still disturbing Stephanie. She is not a child anymore.

At the age of nineteen, Damon was already leading a pack, while Lisa is whinnying about losing a man who was never hers. Any hope she had for a happy ending with Tony should be extinguished at the moment Tony told her that he will look for his mate and that Lisa is not the one, and that was more than two years ago.

If Tony was deceiving Lisa, Damon might have some grievances against the guy, but Tony was always honest.

Damon can't blame Tony. It's no one's fault that Lisa and Tony are not mates.

The more Lisa was acting out, the more Damon saw similarities between Lisa and some of his crazed ex-es (aka Cassie).

Two years should be more than enough for Lisa to prepare for this moment and to step away gracefully. Or was Lisa hoping that Tony will feel sorry for her and leave Kalina?

That's not happening.

Damon was aware of how good it feels when one finds his mate. No other woman compares and if Tony allows Lisa to spoil the relationship between him and Kalina, Damon will dislike him.

Damon didn't want to talk about Lisa or Stephanie. In his opinion, it was a private issue and not his business.

Talia didn't understand fully the relationships Damon had with Stephanie, Maya, and Caden, but she knew that each of them has their duties, and they don't interfere with each other unless necessary. And she absolutely had no idea how Lisa fits in all that. Will Lisa return to the Lightclaw pack, or will she stay here?

At the thought of Lisa staying at the Dark Howlers pack, Talia realized that there might be a problem.

"Do you know if Lisa staying here is temporary or...?" Her voice trailed as she waited for Damon to respond.

Damon shrugged, indicating that he doesn't know. "Lisa has a room on the first floor, next to Steph's. Other than seeing Lisa during meals, I wouldn't know she is here unless Steph tells me about it."

The truth was that since becoming the Alpha of the Dark Howlers pack, Damon didn't idle in the packhouse. He would sleep in his room or work in the study, and for the remainder of his time was somewhere else, so Damon wasn't aware of Lisa's presence in the packhouse.

"Kalina and Tony will come for a visit.", Talia reminded him, and Damon's eyebrows shot up when he understood where Talia was going with it.

He stuffed a forkful of moussaka in her mouth before responding.

"It doesn't matter if it's them or anyone else. You can't force others to like each other, but they must be polite or suffer the consequences. If Lisa makes things uncomfortable for Tony or Kalina, it will strain the relationship between our packs, and that's unacceptable."

Talia chewed in slow motion while thinking about his words. Logically, it made sense, but... "I don't think that a heartbroken girl will be polite or consider what's the best for her pack when she sees her ex-lover happy with someone else. Cassie is a perfect example of how far things can go, and she is Alpha's daughter."

Damon paused at the mentioning of Cassie.

Did Talia need to use him as an example?

But it was a good example because just how Tony changed after finding Kalina, Damon changed after finding Talia.

Damon pinched the roof of his nose. "Fine. When we confirm that Tony and Kalina are coming, if Lisa is still here, I will talk to her."

"What will you say?"

Damon had no idea. "I'm sure I will figure out something by then." Sending Lisa on a vacation sounded like a plan.

Talia eyed Damon suspiciously, but she didn't pursue that topic. She accepted the forkful of salad Damon offered, and she fed him in return.

Chapter 184 - Never Apart? [Bonus ]

Damon and Talia were nearly done with the food when Talia asked, "When will Caden come back?"

Damon frowned. "Are you missing him?"

Talia couldn't believe how possessive he was.

Was he serious?

"Not me. Maya. Didn't you notice that she was down because she is missing Caden?"

Of course, he noticed. That was Maya's punishment for acting against her Alpha and endangering her Luna! Damon didn't want to say this at loud, fearing that Talia won't approve.

"Are you feeling sorry for her?"

"Yes.", Talia responded right away. "Can Caden return? Instead of him spending a week away from Maya, maybe he and Maya can make a series of small trips together so that they handle that business and take care of their duties as Betas."

Damon cocked an eyebrow at Talia. It's not that she was only feeling sorry for Maya, but she found a solution to make everyone happy.

All those were traits of a Luna. A very good Luna. His Luna.

Damon smiled. "You were thinking about this."

Talia didn't deny it. "I noticed that Maya was sad before we left, and today she was worse. I know that I would be missing you if..."

Talia stopped talking when she saw Damon looking at her with sparkles in his eyes and an irresistible grin which she wished to wipe off.

"You would miss me?", Damon asked with glee in his voice, urging her to say more. He really wanted to hear more about it.

An intense heat invaded Talia's cheeks, and she knew that she was blushing fiercely.

Why was he asking that so openly? And why did she blurt out whatever was on her mind?

But he asked her a question and he was eagerly waiting for her answer, so she gave him one.

"Yes."

A warm and fuzzy feeling filled Damon's chest and he was drowning in the ocean of emotions, unsure if those were his or Talia's.

He scooped Talia in his arms, all with the bedsheet she was wrapped in, and he placed her to sit on his lap.

Damon hummed in satisfaction when Talia relaxed against him. He remembered the time when she would be stiff in his embrace. Those days were long gone as Talia didn't deny that she enjoys Damon's proximity.

"Don't worry, kitten.", he murmured close to her ear. "We will never be apart. I won't allow it to happen."

Talia looked into his icy-blue eyes that stirred with passion and... she believed him.

Never apart from Damon. She wanted to pinch herself and confirm that she was not dreaming.

The attraction sizzled between them. The pull was impossible to resist, and she didn't want to resist her urge to kiss him.

Regardless of what tomorrow may bring, right now she was in Damon's embrace, and he looked at her like she was the only woman in the world, and she liked it very much.

The kiss quickly turned hungry and both of them were on fire.

More than Talia's hunger for food, she was craving for Damon and his addictive flavor of the dark chocolate, and his scent of the forest, and his firm hold, and the warmth of his body, and the texture of his skin, and his power, and that friction which makes her touch heaven.

Damon wanted them to finish food first, but the scent of Talia's arousal hit him hard, so he pushed the tray on the side haphazardly and removed the bedsheet she was wrapped in without breaking the kissing frenzy.

As they moved, plates and utensils clattered on the floor, and leftovers messed up the carpet while some walnuts rolled under the bed, but none of them had the presence of mind to care about it.

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Talia's eyes fluttered open, and she squinted at the sunlight that hurt her eyes.

Talia and Damon were indulging in each other until late, and it was wonderful, but she overslept.

At the thought of Damon, Talia turned to her right and frowned when she saw crumpled bedsheets. She put her hand there to feel that it's cold. He was gone for a while. A note on Damon's pillow confirmed that he was not nearby, and she wondered if he went to work without her, but... he promised to wake her up.

Talia jolted out of her drowsiness when she heard movement in the bedroom.

"Why are you here?", Talia asked while tightening the bedsheet around her bare body.

A familiar figure looked at her innocently. "I came to get the laundry."

Talia observed the woman who wore skimpy shorts which revealed her long and toned legs, and a t-shirt that was at least two sizes smaller than it should be, making her ample bosom nearly spill out through the low V-neck opening.

The Omega was glancing at the note that Damon left behind, and Talia quickly snatched it.

Talia didn't like that this woman came here while Talia was in the room. Talia spent years watching Omegas in the Red Moon pack, and she knew very well that Omegas would double-check that the room was empty before coming to perform their duties. If their senses were not sharp enough, they would mind-link someone to confirm that the room occupant is somewhere else, and even then they would knock, and considering that Talia didn't hear any knocking and that the Omega was inside the room... this was definitely on purpose.

"Rose, right?", Talia asked and when the woman nodded, Talia continued, "Do you always come at this time?"

"No.", Rose responded honestly. "I confirmed that Alpha Damon is not in the packhouse before coming here. I didn't know that someone else is in his room. I will get the laundry and be out in a minute. I apologize for disturbing you."

Talia could tell that the apology was not sincere, and she guessed that Rose came to confirm who the girl in Alpha's room is.

Talia's impulse was to tell Rose to scram, but she was already here, and they had laundry from their trip, and Talia didn't want to cause problems, so she swallowed her grievances.

Rose returned with a hamper in tow and glanced at the tray, plates, utensils, and the food-mess on the carpet. "I will clean this in a bit."

"No.", Talia snapped. "You can come in one hour."

All that mess was there since last night. One more hour won't make a difference.

Rose gave Talia a stiff smile. "Of course. In one hour."

Talia didn't like that Rose was snooping around while pretending to be ignorant. It reminded Talia of gossipy Omegas at the Red Moon pack, the malicious ones who would come to make fun of Talia and beat her... like Anna and her henchmen.

Yes, Zina and Dawn were gossipy also, but those two spoke with Talia openly, and they didn't feign politeness while harboring too much curiosity in their gazes.

Talia watched Rose leaving the room and only when the door closed did Talia plop back in the pillow.

She guessed that there were rumors circulating about her, as the girl who is staying on the third floor of the packhouse, and this encounter confirmed it.

Should she tell Damon about this? What should she say? That an Omega came to get the laundry? If she says that, Damon will think that she is petty and that being with him got into her head.

Talia uncrumpled the note to read:



[I hope to return before you wake up, but in case that doesn't happen...

I need to take care of something personally.]

Talia pressed her lips into a line while wondering what happened that Damon needed to handle personally, but the message was vague and Rose told her that Damon is not in the packhouse, so there was not much to go with.

She was grateful that he left her a note.

Talia hugged his pillow and breathed in the lingering scent of the forest and the dark chocolate. It was nice but knowing that Damon was not nearby made her restless.

Didn't he promise last night that they won't separate? Talia shook those thoughts away. She shouldn't be that clingy. Damon was definitely somewhere in the pack territory, tending to some important matter only Alpha can handle, and he will be back soon.

It's unreasonable to expect they will always be connected at the hips, no matter how good that feels.

Without Damon around, it was awfully quiet, and Talia decided to start her day with a shower.

With or without Damon, there was plenty for Talia to do.

After showering, Talia dressed up and headed for the kitchen. It was empty, so she made herself a sandwich and headed into the study.

She didn't want to risk bumping into any other Omega and no one other than Damon would dare to enter the study, so having her sandwich there assured that no one will disturb her.

While chewing her sandwich absentmindedly, Talia checked emails and sorted them out for Damon.

Once that was done, she went through Damon's regular mail.

Under a dozen envelopes, a magazine peeked, and Talia's eyes widened when she saw it was an exclusive edition of WW Magazine that covered the event at the Lightclaw pack where Kalina was introduced as the future Luna.

Chapter 185 - A Morning Without Damon

The WW Magazine had four figures on the front page.

Kalina and Tony were in the center with Alpha Magnus and Luna Alicia on their sides. They were all smiling and looking happy. There were no traces of Kalina's gloom that she showed in private, and Talia knew that she would never get a glimpse of that side of Kalina if they were not friends because in front of strangers Kalina had her practiced smile on.

Talia's heart fluttered as she flipped the pages of the magazine, wondering if she will see Damon's photo there... somewhere. And she was not wrong.

Her mouth hung open when she saw several pages filled with photos of her and Damon. There was one with the two of them at the table chatting, him feeding her... and there was one photo covering an entire page with the two of them dancing and the caption, "Did Alpha Damon find his Luna?"

Talia released a shaky breath when she realized that this turned into a story that was bound to create numerous gossips.

Talia hungrily read the text that was squeezed between the photos.

The article said that she came as Alpha Damon's date and that her name is 'Lia', probably because someone overheard Kalina or Mindy addressing her. The article was mostly speculating about her identity and if Damon will mark her.

There was a special note in bold letters about the absence of a mark on Talia's neck and a photo right next to it had Talia's neck zoomed in with a red arrow pointing there.

Talia absentmindedly touched the base of her neck, on the left side.

She remembered the drunkard at the party saying how Damon was toying with her because she doesn't have Damon's mark. Damon punched the daylights out of that man and then Maddox was left to deal with the aftermath. Talia was not sure what Maddox did with those two unconscious people, but the fact that no one raised a fuss about it, meant that he did a good job.

Talia also remembered that Damon asked her if she would wear his mark. Was he serious?

She was not sure if he was. Maybe at that moment, he thought about it, but now that the mood simmered down... who knows?

'It's better this way', Talia told herself. Things like marking are forever and it shouldn't be done rashly.

Would she think differently if Damon is her mate? Talia didn't have an answer to that question.

What would happen if she agreed? Would he do it? And then what...?

What if Damon's mate showed up after Damon's mark formed on Talia's neck? Which one would be the impostor?

Talia definitely didn't see herself as worthy of Damon's mark.

Actually, she didn't understand why Damon gave her any attention.

Even an Omega like Rose looked more voluptuous and alluring, compared to Talia but then... maybe Damon already sampled Rose and Talia was someone new.

With every passing minute, Talia's heart grew heavier, and she closed the magazine and kept it on Damon's desk.

She realized that her insecurities were chipping away her happiness and she needed to snap out of it.

But the whole study smelled of the forest and the dark chocolate, reminding her of Damon and that he was not there to give her one of his comforting hugs with the power to calm her down. She was alone and it was getting unbearable and Talia walked out into the garden to get some air.

Talia chided herself. Why was she so dependent on Damon and his presence? She met him only a few weeks ago, and even though her life before that was not amazing, she still survived. Surely, there are things she can do without him.

She remembered studying and the book Doctor Travis gave her. She finished reading it and she was due for a checkup, so she gave Doctor Travis a call.

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At the pack hospital...

After her checkup was completed, Talia was left with Doctor Travis in his office, to go over her results.

He told her that her overall condition is showing improvements and that she should continue with whatever she is doing.

"I can see that you are taking care of your body", Travis said, and Talia blushed at the thought how Damon is the one doing most of the care of her body, and that extends beyond feeding her. Waaaay beyond just feeding her.

She focused mightily on Travis's words as he spoke about the results of her blood tests.

"If you continue with this progress, soon you can stop with vitamin supplements.", Travis ended on a good note.

Talia was happy to hear the good news, not that she expected anything else because she was eating, exercising, and sleeping, and overall, she felt better.

Since she talked to Damon about her wolf, she wanted to discuss it with Travis... "Doctor Travis, you are aware that my wolf is gone. Right?"

Travis nodded.

"What are the chances that, with my condition improving, she will come back?"

Travis paused. Alpha Damon requested from Travis to not discuss the issue of Talia's wolf with her because it might give her false hopes if her wolf doesn't wake up.

If Alpha Damon told Talia that her wolf might wake up, then Travis can talk about it freely. But what if Talia figured it out on her own?

Travis was in a predicament. Should he obey the order of his Alpha or honor the doctor-patient relationship he has with Talia?

Whichever he chooses, he can't tell Talia that he discussed her medical issue with the Alpha, not without Talia's consent. Ah, he already violated rules as a doctor. Should he add one more violation to that, or try to fix things?

Travis's guilty conscience was eating him from the inside, and he was not willing to add more to it.

"We are in uncharted territory here, Talia.", Travis said honestly. "If we knew why she left you, we might try to fix it, but even that won't guarantee her return."

Travis saw that Talia's mood dropped and he let out a long breath. "I will be honest with you. Your sight and hearing are better than human's, and that tells me your wolf is not gone. But there is no medicine I can give you with a guarantee that she will wake up. The most you can do is take care of your body and hope it will make a difference. Considering that your body is in fairly good shape now, you might want to focus on your mental state. Avoid stressful situations and do things that make you happy. I know that it's impossible to eliminate stress from life, so I will recommend you some breathing exercises..."

Talia was bummed that Doctor Travis didn't have a concrete solution, but she listened carefully about breathing exercises and meditation techniques.

Travis ended with, "I am not an expert in that area so I will send you links. You will need to try things and see what works for you."

"Is there an expert?", Talia asked.

Travis was not sure how to answer this, knowing that it's a tricky area. Everyone in the Dark Howlers pack is aware of the feud between their Alpha and Shaman, and considering that Talia was under Alpha's care, Travis didn't dare say anything rashly.

"You might want to talk to Alpha Damon about visiting Shaman Gideon. He is the most knowledgeable about spiritual things."

Talia didn't understand why she needed to talk to Damon about this. Nevertheless, her mood improved at the mentioning of Gideon. She saw it as another path she could explore. It was better than a dead-end or vague 'take care of yourself and hope for the best'.

If Shaman Gideon can help her, she will be a proper she-wolf, with her wolf.

Before leaving Travis's office, Talia reached into her bag for the book that Travis gave her to read. "I finished with this one and I was wondering if you can give me what comes after this."

"Do you want to read more on this topic, or would you rather expand to something else?", Travis asked.

"I really don't know.", Talia responded honestly. "I am curious about everything so I will be grateful for any recommendation."

Chapter 186 - Recognized As Lia [Bonus ]

Travis thought for a moment about how to answer Talia's question.

"How about this... I am free after two o'clock in the afternoon and we can meet at the library where I can help you pick your next book."

Talia nodded earnestly. "I would love that."

Travis smiled at her enthusiasm. "Until then, I'm giving you a task to think about what you want to do with that knowledge. Are you interested in medicine in general, as someone who would treat colds and cuts, or are you interested in surgery, aftercare, specific conditions, or some parts of the body? Even if you want to know it all, you need to prioritize them into what you want to learn first."

Talia left the pack hospital in a good mood.

She was determined to talk to Damon about visiting Shaman Gideon, and she will go to the library.

It was barely past eleven o'clock in the morning, and Travis said that they can meet at two o'clock, and Talia was not sure what to do in the meantime.

Should she go back to the packhouse? Did Damon finish with the matter he had to handle personally? If he was not back, there was no point in heading there. It was empty with his scent lingering everywhere.

Talia got her phone, only to see a message from Damon...

[This is taking longer than expected. Have lunch without me.]

With that, Talia decided to follow Travis's advice. He said that she should think about what she wants to learn first and do things that make her happy. She headed to the forest. Forest made her happy.

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The library was one of the buildings that circled the town square with the clocktower in the middle, so Talia didn't face any issues finding it.

Talia arrived a bit early, and she stood close to the entrance to the library so that Doctor Travis can see her when he gets there.

She lifted her head up and closed her eyes, enjoying the sun that warmed her skin. Compared to the scorching heat of Colorado, the sun in Darkbourne was pleasant.

Time in the forest was therapeutic. Talia's mind was calm and the only two things that bothered her were her stomach which craved for the lunch she skipped, and the second issue was that she didn't know what got Damon so occupied.

She pacified her stomach with the silent promise that she won't linger in the library. As soon as she picks the book with Doctor Travis's help, she will go to the packhouse and have a meal. A big one.



As for Damon, Talia wanted to call him and hear his voice, but if there was something important, she shouldn't disturb him.

She concluded that she shouldn't worry because if there was an emergency or something dangerous, there would be commotion or people would go into shelters, and the town square had people chatting leisurely.

Talia knew that with Caden gone for days, and Damon being absent due to the party they attended, there must be things piled up that only someone like Beta or Alpha can resolve so she shouldn't overthink the situation.

Talia shifted from one leg to another while looking around, hoping to see Doctor Travis, but she met two pairs of curious eyes looking at her.

Two blonde women stood not so far from Talia and stared at her unabashedly, and Talia swallowed hard when she realized that the blonder-blonde was holding the latest edition of WW Magazine.

Did they recognize her?

But... her hair was lifted into a loose bun, and she wore jeans and a white blouse, and without shiny earrings, makeup, and Damon by her side, Talia didn't look like that sophisticated 'Lia' from the magazine. At least, that's what Talia thought.

The truth was that as much as the Dark Howlers pack is a big pack, there are not many people who would linger in the town square on a Monday afternoon. Those few that had such luxury were either people who worked there or some jobless idlers and they all knew each other, and Talia didn't fit in any of those categories.

The biggest giveaway was that those two misses couldn't sense the pack mind-link with Talia, which confirmed that Talia is an outsider, a new face, a face that has uncanny resemblance to the woman who attended a party with Alpha Damon and was photographed for evidence.

With every step those two women made toward Talia, she clutched the handle of her bag tighter.

Realistically, there was no reason for Talia to be apprehensive but something about their gazes reminded Talia of Anna and her henchmen from the Red Moon pack, and Talia fought mightily against her urge to flee.

"Lia, right?", one of the two women said, and her words stamped Talia's worries as genuine. They recognized her.

Talia had a fleeting thought that she should pretend that she has no idea who that 'Lia' is, but then she gave up on that idea. It made no sense. Even if she denied it now, she might bump into these two women later, and then she will be labeled not only as Alpha Damon's date, but as a liar also.

"And you are?", Talia responded with a question.

The blonder-blonde elbowed the other blonde and said with glee, "I told you that's her!" Then she turned to Talia, "I am Ashley, and this is Heather."

Talia was surprised that it just ended at that. Or were they expecting for Talia to say something?

"Can I help you?", Talia asked.

Ashley shrugged. "We recognized you and thought of saying, hi. The magazine says that your background is mysterious and now I know why."

"You do?"

Ashley's eyes flashed. "You are obviously not from our pack. From where are you?"

Talia went with her well-practiced story. "I arrived here recently, and I don't belong to a pack."

Heather's face changed a few times as she connected the invisible dots. "You are the girl who is staying in the packhouse! You are not just a one-time date. How did you do it?"

Talia was not sure how to respond to that. "I don't know what you are talking about."

Ashley rolled her eyes. "Come on. Alpha Damon's habits are not a secret. No woman lasts long, yet you managed to hold onto him long enough to show up in a magazine. Did you use some specific technique? Or is it a pose? Everyone knows that he loves to take a woman from the back."

Ashley got closer to Talia with her every word and by the time she was finished talking, she was very close. Too close.

Talia frowned and stepped backward, eager to put distance between herself and two women. Why did Heather and Ashley act like they are some gossip-buddies?

Talia cherished every moment with Damon, naked ones included, yet these two managed to make it sound dirty.

"If you are so curious, why don't you ask Alpha Damon?", Talia said dejectedly.

Ashley and Heather had matching frowns on their faces as they scrutinized Talia.

"It seems that a little favor from the Alpha gave you an inflated sense of importance.", Heather said, her condescending tone was a total opposite of her friendly one she had only a minute ago.

Ashley continued, "Let's see how long this lasts. Another day or two? And then Alpha Damon will find another woman that tickles his libido, and he will leave you behind just like all of us. Or do you think that you are different?"

Heather snorted. "Different? If she is, her pretty neck wouldn't be so clean."

Talia reached for the left side of her neck. She knew that those two were talking about the absence of Damon's mark.

Seeing that Talia's face fell, Heather was emboldened.

"You need a reality check, Lia. You are nobody. Just like the rest of us. Why don't you use your head and see the truth? You are in the packhouse for such a long time. If Alpha Damon thinks you are worthy, he wouldn't hide you. Or are you his pet so that..."

"Hey!", Travis's angry voice came from the side. He didn't hear everything, but he definitely heard this last part that Heather said, and he knew that Heather and Ashley were ganging up on Talia.

When they realized that Travis was approaching them, Ashley and Heather stepped away.

"What's going on here?", Travis asked.

"Nothing.", Ashley was quick to respond. "We thought that Lia might be someone important, but we made a mistake."

And with that, Ashley and Heather turned on their heels and left.

Chapter 187 - Gideon

"Are you OK?", Travis asked Talia when Ashley and Heather were out of the earshot.

Talia nodded, but her expression was not good.

She wanted to retaliate and to tell those two women that they were wrong, but somehow... everything they said sounded right. Maybe that was a reality check she needed.

The truth was that Talia didn't know, what is she to Damon? A nobody? A pet? He called her so many names, from Mrs. Blake to kitten, and Talia didn't know if any of those would last.

Did he mean it, or was that just sweet-talk with a purpose to trick her?

From the beginning, Talia knew Damon as a moody Alpha. He would do what he wanted, when he wanted, with whom he wanted... and that included sleeping around.

Talia was dejected at the thought that Damon slept with those two... Ashley and Heather. Is there a girl who didn't spread her legs for him? But who was Talia to judge them when she was the same?

Talia hoped that maybe, just maybe, she started figuring him out, but maybe she was wrong. How could someone like her, uneducated, ignorant, and without background, be comparable to Damon?

She had fun at the party, and she was confident that the magic will last, but it was broken, and the reality reminded her that she can't take care of herself and that she was brave only when Damon was by her side. She was useless.

Travis touched Talia's chin, making her look up at him, and he said, "I don't know what that was about, but you shouldn't concern yourself with people who don't have better things to do than to poke their noses where it doesn't belong."

Talia looked at Travis and she observed his genuinely worried expression. It reminded her of Olivia.

When Talia was sad, Olivia would give her a comforting hug, but Talia knew that this was not Olivia and that even if Travis gave her a hug, it wouldn't solve anything because this was not his problem to solve.

Or maybe Travis's concern was not genuine. Maybe Talia had a problem of seeing things she wanted to see, and everyone was laughing behind her back because a nobody like her dared to stand next to Damon, like she was important.

Talia's heart tightened with every next thought, and it was difficult to breathe.

She felt her eyes prickling and she knew that tears were coming, but she didn't want to cry here, in front of the library, for Doctor Travis and who-knows-who to see.

"I am sorry for making you come here, Doctor Travis", Talia said. "I apologize for wasting your time, but I don't feel like picking a book right now. I would like to be alone."

Travis helplessly watched Talia as she swiftly disappeared between the buildings.

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Talia thought that she might burst into crying, but she didn't.

She walked through the forest absentmindedly, and she lost track of time.

Talia knew that she should think about what to do next because just wandering aimlessly was stupid, but her mind was muddled with indistinct thoughts, and she just let it be.

She was emotionally numb, and this was not the first time. Talia knew this feeling because she would go there wherever the reality was too hard to bear. It was her way of shielding herself until the storm passes.

Eventually, this will stop, and she will be able to think again.

After an unknown measure of time, Talia emerged on a meadow that was full of wildflowers. She took a deep breath, allowing a mix of scents to enter her system, and then she sat on the ground, leaning her back on a tall rock.

Talia wondered, what was she doing? Why was she here in this meadow instead of going to the packhouse? But somehow... that packhouse didn't feel like home.

Can she be near Damon and not fall apart every time she remembers that she was nothing special to him?

Yes, Damon said that he gave her many of his firsts but how can Talia believe those words when Damon slept with nearly every young woman she met?

If she thinks about this rationally, the best thing would be to cut her ties with him and stop this madness before it spirals even further.

Should she move to live in one of the buildings with Omegas?

However, staying in the Dark Howlers pack without being with Damon sounded impossible and she started going over her plans which she put on pause not so long ago... plans for her independence and leaving.

Her heart ached at the thought of leaving, but what were her options?

Talia told herself many times to enjoy this patch of happiness while it lasts, but how can she enjoy the moment of sunshine while clouds are gathering from all directions?

Damon was like sunshine. Warm, soothing, hot, and steamy, and she really missed his scent of the forest and the dark chocolate that was impossible to forget.

Talia was happy when Damon's attention was on her and his embrace had an effect of calming her personal demons, but these moments, like the one with Ashley and Heather, were unbearable.

The higher she flew with Damon, the harder she would fall every time she realized that every moment she cherishes was nothing special for him.

Talia told herself that she is stupid. She was not supposed to fall for Damon. She repeated in an endless loop that being close to him won't bring anything good and now... she was lost, unsure what to do, because no matter what she did, it looked like a path to disaster.

Her eyes widened when she realized that a pair of worn-out slippers was in front of her, and she looked up in slow-motion to see an older man with a frown looking down at her.

Talia scrambled to her feet, and she wanted to go backward and put some distance between the man and herself, but there was that blasted rock, and she was not sure if she can jump over it without tripping.

How did he get so close without her noticing? How could she be so distracted and not realize that a stranger got so close to her?

Talia nervously glanced left and right, and she confirmed that there was no one else.

It was just her and this older man whose sun-kissed skin told her that he spends a lot of time outdoors. But his trousers and t-shirt were neat and clean, and he didn't look like a wanderer. Actually, if not for his frown, she would think of him as a scholarly wise man.

"Why are you here?", he asked.

Talia pressed her lips into a line and hugged her purse tightly against her chest. She couldn't come up with a lie about why she was there, and she didn't want to tell him the truth either.

"Don't worry", he said. "If I wanted to hurt you, I would do it the moment you stepped into my garden."

Talia's eyebrows shoot up. "Garden?" It was obviously a meadow with wildflowers.

He hummed and gestured while talking, "That's the area with chamomile, there is echinacea, feverfew, behind it is goldenseal..."

Talia realized he was right, but it still looked random for a garden. She just assumed that flowers grew there on their own because there was no landscaping or a fence she could see.



"...thistle, and there is..." He stopped talking when Talia's stomach rumbled.

Talia was embarrassed. Normally, skipping a meal or two was no big deal, but lately, she was eating well and now that she skipped lunch, her stomach was protesting. Loudly.

He let out a long breath. "My house is behind those trees. How about you follow me, and I give you something to eat?"

Seeing that Talia didn't move, he made a face. "I told you already. If I wanted to hurt you, I would do it a while ago. Come with me or stay here. It's your choice. Actually, if you are going to reject my offer for food, I will appreciate it if you get out of my garden."

Talia looked at his retreating back and wondered if she should go after him.

She concluded that he is definitely from the Dark Howlers pack. After all, she didn't walk that far and since he has a home here... Her stomach rumbled again, and her legs moved to follow after the man. She was hungry.

Talia thought how it was silly to be defensive because he is probably a werewolf, and he could catch her and snap her into two without blinking.

...

It was a small and cozy cabin-like home with one open area that had a kitchen, a dining table for four people, and a sitting area with a sofa and two chairs. On the right, there were two closed doors for which Talia guessed are bedroom and bathroom.

Talia inhaled scents of lavender and basil, and there were also mint and several other plants that mixed together into something sweet and soothing.

The man put on the table bread, yogurt, cherry tomatoes, and a plate with sliced smoked meat.

He gestured for her to sit with the question, "Tea?"

"Yes, please." She would take anything. Talia looked at the food and swallowed the saliva that pooled into her mouth.

"Thank you for the food.", she said.

"You are far from Darkbourne."

"How do you know I came from there?"

"Humans who wander in this area on foot would have backpacks with food and drinks, yet you have a skinny purse.", he responded, and Talia thought how that made sense. "You didn't answer my question, why were you in my garden?"

"I wanted some time for myself, so I started walking. The forest is peaceful and... I didn't mean to trespass into your garden. My name is Talia."

"Talia", he repeated. "You can call me Gideon."

Chapter 188 - Finding Talia [Bonus ]

Author's note:

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Damon rushed into the packhouse.

He cursed internally that so many things piled up and he lost track of time.

If he knew it will take this long, he would wake up Talia in the morning and ask her to accompany him for the day.

When the news of the patrol having a skirmish with rogues on their South border woke him up, Damon decided to let Talia sleep with a plan to check the situation quickly and return before she notices his absence. After everything they did last night, she needed rest.

The issue at the border was a matter Caden would look into, but since Caden was not here, Damon had to go.

When he reached there, Damon became aware of several other issues that waited for Caden (or him), and Damon thought it will be done quickly, but then three generals appeared, each with their own items on the agenda and Damon wanted to dismiss them, but he could see that those were not trivial issues and he felt guilty for neglecting his duties lately, so he texted Talia to go ahead and have lunch without him.

Damon was missing Talia like crazy and he couldn't wait to wrap her into his arms and inhale her addictive citrusy sweet scent of freesia, and his impatience morphed into anxiety when he didn't find her downstairs or in their bedroom.

'Steph! Maya!', Damon called through the mind link. 'Where is Talia?'

'I didn't see her today.', Maya responded first.

'Same here.', Stephanie said before adding, 'I don't think she had lunch at the packhouse.'

She skipped lunch? Damon thought that Talia might be immersed in reading the book Travis gave her. She would sit on the sofa in the study to read it, so Damon headed there.

Talia was not in the study, but he found a note that she went to the pack hospital.

Talia left the note that morning after confirming that Travis will see her. She thought that Damon might return while she was away, and she didn't want Damon to worry.

Damon mind-linked Travis, 'Did you see Talia today?'

'Yes, she was in my office this morning for a checkup, and I met with her in front of the library earlier this afternoon.'

Damon released the breath he was holding along with some of his anxiousness. 'So, is Talia in the library?'

'No, how much I know, she didn't get in.'

Damon didn't get it. 'What?'

'I was supposed to meet with Talia and help her get her next book, but when I reached there Talia was being bullied by two she-wolves. I chased them away, but Talia was upset, and she wanted to be alone.'

Damon's mood was set back to maximum anxiousness. 'Where is she now?'

'I don't know.'

'What do you mean, you don't know!?', Damon growled into the mind-link.

Travis was exasperated. Was he supposed to babysit Talia? 'Talia is a grownup and she said she wanted to be alone. What did you expect me to do? Stop her or stalk her?'

Damon cursed loudly and cut off the mind-link. Now what?

It took him a moment to remember his phone and the GPS tracking.

A dot representing Talia was shown in the middle of nowhere but then... that was not nowhere. Damon knew exactly who lived in that area.

He tried calling Talia, but she didn't pick up and Damon remembered that she would keep her phone on silent.

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...

Talia's phone was in her purse, on silent, and she was not aware that Damon was calling. Even if she knew, Talia wouldn't pick up because she was not over the incident with Ashley and Heather, and she was busy with other stuff.

During her meal, Talia realized that she was talking with Gideon, the Shaman of the Dark Howlers pack, the same person Doctor Travis said Talia should talk to.

But Doctor Travis also said that Talia should check with Damon if it's OK to talk to the Shaman.

Did she really need Damon's permission to talk to people? Talia thought how that was unreasonable.

Damon was definitely going places and talking to people, and probably doing much more than just talking (if the person in his vicinity was an attractive female), and Damon never asked for Talia's permission. Why would she ask for his?

The more Talia thought about this, the more vexed she was.

She understood that she shouldn't reveal to Gideon that her wolf can talk. That seemed to be a big secret, but for the rest, she didn't think there was a need to hide.

Besides, this was about her health and maybe getting her wolf back. Damon had no say in it.

Once her belly was full and she was sipping warm lavender tea, Talia decided to ask, "I was wondering if you can help me with my wolf."

Gideon's lips lifted into a smirk. "Why do you think I can help you?"

Talia thought that maybe this is some other Gideon. Did she get the wrong person? "Aren't you the Shaman of the Dark Howlers pack?"

"I am.", he confirmed. "But, are you sure you want my help?"

"Is some payment required?", Talia guessed.

Gideon waved his hand, indicating how that's not the case. "Not many come to me, at least not openly."

Talia didn't get it. Shouldn't a Shaman be one of the core people in the pack? "Why?"

"Some time ago, I had a... conflict with the current Alpha. Since then, people are avoiding me."

Talia pressed her lips into a line while thinking about what to do with that information.

"Your conflict with Damon has nothing to do with me. I need help and the only question is if you are willing to help me."

Gideon was surprised that Talia addressed Damon without his title. He liked Talia's spirit. "Alright. What's the problem with your wolf?"

"Until several years back, I could feel her but then... I couldn't. At that time, I thought that she disappeared for good, but then Doctor Travis told me that my sight and vision are above what humans have and that my wolf is still inside me. Doctor Travis said that there is a chance to get my wolf back. I should eat well and exercise to improve my body, and also take care of my mental health and since you are an expert in spiritual stuff..."

"Is that why you trespassed in my garden?", Gideon interrupted her.

"No, no", Talia said with haste. "That was an accident. I wanted to find a way to contact you and schedule an appointment, but since I already wandered in your garden, I thought that it's OK to talk about my... issue. Is it OK?"

Gideon nodded faintly. "The Moon Goddess is guiding her children to find what they need."

Talia had no idea what he was talking about, but she agreed earnestly. Anything was better than the version where Talia sneaked into his garden with an ulterior motive.

Gideon made a thoughtful face. He could tell right away that Talia was not a member of the Dark Howlers pack, and she smelled like a werewolf, but he didn't know that she can't reach her wolf.

"Wolves are spiritual beings, and their presence can diminish when the body is weak or when the mind is."

"I am exercising and eating well..."

Gideon shook his head in disagreement. "I found you in my garden and you were hungry. How is that eating well?"

Talia pursed her lips. "That was just today. Besides, until a few weeks ago, I would go the whole day and sometimes two days without food." She saw Gideon frowning and she didn't want to continue talking about her past. "Can you tell me more about a weak mind? How do I know if I'm a weak-minded person? How do I fix it?"

"Not necessarily weak-minded.", he said. Talia was looking at him straight into eyes and that was not a trait of someone who doesn't have a strong will. She was definitely not an Omega.

"Think of it as... suppressed. When a werewolf suppresses his or her nature, it is our wolf who takes the burn of it. Is there something you really want, yet you are denying yourself?"

Talia's brows came together. Something she really wants? She wants to be Cinderella and that Damon is her prince and that the two of them can have their happily ever after, but that is just romantic gibberish that will never come true so it can't be it. Besides, her wolf was gone years before she met the moody Alpha so...

'BAM! ... CRASH!'

Both Talia and Gideon jumped on their feet when the front door of Gideon's house was slammed open out of its hinges and it crashed on the floor, raising a small cloud of dust around it.

Talia gaped at Damon who was standing at the door while spreading an icy aura all around him.

Damon made a step toward the duo and Gideon stood in front of Talia defensively.

Gideon had no idea why Damon was in his house, but it was obvious that Damon was angry, and Gideon didn't want Talia to take the burn of Damon's anger.

Seeing that Gideon was blocking Talia from him, Damon's fury flared.

"You want to take her away from me?", Damon growled.

Without thinking, Talia moved to stand in front of Gideon.

"He is not taking anyone. I came here, and he was nice enough to..."



"Nice!?", Damon squeezed through his teeth. "Tell me... why do every time you leave my sight I find you with some guys sticking to you?"

"No one is sticking to me.", Talia said bravely, fueled by her indignation. Why did Damon barge in here and act like he owns the place? And he broke the door!

"If you use your eyes instead of your ego, you will see the situation for what it is. Be reasonable and... AAAHHH!" Talia screamed when Damon grabbed her and hoisted her over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes.

She wiggled and punched his back and then...

'SLAP!'

"Awww...", Talia cried when Damon smacked her butt.

She wanted to protest, but the stinging pain radiated and morphed into arousal and Talia silently cursed herself for enjoying being manhandled by Damon.

Damon narrowed his eyes at Gideon before grabbing Talia's purse and walking out without a word.

Gideon stared at the hole where his door used to stand, and he was processing events from the last minute which confirmed that Talia is not a simple person. Not only because Alpha Damon came personally for her, or because he was possessive, but because she stood in front of the Alpha and talked back without flinching under Alpha's aura that made Gideon break into a cold sweat.

Chapter 189 - Things Are Not Working [Bonus ]

"Let me down!", Talia protested only to be met with Damon's silence in response as he carried her through the forest over his shoulder like she was a sack of potatoes with her head sticking to his muscular back.

Talia wanted to push herself away from Damon's back, but her arms ran out of strength five minutes ago and she wondered, how can he walk while carrying her like she weighs nothing? But then... Damon was an impressive bundle of muscles that smelled of the forest and the dark chocolate and... Talia told herself to snap out of it. This was not the time to succumb to Damon's charms!

"You can't do this!", Talia hissed and started wiggling.

'SLAP!'

After the slap, Damon's hand lingered a bit on her behind and Talia bit her lip, refusing to let him know that it hurt or that she wanted him to keep that hand there a bit longer.

Talia took a few deep breaths to calm down and then she spoke, "Come on, Damon. Let me down. I can walk."

Silence.

"Are you going to ignore me!?" Talia punched his back.

"Aww...", she cried softly because her hand hurt now. How can a man be so hard?

"This is ridiculous! Let me go!"

She started wiggling her legs again.

'SLAP!'

Why was his hand still on her butt? Did he just give her a squeeze? And why did she like it, damn it!?

Talia plopped limply against him and started sobbing silently. More from frustration than from pain.

When did her brain get rewired and she was enjoying this barbaric treatment? Did she develop masochistic tendencies?

Damon stopped walking. "Are you OK?"

"How can I be OK when you are carrying me like this and spanking whenever I say something?"

In one swift move, Damon flipped her, and Talia found herself in his arms, this time being carried princess style, and he continued walking.

"I spank you when you squirm haphazardly.", Damon said. "Do you want me to drop you and you break your neck?"

Talia pouted and crossed her arms over her chest in order to prevent herself to act on an urge to put her arms around his neck. He was NOT getting any hugs!

"Can we talk?", she asked.

She could see the muscles of his jaw tensing before he responded, "When we reach home."

That was a no, for now.

Talia didn't know where they were, but she guessed that the packhouse can't be far. He said that they will talk when they get home, and he had no intention of letting her walk on her own, so she decided to wait.

Rays of the sunset sneaked between the trees and danced over his handsome face, creating mesmerizing shadows as he walked, and Talia couldn't stop herself from staring.

The longer she looked at him, the more entranced she became. Every curve of his face was flawless, just like the rest of his body. How can a man be so beautiful?

Little by little, Talia forgot about her grievances. Damon's proximity cast a spell on her where she couldn't worry about anything and anyone beyond their imaginary bubble that was big enough only for the two of them to fit.

A small smirk at the edge of Damon's lips told her that he knew she was admiring his features silently, and she didn't realize at what point she relaxed against him.

As for Damon, he was anxious that Talia was missing, and furious when he found her with Gideon, but now that she was in his arms, Damon forgot why he was angry. Talia's proximity came with her addictive sweet citrusy scent of freesia and the delightful sparks danced over his skin, and he was happy.

He wished that this walk with Talia in his arms, through the forest, into the sunset, lasts forever.

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In the packhouse...

The sounds of utensils clanking from the kitchen told Talia that dinner preparation was in progress which meant that Stephanie, Zina, and Dawn were there. Talia hoped that none of them will peek out to see the scene of Damon carrying her in his arms.

Only when Damon closed the bedroom door behind them did Talia release the breath she was holding.

Normally, Talia would relax the moment she reached the third floor of the packhouse, but since the incident with Rosa, she was aware that no place provides privacy.

Feeling the ground under her feet after a long time, Talia was unstable for a moment, and Damon was quick to support her by holding onto her shoulders.

"How are you doing?", Damon asked while inspecting her visually. "Any injuries?"

Talia's expression hardened. "What injuries? Other than you smacking my butt, there is nothing else."

"Is it aching?"

"Yes!"

It didn't really hurt much, but she wanted to make him feel guilty about spanking her. Why did his eyes light up with mischief?

Damon licked his lips slowly. "Let me see."

Talia stepped away from him. "No."

"If I caused you pain, I have the right to fix it.", Damon said matter-of-factly.

Talia was aware of the effect Damon's proximity had on her. She would lose all reasoning and forget grievances and if she ends up butt naked so that he can inspect the so-called injury, there won't be much talking involved.

Damon made a step toward Talia, and she extended her arms in front of her defensively.

"Stay there. We need to talk."

Damon puffed his cheeks when he realized that undressing Talia will come later. "OK. Talk."

Talia pressed her lips into a line and steeled her resolve.

Yes, he is handsome and smells good and she is absolutely smitten with him but that's exactly why she needs to think and do what's best for her because no one else will.

Talia remembered Ashley and Heather at the town square and their hurtful words... and Rosa snooping with her malicious gaze... and Marcy and Nora at the party with their condescending attitudes... and how Damon violently broke the door of the shaman's house without any warning... and Talia swallowed a mouthful of air before forcing out of her mouth, "This... is not working."

Damon cocked an eyebrow. "What's not working?"

"This. Us. Me staying here..."

A wave of dizziness hit Damon and he didn't hear Talia's next few words.

"What did you say?", he asked while feeling that the ground below his feet was crumbling.

She didn't have the strength to say it again. Somehow, her anguish intensified. "You heard me."

"You want to move out? Where to?", Damon's words were dripping with disbelief, mostly because he could feel Talia's emotions and how everything she said went against what she truly wanted.

"I was thinking to stay with Omegas until I figure out where to go next.", Talia responded honestly.

The hell you are!

Damon's expression worsened when he realized that she is not only planning to leave the packhouse but the pack itself. "Why?"

Talia released a long breath. "Look, Damon, I am grateful for everything you did for me. I really am."

"And that's why you want to leave me?", he interrupted her. "You said that you won't leave!"

"Is this what you see as payment? You got a nobody from an attic and gave me a roof over my head and now I need to serve you until the debt is repaid? For how long?"

Damon was not sure if he heard her right. "What!? No!"

Talia ignored his words and continued, "People talk about me as a nobody who is latching onto you while you see me as a pet, the latest entertainment. I know you had many women before and just how you discarded them, you will do the same with me when..."

"STOP!", Damon shouted and grabbed her shoulders. "Where did you get that? Who are those people!?"

"Everyone!", Talia shouted back while jerking out of his hold. "Maybe you don't hear what they are saying, but I do. You want to know who they are!? It's the Omega who cleans the packhouse and the vendor at the town square and the nurse in the hospital. Everyone!"

Talia released a shaky breath and lowered her head, her next words were barely above a whisper, "I am no one and I don't have anything, but I still have my pride and I won't allow you to trample over it."

Damon was at loss for words.

He had no idea what caused this outburst. Talia said how she wanted to leave him and... he remembered that Travis told him that Talia was bullied by two women.

They were doing fine, they were making progress, and he will be damned if he allows some unknown wenches to separate him from his mate!

Damon's eyes flashed with murderous intent.

He was focused on Talia and didn't think much about she-wolves like Cassie and Marcy, and he definitely didn't think about some random women who were present in his life just long enough to scratch his itch once, and he had a feeling that those two women who bullied Talia in the town square, belong to the latter group.

Damon's eyes lost focus as he mind-linked Maya, 'Maya, two women approached Talia this afternoon at the town square, and they bullied her to the point of Talia wanting to leave. I need you to find out who they are.'

'Yes, Alpha', Maya responded right away.

Chapter 190 - Plan For Dealing With Elders

'We need to talk. Some Elders want to see you.', Maya said before Damon closed the mind-link.

Maya wanted to discuss this during their regular sync-up after dinner, but since they were already talking, she decided to bring this up. It was important.

Damon pressed his lips into a line. Elders want to talk to him?

Elders are senior people whose previous service to the pack earned them a title of an Elder. They are not ready to retire and still want to serve the pack by guiding younger generations. They would normally have roles as advisors to the Alpha and manage issues within the pack for which Alpha shouldn't bother with.



Once Damon took over as the Alpha of the Dark Howlers pack, he removed Elders as his advisors because he suspected that some of them were involved with the death of his parents, and also because they wanted to manipulate him.

Damon hated their condescending attitudes. Yes, Damon was much younger than they were, but he was still their Alpha! The only thing that saved their necks was that his parents respected them.

He let them handle minor issues within the pack because stripping them of their positions completely would give them a lot of free time on their hands (probably to cause trouble for Damon) and it would also add to Damon's workload dealing with things like determining punishment for a guy who broke into the bakery on the main street of Darkbourne after the Summer Solstice festival.

Elders wanting to talk to Damon, meant nothing good and Damon didn't want to meet with them, but he still needed to understand the situation.

'I will be in the study in a few minutes.', Damon told Maya before shutting down the mind-link.

"Come with me.", Damon said to Talia.

Talia looked at Damon apprehensively. She just said some unpleasant things... or were they unpleasant to him? What if he wanted to get rid of her? That thought hurt, but it would make things easier.

"Where?", she asked.

"To the study. You are my assistant. There is work that I need to handle, and you should assist me." Damon ended by gesturing toward the door of the bedroom.

Talia walked out and he was one step behind her.

Damon had no intention of leaving Talia out of his visual range.

She wanted to leave? That's not happening.

Some people dared to talk rubbish? He will find them and teach them a lesson.

Damon didn't want to force Talia to stay by his side, knowing that she has an uncanny ability to escape his grasp. If he pushes too much, she can give him a slip when he is not paying attention.

But how can he make her stay with him? He needed some time to figure out how to deal with this.

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Maya entered the study, and it was obvious that she was dispirited. Her cheeks were sunken and her always-present smile was not there. She was missing Caden.

Maya paused when she saw Talia standing in attention next to Damon.

'We should talk in private', Maya told Damon through the mind-link.

Damon waved, indicating how that's not happening. There was no way he will leave Talia out of his sight.

"Whatever you have to say, Talia can hear it.", Damon said aloud.

He wanted Talia to know about ins and outs of the pack and the matters he was dealing with daily. She will need that, as his future Luna.

Maya cleared her throat. "As I said before, Elders want to see you."

"Which ones?"

"Elder Charlie and Elder Samson", Maya responded.

"Did they say why?"

"No, but I have a guess.", Maya said while putting the latest edition of WW Magazine on Damon's desk. "We all know that those two Elders are close to Elder Parker, and considering the coverage you and Talia got in this magazine, and the timing... We should assume that this will be related to you and Marcy from the Red Moon pack."

Damon's brows came together. "Anything from our people in Europe?"

Maya shook her head. "Nothing yet."

Damon was irked. How come they can't find any dirt on Marcy? But he didn't have the luxury to vent because he was running out of time.

This also reminded him that Marcy was only days away from coming to the Dark Howlers pack unless he finds something solid to deter her.

Talia could see that both Damon and Maya were worried about this.

"I'm sorry for causing you trouble.", Talia said in a small voice.

"Yes, when you wander alone, you get me worried.", Damon responded without looking at her.

"That's not what I meant.", Talia said, and Damon turned to look at her questionably.

She pointed at the magazine. "If I didn't go with you, this wouldn't happen, so..."

Damon stared into Talia's honeyed eyes that looked at him with sincerity and he got an idea.

"Yes, you caused me trouble. Will you take responsibility for it and help me fix it?", Damon asked.

Talia didn't know what he was getting at, but how could she refuse? "Sure."

Damon's lips curved into a smile, and he told Maya, "Tell them to come tomorrow morning. I will give them an explanation."

Knowing Damon's explosive personality, Maya feared that he will put those two Elders into the dungeon, or maybe kill them and make it look like an accident.

Maya was afraid to ask, but she had to, "What explanation?"

"They are Elders of the Dark Howlers pack. They are putting the needs of our pack first." Damon waited for Maya to nod in agreement before continuing, "I need to prove that no matter what benefits Alpha Edward or Elder Parker offered them, Marcy from the Red Moon pack is not the best choice to be my Luna."

Maya was suspicious. Did Damon actually have a plan? But Damon is not the guy who comes up with schemes and plots. Damon is straightforward and he says what's on his mind, and when facing opposition, he would settle it with a fight. Did he plan to beat up two Elders?

"How will you prove it?", Maya asked.

Damon smiled smugly, obviously pleased with his idea. "No one is more suitable to be the Luna than Alpha's fated mate. Those Elders won't dare go against the will of the Moon Goddess. Actually, this might make them resist Elder Parker's advances to set me up with Marcy."

Maya glanced at Talia. Were they ready to reveal the secret? But based on Talia's expression, it seemed that Talia didn't know what Damon was getting at, so Maya needed to clarify.

"You will tell them that you found your fated mate?"

Damon confirmed with a nod. "That will shut them up."

Talia shifted on her feet. How come Damon found his mate, and he didn't tell her? If he had his mate, why did he go to the party with Talia? Or did he find his mate today while they were apart? But then... why was Maya looking at her? And Damon was looking at her also and... Talia realized something.

"Are you talking about me?", Talia asked as panic swelled inside her. "I can't be your mate."

Damon puffed his cheeks and before Talia could react he pulled her to sit on his lap. "There is no one better than you for that role."

Talia was flustered. She was sitting on Damon's lap right in front of Maya! And Damon was talking some nonsense about mates.

"They will see right through that lie. Everyone will. I can't do that."

"Didn't you say that you will help me?", Damon asked.

Well, she said that but... "I did, but..."

Damon put his index finger on Talia's lips, preventing her from talking further. He didn't want to hear any buts.

"Don't overthink it. The only thing you need to convince them is that you are madly in love with me. You can do that, right?"

Talia stared into his icy-blue eyes, and she was unable to look away.

Did he say that she needs to convince someone how she is madly in love with him? And he was confident that she can do it.

Talia's chin trembled. He knew. He knew that she was totally, irrevocably, ardently, in love with him.

Without removing his gaze from Talia, Damon waved at Maya to leave the office with, "Tell Caden to return as soon as possible. We have a situation here and you will deal later with any work that is still pending. If he can be here by morning, that would be perfect."

Maya quickly scurried out of the office, before Damon could change his mind about Caden returning to the pack. She missed her mate immensely and she couldn't wait to have him in the touching distance again.

Back in the office...

Damon cupped Talia's cheek with his palm. "What do you say, kitten? Will you do that for me?"

"Do, what?", Talia asked in a shaky whisper.

Talia was sitting on Damon's lap and with Maya gone, suddenly she became aware of how close she was to Damon.

"I need to hear your answer. Will you be my Luna? Will you be my mate?", Damon's words splashed against Talia's lips, bringing her an extra dose of the dark chocolate she craved for.

"For tomorrow?"

"And longer. Much longer.", he said, and before Talia completed her nod, Damon's lips landed on hers with urgency.

