

Alphas Bride 381

Chapter 381 – Checking On Patients (1)

As they finished breakfast, everyone dispersed to accomplish their tasks.

James headed to the human city with his new friends. James saw that Petra, Erik, and Zack would occasionally stiffen as if they reminded themselves who James is, but James didn't mind. He was used to it.

Mindy, Kalina, and Maya went to Darkbourne to check on a few things for the upcoming party. Marcy volunteered to do it, right before Talia snapped and held her down while showing her the graphic video, and then there was the whole rejection business... long story short, Marcy was unavailable, so Maya took it on herself to finalize those tasks, and Mindy and Kalina decided to accompany Maya.

Caden accompanied Tony, Paul, Nate, and Greg for training. Their schedule included training in the morning, and after lunch, they will help with setting up the event hall and the garden for the upcoming party.

Tatiana and Maddox went back to her room after promising that they will make appearances at the party. Damon was hoping that Maddox will be more present, but considering that he just found his mate, Damon didn't insist.

Maddox's situation was a painful reminder for Damon that if he was not an asshole when he met Talia, he and Talia would spend the first few days (probably longer) indulging in each other. When they come out of the room, Talia would wear his mark, regardless of her wolf's presence.

But Damon messed up, big time, and it was weeks already, yet Talia was still not marked. This combined with external threats to Talia's safety, and Axel wanting to take her away... it was all driving Damon mad.

At this rate, Damon feared that it won't happen. He was stupid at the beginning, and now they were stuck with her wolf's conditions, and there was also Axel's warning how they should give it at least few days to adjust to the marking. What was that about?

Part of Damon considered letting his wolf out to mark Talia, and he would deal with Talia's wolf and anything else that comes later.

Sometimes it's better to ask for forgiveness than permission, but Damon was not sure which one this was. What if the mess escalates into something that's too much and he really endangers Talia?

Damon was frustrated. He was never indecisive. Damon's nature was to do what his instincts tell him, but since he met Talia, he was doubting himself like never before.

After breakfast, Talia had a task to go with Dawn and visit Marcy and George. They would deliver fresh food, herbs, and check on the situation there.

Shaken up by recent events, and nervous about what's coming, Damon decided to tag along.

"Don't you have pack-related work to do?", Talia asked Damon when she realized he was serious about coming with her.

"Kitten", he called with all the importance in the world. "Didn't you notice that whenever we are apart, something bad happens? We should stick together. Besides, I want to hear what Travis has to say."

Talia gave up. If Damon was fine to neglect his work in order to follow her around, she wouldn't object. She liked his presence. The only downside was that Dawn was super-stiff with Damon around.

In the kitchen, Damon waited on the side and checked emails on his phone while Talia and Dawn packed food. For people who didn't know what was going on, the official version was that Damon and Talia will have a meal in the forest.

Stephanie, Zina, Ivy, and Lily were also busying themselves in the kitchen with clean-up after breakfast.

Because Lisa was in the dungeon, and it was somewhat because of her, Talia was not sure how to look at Stephanie and she couldn't wait to pack stuff and get out of there.

"Is this the right time to have a meal in the forest?", Stephanie asked Damon with disapproval in her voice. "I know you kids like to have fun, but there is so much to do with the upcoming party."

Damon nodded in agreement. "It's exactly because of the party that we will do this. It will help us change the scenery as we go over the schedule. Maya is handling things in the town with Mindy and Kalina, and we will all be back in time to set up things here."

Stephanie exhaled helplessly and shook her head. She didn't approve, but Damon was the Alpha, and he knew what he was doing. Hopefully.

"If you are not here when I return, I will meet with you in the sweet shop.", Dawn told Zina.

"You have plans?", Talia asked.

Zina confirmed. "We will take Ivy and Lily to enjoy the best lemon pie in the area."

"Just make sure you don't stay too long.", Stephanie reminded them. "At ten-thirty, I want us to start with lunch and food prep for tonight."

"Sure, sure...", Dawn and Zina responded in unison like it's not a big deal.

Stephanie was flustered. Just yesterday Maya told her that they will have this big party, and now everyone was going to relax and enjoy. Don't they have a sense of urgency?

Stephanie felt like the only grownup in the room that was stuck with a bunch of kids who only want to play.

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Talia, Damon, and Dawn reached the house where Marcy and George were.

They took a longer route because Talia wanted to get some fresh herbs from the forest.

Travis was there already, sitting in the living room.

"Don't worry about it. I finished the exam a minute ago, so I'm waiting to tell you the results in person", Travis said when Talia apologized for running late. He didn't dare be disrespectful toward his Luna even though Damon didn't announce it.

Dawn went into the kitchen to prepare a tray with food for George, and Damon and Talia sat on the sofa to hear updates from the good Doctor.

Travis spoke for a few minutes, which could be summarized with, "There are no significant changes to their conditions."

Actually, their states were slowly declining, which was not unusual considering that they were not getting out of beds, and the extent of how much IVs could do was limited.

"They are fine for now, but if this continues for the next few days, I will recommend that we move them to the hospital where they can get extensive care. If they were humans, they would be hooked up to machines already."

Damon didn't like it. If Marcy and George are moved to the hospital, people would find out about their condition.

Sure, people working in the pack hospital are members of the Dark Howlers pack, and Travis can decide who from the staff can approach the patients, but there are ways to find out things by hacking into security feeds, or into hospital records. Nothing was completely secure.

Chapter 382 – Checking On Patients (2)

Damon was alerted when he felt Talia's emotions fluctuating.

He knew that Talia was worried about Marcy and George. She was kind and selfless, and her impulse was to help people, but this was not the right time.

Damon feared that she will use her powers.

What if someone sees how amazing she is? With all the things going on, he really didn't want to add more to it.

He gave her hand a squeeze. "Don't do anything rashly. It's still early to give up hope."

Talia responded with a sad smile. She could feel Damon's worry, and she wanted to assure him that she won't act without thinking.

"I will do my part by providing herbs and food. The two of you continue without me. I will check on Dawn." With that, Talia left the living room.

Travis looked after Talia and smiled dreamily while thinking how their Luna is compassionate. Alpha Damon is just and fierce, and he takes care of his people, but they were missing the soft side that comes out of Talia effortlessly.

In the next moment, Travis broke into a cold sweat as Damon's murderous aura splashed on him.

Travis knew what he did wrong, his head was not just for decoration. He was looking after Alpha's mate with an ambiguous expression that lingered longer than necessary.

And to save his neck, Travis lowered his head in submission.

Travis didn't dare to reveal how he knew that Talia was Damon's mate because Caden told him it was a secret, and Travis didn't want to get into more trouble.

"I had no bad intentions, Alpha. I was just noticing how Talia is a caring person. She would be a great medical professional. That's all."

"It better be..." Damon grumbled and eased up his aura. The more Damon looked at Doctor Travis, the less he liked him. Was he due for survival training? If not, Damon could make it happen.

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Dawn and Talia went upstairs together.

Talia held a bowl with fruits and a bag with fresh herbs dangling on her shoulder.

Dawn carried a tray with a full meal that had covered plates with eggs, bacon, and pastries from breakfast, which went great with cream cheese and small jars of jams. On the tray were also a glass of orange juice and a glass of milk.

As something little extra, Dawn brought a plate with cinnamon rolls, her favorites. Dawn knew that she would come to see Commander George in the morning, and she got up extra early to make them with the hope that the soothing scent of cinnamon rolls will stir him out of his daze, at least to eat.

The idea of such a handsome man with a promising future dwindling away because of rejection was eating Dawn alive and she had to do something, anything. Unfortunately, making cinnamon rolls was the most she could do, and she didn't have much hope it will work, but it was more than nothing.

They went to Marcy's room first.

Dawn observed Marcy who was unmoving, and she was not sure if it was right to feel nothing.

Dawn thought that she will feel sorry for the woman in her early twenties that was in such a sorry state. Marcy was the princess of the Red Moon pack, with good looks and great education, she came here to become Luna, yet she fell into a coma.

Dawn also thought that maybe she will despise Marcy for not appreciating all the good things in her life and rejecting the mate bond.

However, instead of any of those, Dawn didn't feel anything.

Dawn watched as Talia arranged herbs in the vase and collected the ones that started drying. They really smelled nice, and Dawn thought of asking Talia if she can get some for her apartment also. It wouldn't be fair if Zina's place smells great and Dawn's was lacking.

Seeing that Dawn was watching her, Talia started explaining what she was doing while wrapping the half-dried plants into paper towels. "I will cut off the wet parts and dry them separately. When they are fully dried, we can use them as spices, to make tea, for scented pouches, or as material for incense burners."

Dawn thought how Talia was amazing, and she remembered how Talia would always keep the leftover food for later. No matter how much they had, Talia never wasted anything.

"OK. We are done here.", Talia announced, and Dawn felt all jittery.

"How do I look?", Dawn asked.

"Are you worried that Commander George won't approve of that smudge on your cheek?"

Dawn started rubbing her left cheek vigorously.

"The other one.", Talia said with a straight face, and she burst into giggles when Dawn switched to rub her right cheek.

It took a second for Dawn to realize... "You are messing with me."

"Don't be silly, Dawn. The man is non-responsive. Even if you have horns sticking out of your head, he won't mind. Or it's more accurate to say that he won't notice."

Dawn made a face and grabbed the tray that she kept on the side. "Lead the way."

The truth was that even Dawn was not sure why she was so self-conscious while thinking about Commander George.

Sure, George was powerful and handsome, but Dawn saw many Alphas and many handsome people, yet none of them invaded her thoughts and affected her emotions to the point of her acting like a flustered teenager who was experiencing her first crush.

...

Talia entered George's room first and after a quick glance at George, she confirmed what Doctor Travis said. He was not better.

Talia placed the bowl with fruits down and moved toward the vase where herbs were.

Dawn paused in the hallway and peered through the open door to see George lying on the bed and staring blankly at the ceiling.

She expected a heartache, or concern, but instead... she was happy. Or to be more precise, Dawn's wolf was happy and urging her to get inside.

Dawn had no idea what was going on because she never felt like this, but the urge to get closer was overwhelming and she made one step, and another, and another... and she stood at the door and stared at the man who was lying on the bed.

Somehow, George was more handsome than Dawn remembered him to be.

Dawn inhaled deeply and her lungs were filled with the scent of a meadow where many flowers mixed, but the most prominent one was the sweet clover.

Dawn remembered that Zina said how the flowers Talia brought smell fantastic, but how come Dawn didn't pick up this addictive scent in Marcy's room? Did Talia place different ones in this room?

Dawn's heart skipped a beat when she realized that the man on the bed was staring at her. His dark brown eyes seem to peer into her soul, and she was wondering if that was really happening or if she imagined it.

Chapter 383 – The Second Chance For Happiness (1)

George was lost in the turbulent world his memories created.

Scenes from his early childhood morphed into an endless cycle of training, shouting, pain, hiding, enduring, hatred, dejection. He was able to survive by channeling all that negativity into more training and using it as fuel to keep going.

And then there was light. Marcy. The perfect woman, made for him. She stood like a beacon of light for a brief moment, and then she pushed him back into the cycle of nightmares that waited for him, threatening to swallow him whole.

George was unable to find an exit into the reality that was just as grim as his nightmares, but he knew that in the reality there were people waiting for him. There was Estelle and a number of other people, and for their sake, George should do something only he could do, and he had to snap out of it so that he could help them.

Helplessness was consuming him, and he wondered if this was the extent of his abilities. What was the point of finding out about his heritage if this is how it will end?

George hated himself for falling into such a sorry state. He was a joke of an Alpha.

And just when he thought that there was no hope for breaking the cycle, he picked up something different. It was a sweet scent of cinnamon that carried warmth with it, and George turned toward the source to see an outline of a person. He narrowed his eyes to focus and realized that he was staring at a young woman with short blond hair and endlessly blue eyes directed at him.

Was that his wolf stirring? It was weak, but it was definitely his wolf.

The girl was standing at the door and the light from behind her made her look like she was glowing. She was familiar, yet he was certain that he has never seen such a beautiful woman in his life.

George was lost in a daze that might have lasted a second or eternity, and he didn't realize when his wolf whispered into George's mind that one word he never thought he will hear again, "Mate".

George couldn't believe it. Was that for real or was his imagination playing tricks on him?

...

Oblivious to the state of two other people in the room, Talia finished arranging the flowers and turned around.

"Dawn?", Talia called her non-responsive friend.

Talia's eyes widened in shock when she realized that George was staring back at Dawn.

Both Dawn and George were in some kind of a trance, mesmerized with each other, and Talia realized... mates.

But how was this possible? Didn't Marcy reject George?

It took Talia a moment to remember the story about second chance mates and her lips lifted into a knowing smile.

Who said that witnessing mates recognizing each other was a rare occurrence? In just two days, Talia saw it three times, and she even saw one rejection!

Talia carefully approached Dawn and took the tray from her hands. She placed the tray on the side table and moved toward the door.

Talia nudged Dawn from the back, pushing her to step into the room, and said softly, "Go to him, Dawn."

Dawn moved robotically and stopped only when her legs reached the bed.

Talia started closing the door and paused when she remembered the camera in the room. It was there so they can see if there were any changes in George's condition. Caden just placed the camera on the dresser, so Talia swiftly snatched it and put it in her bag where herbs were. No one will get to watch what's going to happen in there.

Well, almost no one.

Talia pulled the door to close, but she didn't close it completely. She left a small crack so that she can peep inside.

Talia didn't want to watch the X-rated scenes, but she just wanted to ensure things were moving in the right direction.

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Dawn looked at George's handsome features, but she couldn't read his expression.

Somehow, he didn't look happy and that made her heart tighten painfully.

In the next moment, she was overwhelmed with emotions.

Disbelief. Doubt. Fear. There was a trace of joy, but it was quickly drowned by hesitation.

Dawn clutched her chest while wondering from where those feelings were coming, and then she heard a voice in her head, "Mate".

Dawn stared at George while questioning her sanity. Was she daydreaming about handsome Commander George, and she lost her mind completely? How can she be his mate?

Isn't he the powerful Commander?

And there was another thing... wasn't he rejected by Miss Marcy?

If the mate thing was real, doesn't that make her his second chance mate?

But... the stories go that only two people who lost mates can be each other's second chance mates.

Did that mean she had a mate at some point, and she lost him? Did he perish before they met? Or did he mark another woman and that destroyed the chance for a bond to form between them?

Dawn will never know the answers to those questions.

However, she knew that if she was looking at her second chance mate, then all those negative emotions she was feeling were coming from George.

Why was he just lying there and staring at her?

Was it possible that he didn't want her?

No one ever mentioned a third chance mate... will she be mateless forever?

George stared at Dawn while taking in her features. No matter how he looked at her, she was perfect. Was this another joke of the Moon Goddess? A test?

Why would she give him a mate, if the bond can be so easily discarded?

And he could also feel that she was uncertain and a bit scared. Is that how one feels when they meet their mate?

George frowned when he noticed tears streaming down her cheeks. It was all super-confusing.

"Why are you crying?", his voice was raspy because he didn't talk for a while and his throat was dry.

"You don't want me.", Dawn said in a shaky voice, and she wiped her tears with the back of her palm. "Is it because I am an Omega? Not worthy to be your mate?"

George's frown deepened. He never thought about the status of his mate. Actually, before meeting Marcy, George was so consumed in his training and revenge that he didn't think about his mate at all.

The scar of Marcy's rejection was fresh, and it reminded him how opening up to the bond could backfire but... how could she be not worthy?

Marcy rejected him because she thought that he was an Omega, and if he does the same after the hell Marcy put him through, he will be the biggest asshole on the planet.

Chapter 384 – The Second Chance For Happiness (2)

George raised his hand and touched Dawn's fist that was in her chest level, pressing on the spot where her aching heart was.

They both jolted when sparks prickled their skin upon contact, confirming that the mate thing was real.

"It is me who is the unworthy one.", George said.

Dawn's brows came together in concern, and she voiced her thoughts, "Do you think that Alpha Edward won't take you back because of what happened?"

"You know..." He couldn't say the words that Marcy rejected him, but there was no need to say it.

He slowly retracted his hand from Dawn's, and she was quick to catch it.

Their hands stood connected between them, symbolizing the bond that was fresh and delicate.

"I know what got you into this state.", Dawn confirmed. "I assume that Alpha Edward won't approve. You don't need to go back to the Red Moon pack. You are a Commander. I'm sure that Alpha Damon will find you a position in our army and protect you. He takes care of his people. If you don't want to be a soldier in the army of the Dark Howlers pack, that's fine. I have an apartment where we can live, and my income is enough for both of us. Actually, I saved quite a bit."

Dawn was planning to go on a trip with Zina, but now that Dawn found her mate, Zina will need to take the back seat... assuming George doesn't reject her.

George looked at Dawn in disbelief, wondering if he heard her right. "You will support me?"

Dawn suspected that she hurt his pride. But he was still holding her hand, so even if she stepped over the invisible line, it was not by much. "I will support you until you find a job. Then we can both contribute."

"You won't mind if I am a nobody? A failure that was discarded?"

Dawn realized that his words were harsh because Marcy rejected him. Was it possible that he was insecure?

Or did Marcy's rejection hurt so badly that he didn't want a mate anymore?

Or was he testing her?

Whichever it was, it didn't matter. Regardless of how George felt about the mate bond, her answer would be the same.

From a young age, Dawn was hearing stories about how the mate bond is beautiful and sacred, and how true happiness can only be achieved when mates were together, and now that she was standing in front of her mate who was outrageously handsome, Dawn had no intention of backing down.

Dawn put her other hand over George's that was still holding hers, and she confirmed that the sparks of their bond were real. How long will she get to enjoy them? Dawn was not sure.

"You are not a nobody. You are George. Your job or background don't define you. The only thing that matters is what you will do going forward. My wolf told me you are my mate, and these sparks confirm it. I am willing to make it work and if you think otherwise..." Dawn released a shaky breath. "Reject me and be done with it."

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George helplessly looked at Dawn whose cheeks were wet with fresh tears again. He was a soldier, and he didn't know how to handle a crying woman.

He propped himself into a seated position and raised his hands to wipe her cheeks with his palms. Every movement hurt, like a thousand needles were lodged into his muscles, but his urge to comfort her was stronger than anything else.

"Stop crying. Uhm... What's your name?"

Dawn sniffled. "Dawn. That's D-A-W-N, like the first appearance of light in the sky before sunrise." She had to explain because some people would call her Don, like she was a boy. It's pronounced almost the same.

"Dawn...", George repeated with a smile that made her heart skip a beat. "How about you sit next to me, so..."

'GRRRGRRR!'

George stopped talking when his stomach growled loudly.

He wanted to say that she should sit next to him so they can talk and get to know each other, but his stomach made noise and interrupted the moment. Actually, his wolf was weakly urging him to pull Dawn into his embrace and kiss her senselessly, but George decided to take it slow.

With Marcy, Gorge allowed himself to get carried away, and it's not like he had an intention to reject Dawn, but he wanted to be careful and not rush into things.

Dawn realized that George's emotions changed from what she sensed previously. The initial negativity was dissipating, and she knew that he was willing to give them a go, and that meant the world to her.

George was embarrassed by the noise his stomach made. He looked at Dawn sheepishly to see her smiling brightly, making him feel like the whole world came to life.

He thought of her name... "Your name suits you."

"It does?"

"You brought light to my darkness." He knew that she probably won't understand how true his words were, but it didn't matter.

Dawn felt her cheeks heating. Was she blushing? Probably.

She thought how it was ridiculous, George didn't even say anything super romantic or sexy, but her heart was racing like his words were the sweetest thing she ever heard.

Completely flustered by George's unexpected compliment, Dawn's eyes darted randomly until she saw the tray with food. "I brought you food. You should eat."

Dawn moved to get the tray with food closer to George while talking quickly. She would blabber when she was nervous. "I guess your body feels stiff. Would you like a good stretch? We can go for a walk, or a run if you are up to it. I can give you a massage. If you want, I can prepare a bath for you..."

"Can I have some water first?", George asked when Dawn paused to inhale.

Dawn swiftly changed her direction toward the pitcher with water. She poured him a glass of water and watched him drink it.

She stared unblinkingly at his Adam's apple that bobbed with every gulp he took and she thought how even that part of him was handsome.

Dawn placed the tray with food on the bed next to George. She gingerly sat on the edge of the bed with the tray between them.

Instead of ogling at him, Dawn decided to get busy, and she started removing covers from the plates with food.

Dawn took the fork and her eyes darted from the food to George. "With what do you want to start?" It was obvious that she wanted to feed him.

Instead of answering, George took the fork from Dawn's hand and poked a piece of scrambled eggs.

Dawn stared at him as he held the fork in front of her mouth.

"That's your food. I had breakfast already.", she said.

George smiled a little. "It's custom for a werewolf to feed his mate first. Allow me to do this, Dawn. It's a gesture to show that I will take care of you." And he also had an inexplicable urge to feed her.

Dawn's eyes opened wide to the point of hurting and her lips parted to accept his offering. He said that he will take care of her, another indirect confirmation that he was OK with her being his mate.

Was she worthy of being Commander's mate? The Moon Goddess seemed to think so.

Dawn didn't want to appear like a weak Omega. Commander's mate needs to show some backbone.

She took the spoon and scooped a piece of scrambled eggs.

"And I want to take care of you in return.", she said while holding the spoon in front of his mouth.

George looked at Dawn with a complex expression and his heart cracked a little. He realized how this was the way it was supposed to be from the beginning. If Marcy didn't reject him, they would take care of each other... but she did reject him, and now he didn't feel anything when he thought about her. Actually, his wolf protested.

George opened his mouth and Dawn pushed the spoon in there, smiling happily when the utensil came out clean. She really wanted to be that spoon and to get into his mouth, so that he can touch her with his tongue... Naughty thoughts.

Chapter 385 – Learning About Each Other

In the hallway...

Talia jumped in fright when she felt someone fondling her ass and she whipped her head to see Damon grinning at her.

Damon finished talking to Travis a while ago and he expected Talia to come down, and when she didn't, his patience ran out quickly and he went to investigate. He didn't expect to see Talia sticking to the door and he couldn't stop himself from teasing her.

It was obvious that she was peeping through the crack on the door of George's room. What were Talia and Dawn up to? And where was Dawn?

Damon was not aware of this playful side of Talia. Every day he learned more about his adorable mate and he couldn't wait to see what else she had in store for him.

"What are you doing?", Damon asked in a hushed voice.

"Mates", Talia mouthed and pointed excitedly toward the door.

Damon's eyebrows shoot up and he craned his neck to see through the crack of the door above Talia.

And sure, there it was... George and Dawn were sitting on the bed with a tray of food between them, and they were feeding each other.

A big smile bloomed on Damon's face. He didn't care if they were mates or not. The only thing on Damon's mind was that with George awake, one of his problems disappeared.

George was not a kid who can be swindled, and he was definitely not a fun-hungry teenager.

But the most important thing was that Damon knew George's secret, and that went beyond George and Marcy breaking their mate bond. If the wrong people knew that the Alpha of the Frostcrest pack was alive and kicking, heads would roll.

The point here was that Damon would rather collude with a person he had something on, and he had something big on George.

Without any shame, Damon briefly knocked on the door and pushed it open.

Dawn bolted to her feet and bowed her head. "Alpha!" She looked like a kid who was caught doing mischief.

Damon waved at Dawn. "Continue what you were doing."

Damon spoke to George. "I am glad to see you are better. I congratulate you on finding your mate. Take your time to recuperate. Let me know when you are better so we can talk. My pack Doctor would like to examine you but considering the circumstances, the doctor won't intrude." Damon glanced at Dawn who sat back on the bed, but her head was still lowered. "Dawn can inform us when is a good time for the doctor to visit. Feel free to move to the packhouse where you will be closer to amenities, and not so close to..." Damon gestured toward the hallway. He didn't want to say Marcy's name, but they all understood what he meant.

Talia used this opportunity to approach Dawn and give her a hug. "Congratulations, Dawn. Enjoy with your mate. You deserve it." Talia winked at Dawn and mumbled congratulations to George before moving to leave the room and dragging Damon with her.

The moment the door closed behind them, Talia asked Damon irritably, "Why did you barge in there?" He pushed the door open, and Talia was still half-bent, and if Dawn or George paid attention, they would know she was peeping. How embarrassing!

"Are you upset that I spoiled your spying on a newly mated couple?", Damon asked with amusement in his voice.

Talia pouted. She didn't want to peep. OK, maybe she did, but just a little bit. If they started kissing or undressing, she would definitely stop.

By this time, Damon and Talia were downstairs.

Damon chuckled and pulled Talia into his embrace. "I didn't know that my mate is into looking."

Talia had no intention to admit to anything.

"I don't know what you are saying."

"I think you do, kitten...", Damon drawled. "Should your mate give you a good show? How about right here in the..."

"We should head back.", Talia said with urgency. She grabbed his hand and pulled him toward the front door. "The preparations for the party will start soon and we can't let others do all the work. We should tell Steph and Zina that Dawn won't be available today, and maybe for the next few days..."

Damon smiled helplessly and walked after Talia, allowing her to drag him with her.

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In George's room...

"Tell me something about you.", George said while poking food with the fork for Dawn.

"Uhm... I work in the kitchen."

"Does that mean you are a good cook?", George asked.

Dawn lifted her chin smugly. Cooking was her forte. "You will find out soon enough."

"I look forward to it.", George responded. "Tell me more about you."

Dawn shook her head. "It's your turn to share."

George accepted the food that Dawn gave him and he chewed while thinking what would be interesting. She probably didn't want to hear about training and military stuff which was about 90% of his life.

Eventually, he thought of something. "I don't have parents."

Dawn's face fell as she imagined George without his parents, and then Marcy rejected him. It was a lonely picture, difficult to bear.

George could see that Dawn was upset. Was she feeling sorry for him?

"Don't worry about it. It happened a long time ago. They died before I could remember... Uhm... I mean..." George stumbled over his words when he realized that he only made it worse.

The image of a lonely young man turned into an image of a lonely child, and Dawn's heart cracked.

George felt the urgency to fix it. But what could he do? He was really not good at this type of talking with women.

In his panic, George pushed the tray with food away and pulled Dawn into his embrace.

Dawn stiffened for a moment, but then she relaxed against him, taking a deep breath that filled her chest with the scent of a meadow that was full of various flowers, and there were a lot of sweet clovers.

Even through the clothes, Dawn could feel the sparks of their bond prickling her skin, and the way his hold on her tightened told her that he felt the same.

She realized that her arms were slack next to her, and it didn't seem right, so she gingerly moved her hands around him.

Dawn smiled when she fully embraced George. The firm muscles of his back felt good under her palms, and she couldn't believe that this was her mate. It was surreal.

George buried his face in the crook of Dawn's neck and her scent of cinnamon made him lightheaded. It was warm and welcoming, just like the woman in his arms. He really wanted to get a taste of it, so he pressed his lips on the delicate skin of her neck and then he licked her there.

Dawn's hairs stood on ends.

George's embrace was solid, and he was kissing and nibbling on her neck and releasing small groans that sent pulses of need converging at her core, and she gripped his back firmly to steady herself because the whole room was spinning.

Chapter 386 – Mate's Promise

"Dawn...", George murmured and lifted his head to look at Dawn. They were so close that their noses nearly touched.

Dawn stared into his eyes that were getting darker by the second and she forgot how to breathe.

Commander George was even more handsome when he was this close. And she still couldn't believe it. Just yesterday she was swooning over him as he carried suitcases out of the car. She was thinking about him as some untouchable celebrity, yet now she was almost sitting on his lap, their hips were connected and his arms were around her and her heart was beating in her throat.

George wanted to take this slow and to get to know Dawn so that he doesn't repeat the mistake he made with Marcy. However, he could pick up the scent of Dawn's arousal and she was so adorable with her red cheeks and those delicious lips he certainly wished to devour. Was there a need to wait?

George cupped her cheek with his palm, and he pecked her lips once, twice... every kiss was a bit longer and it stirred him to get closer, and the fact that she was kissing him back was the best thing ever. Without further delay, George deepened the kiss, greedily taking everything Dawn had to offer.

Dawn melted into him as his tongue explored her mouth and his sweet flavors seeped into her system.

His hand slipped under her blouse, and she jolted when addictive sparks prickled her skin low on her back. She knew where this was going, and it's not that she was not willing, but she remembered something important.

"Wait... wait...", Dawn called between kisses and George frowned when she inched away while pulling his hand out of her blouse.

He didn't like it. Why was she pushing him away? Is this the moment when she rejects him? It happened the last time. Marcy kissed him, and then she rejected him.

Dawn took two deep breaths to stabilize herself before saying, "Are you OK? I mean... is your body fine?" He was lying on the bed without moving. She saw him on security feed last night and even this morning. Sure, one day in bed without food for a werewolf is not much, but the mental and emotional damages were unknown.

George studied her expression for a few long moments before responding, "My body is fine and my wolf welcomes your proximity."

He was about to dive for another kiss when Dawn put her fingers over his lips and asked, "Don't you want us to go to the packhouse? Or if that's not fine, we can go to my apartment?"

George removed her hand from his face. "Why?"

Dawn was not sure how to respond to this. Didn't he know why? Marcy was right there, in the room next door!

"Because... Marcy is here...", Dawn said in a small voice while pointing at the door.

George's hard expression eased.

"She can be in the room across the hall or across the ocean. Why would I care where she is?"

With that, George's hand landed at the back of Dawn's head, and he pulled her for another kiss.

Dawn was swept away in another kissing frenzy, and she felt his hot palm on her waist when she remembered one more thing.

"Wait... wait..."

George groaned in protest. "Now what?"

Dawn bit her lower lip guiltily and looked to the side. "The tray. Let me keep it on the side." It was right there on the bed and if she and George were about to do what she thought they were going to do, that tray will be tossed on the ground and make a mess she would need to clean later.

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Dawn kept the tray on the table and turned to see George's frown directed at her.

"Is something wrong?", Dawn asked.

"I don't know. You tell me.", George said dryly. "Is there some other condition I need to fulfill before I can claim my mate, or are those just excuses to keep me away from you? If you are not willing, just say so. There is no need to..."

"Is that what you are thinking?", Dawn interrupted him.

George closed his eyes and exhaled sharply. "I don't know. What should I think? Tell me."

Dawn's heart cracked when his insecurities splashed on her through their mate bond, reminding her that just yesterday his bond with Marcy was broken, and it seemed that he was broken also.

She looked at him and for the first time, she didn't see the powerful and domineering Commander George. He was just George, her mate, who fed her and wanted to know things about her, and he was impossibly handsome. In addition to that, he was scarred in ways she couldn't imagine, but she knew that she had the power to make it better.

Dawn reached for the hem of her blouse and pulled it over her head. Next, she unbuttoned her jeans and shimmied out of them while being painfully aware that George was observing her keenly.

Dawn released a slow breath and met his gaze.

"No excuses, George." She looked down on her body that had only a blue lacy bra and matching panties to cover her private parts. "This is me. No matter what you think that's going on, never doubt the fact that I am your mate, and I am yours. This is yours."

George could feel her sincerity that dispersed the dark clouds from his mind.

He pushed himself off the bed and in one swift move he removed his t-shirt.

Dawn's eyes widened at the sight of his muscle-packed torso, and she swallowed a mouthful of air when she realized that he was less than a step away from her.

This was the first time for them to stand so close in front of each other, and Dawn realized how tall he was, and how broad his shoulders were... he looked like a mountain.

George's hand went up in slow motion and he ran his thumb over her lower lip. "Dawn Shaw, from today onward, you are mine. As your mate and your partner, I will take care of you. That's a promise."

Dawn was not sure if she heard him right. "Shaw? That's not my name."

George's lips lifted into a smile. "It will be after I mark you." His hand moved to Dawn's left, and he touched with the tips of his fingers the base of her neck. "You will carry my mark, and you will carry my pups. Mine."

Dawn's heart was beating so violently, that she thought it will come out of her chest.

Shaw. George Shaw. Dawn Shaw. She liked it.

He will give her his last name, his mark, and his pups... their pups. Dawn could feel arousal swelling within her at the thought of them making babies.

Chapter 387 – Cinnamon And Clover (1)

George admired the sight of Dawn's breasts rising and falling as she breathed. Her blue lacy bra hugged her curves perfectly and the color matched her eyes. It was like it was made for her.

He licked his lips while imagining what her nipples look like, and how they will feel on his tongue. Would it taste like cinnamon? He knew that he could remove that bra easily and confirm, but part of him enjoyed the guessing game.

Dawn's nipples were just like Dawn herself; a mystery, something he was yet to uncover, but he knew it was his.

George pinched Dawn's chin with his thumb and index finger and lifted her head and he took his time memorizing her features. Light blue eyes with a hint of gray... small nose... pinkish lips... and adorable freckles that created an intricate pattern on her nose and cheeks that were now rosy because she was flustered.

George's wolf was stirring impatiently, urging him to get closer to mate, and George was happy to confirm that every spark of their bond prickling his fingers was gradually mending his cracked soul, and embedding pieces of Dawn as part of George's new normal.

It was faint at first, but now George was confident that thanks to Dawn's presence, his wolf was getting stronger by the second, and so was George. Will they return to the state they were before Marcy's rejection? George was not sure, but this phenomenon confirmed that Dawn was much more than his light. She was his lifeline, his everything.

While George studied Dawn's features, her eyes moved lower to look at the tattoo that was on the left side of his chest.

The design was elegant with a fully open lily flower in the middle and branches spreading on the sides with buds on it. Two swallows with forked tails were facing the lily, and there was a patch close to George's armpit that looked like clouds. It was delicate and curvy, and Dawn thought how it wouldn't fit a fierce warrior. And below it were two letters, E and C.

George was watching her, and he could see her brows coming together in a frown.

"What is it?", he asked. Did she not approve of his tattoo? Or was something else going on in her pretty head?

"Those letters...", Dawn said in a small voice. "Are they... for a... woman?"

George glanced down and responded flatly, "One of them is."

Dawn pressed her lips into a line. She didn't like the idea of a memory of some woman being etched onto his body.

George's expression didn't change when he said, "Eliana and Conor. My parents." He did it to serve as a silent reminder of what he was doing. Revenge.

Dawn's eyes widened for a moment, and she cursed herself silently. Was she jealous of his mother?

George leaned on her left and his breath splashed on her ear as he murmured, "I love that you are possessive of me. It tells me you don't want to share me. I feel the same about you."

Dawn moved to see George's face and she examined him while wondering if that was true or if he was just saying it to make her feel better.

"You do?", she asked. The thought of such an exquisite specimen thinking of her as his, and not willing to share, was fantastic.

George took Dawn's right hand and placed it on his chest. Her palm prickled with sparks of their bond, but even with that, she could feel his strong heartbeat.

"I lost hope that I will see the light, but then you came. I have no intention of letting go, Dawn. As long as you don't abandon what we have, I will go through any storm for you."

A million butterflies exploded in her stomach, making her all giddy and she feared that she might throw up.

His words were extremely stimulating, and it was all enhanced by the fact that she was just in her underwear, standing a fraction away from her smoking-hot half-naked mate.

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Dawn's hands moved around George's neck, and she got on her toes, boldly going to claim lips that were begging to be kissed, and George was happy to respond ardently because he also craved for deeper intimacy with his newly found mate.

Dawn closed her eyes when their lips connected, and she laced her fingers in his hair that curled a bit.

His stubble prickled her skin, a stark contrast to his velvety lips that devoured her hungrily, and she wouldn't want it any other way.

George's arms wrapped around Dawn, and he pulled her into a firm embrace, closing the tiniest gaps between their bodies.

Dawn gasped upon contact as addictive sparks danced everywhere they touched, and she loved it. Was it too soon to say that she loved him?

Dawn was lost in the emotions that overloaded her system, and she didn't realize that he was pushing her to move backward until her back hit the door.

She felt the loss of him on her lips when he started trailing kisses along her jaw, and she gripped his back while his tongue created magic circles on her neck.

She bit her lips in anticipation. Will he mark her now?

But he didn't.

His lips traced the edge of her bra, teasing her breasts and she couldn't wait for them to move faster so she reached to the back to undo the buckles and remove that pesky fabric.

"Don't...", he said. "Not yet."

Slightly disappointed, Dawn nodded obediently and waited to see what he will do next.

His hands moved on her sides, trailing the curve of her waist, and then he hooked his fingers at the edge of her panties and paused. He looked at Dawn, silently asking if this was OK, and her smile told him that he can continue.

Dawn had no idea why he asked for consent. She was sure that he can smell her arousal.

George was objectively handsome, and the mate bond charged with addictive sparks was only making this several folds better. Even if they were not mates, Dawn wouldn't mind hooking up with George. After all, she was fangirling over Geroge from the moment she laid her eyes on him, and sex is not a big deal for werewolves, except when it came to mates, and this exquisite specimen IS her mate. Isn't she a lucky girl?

Dawn moved her legs as the delicate fabric slid down to her ankles and George got on his knees with it.

He kept her panties on the side carefully, like he was afraid that he will damage them somehow.

She thought that he will come up, but he stayed down there, and her face flushed when she realized that he was staring at her crotch area. She hoped that he liked the view, because just a few days ago she did a Brazilian, leaving only one narrow strip right in the middle, that ended above the spot where her folds start.

George looked up at Dawn and gave her a wicked smile that made her heart skip a beat.

He approved.

Chapter 388 – Cinnamon And Clover (2)

Dawn stared at George as he inched closer to her and he took a deep breath, obviously taking in the scent of her arousal.

"Cinnamon...", he murmured.

Cinnamon? Dawn thought how that was odd. Why would he talk about the cinnamon rolls she brought for him? They were still on the plate. She would be happy if he ate pastries she personally made, but what's with this timing?

As if he could sense her confusion, George clarified, "You smell of cinnamon. The delicious kind." He gave her another sniff. "There is some honeyed sweetness, like an apple pie with cinnamon."

Dawn saw George lick his lips and she understood that he wanted to eat, and the food was her. In an instant, her arousal swelled through the roof, and she feared that her juices will drip down her legs. That would be embarrassing.

She inhaled a shaky breath. "Clover."

"What?"

"Your scent is like a meadow full of flowers, but the sweet scent of clover stands out.", she explained.

After a brief pause, George hummed in approval. "Did you know that every part of clover is edible?" He learned that as part of survival training.

Dawn didn't know that, but she thought it made sense because George looked edible.

George's attention was back to the strip of her pubic hair, and he traced it with his index finger, like a child who never saw such a thing. George saw them bushy, neatly trimmed, and completely waxed, but this was new. It was like a landing strip, directing him to the destination.

As a werewolf, Dawn was used to nudity. However, in front of George, she felt exposed, and she wanted to cover her crotch area because he was taking his sweet time inspecting her like he had never seen a woman. It made her jittery. But the last time Dawn took initiative, George thought she was pushing him away, and she didn't want him to get the wrong idea because she was absolutely smitten with her mate, and she really wanted to roll in the sheets with him, and she knew it will happen, so there was no need to rush no matter how eager she was. She stood with her back leaning on the door and waited to see what he will do next.

George's hot palms ran up and down Dawn's legs as if he was memorizing them, and then he grabbed her right leg, behind her knee, and hooked her leg on his shoulder.

George hoped that Dawn won't pick up on how nervous he was.

He was not an inexperienced guy, but the reality was that in the past, women were pleasuring him, and this time, he wanted to do something different.

George never thought much about eating pussy, but Dawn smelled delicious, like a dessert, and saliva pooled in his mouth as he imagined her taste.

George reached with his hand and spread her folds with the tips of his fingers to reveal a delicate pink flesh that was glistening with juices Dawn's body released.

His urge to lick her there swelled.

Dawn couldn't believe that this was happening. Handsome Commander George was on his knees, holding her right leg up and caressing her down there. It was electrifying.

The only problem was that she was technically standing on one leg, without anything firm to hold onto. She grabbed the door handle, that was the best she could do.

When he was done with the visual inspection, George's fingers moved between Dawn's folds.

"Ahh...", Dawn released a soft sigh and George smirked.

George inched closer and gave her a lick. His eyes flashed when he identified sweetness.

Without any warning, he buried his face between her legs and started exploring her with his tongue.

"Oh, God!", Dawn exclaimed.

It was not the first time for a man to go down on her, but his every touch was charged with thrilling sparks of their bond that shook all her pleasure centers.

George growled into Dawn's flesh when she fisted his hair with the force that made it sting, but it only spurred him to lick her more.

Her taste reminded him of a filling for the apple pie that was made with cinnamon, brown sugar, and a hint of nutmeg, and baked to perfection. Everything about Dawn was perfect, made for him.

Dawn's whole body shook, and she almost fell but then George grabbed her buttocks and supported her.

Somehow, he knew what she wanted, so he licked her harder in long mighty strokes that sent cataclysmic sensations through her body in the rhythm his tongue set.

Dawn's breathing became choppy, and he latched his lips around her clit and started sucking.

Dawn's eyes rolled at the back of her head.

'BANG!'

Dawn's head slammed against the door behind her, but she didn't notice because the whole world was spinning, and she felt like floating.

He wanted to ask if she was OK. That was quite a hit. But she was still moaning, so he continued with his ministrations.

"George... Yes! Yes! Fuck!... Yeah!...", Dawn shouted without any shame, and it all stopped abruptly when her body spasmed, and an intense orgasm rendered her unable to breathe.

George groaned as Dawn's emotions spilled onto him, and he really wanted to put his cock inside her, but he was also glad to know how good he made her feel.

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Dawn blinked herself into reality, and she realized that she was lying on the bed with George sitting by her side. The last thing she remembered, she was at the door. How did she get to bed? Did she pass out?

George flicked her blue lacy bra on the floor and observed her completely naked form.

Her nipples were right there, waiting for him to tease them, but he controlled that urge. For now.

He knew how she was feeling, but he still asked, "Did you like it?"

"Very much", she said breathily.

Somehow, her acknowledgment that he could satisfy her made him proud like he accomplished something monumental.

Dawn glanced at his crotch area, and she could see that his erection was straining his jeans.

She licked her lips subconsciously.

"Can I...? To you...?"

Dawn had no idea why she asked, but she felt that since George asked for permission to undress her, she should do the same.

George caressed her face that looked so small compared to his palm.

He was not a stranger to women pleasuring him, but this time he wanted something else.

"You can but I wish you don't.", he said. Seeing her confused expression, George explained, "For our first time, I want to make you feel good. Can I?"

Dawn nodded in agreement. How can she say no to that?

The truth was that George really wanted to plow her pussy and get balls deep inside her, and if she gives him a blow job, it will only delay what he truly wanted to do.

Chapter 389 – Cinnamon And Clover (3) [

George stood up and Dawn gulped a mouthful of air when he started removing his pants.

He had no problems showing off his physique, and he approved of the way Dawn stared at his muscular legs and his cock that was hard and ready.

Her insides tightened at the thought of that big thing stretching her in unimaginable ways. She was nervous.

George crawled on the bed above Dawn, and only then she realized that both of them were completely naked.

He spread her legs with his knees and her breathing became choppy. Was this really happening?

Dawn dated a few guys and had a few hookups. As the prelude to sex, they would go to the Shifters nightclub or some other party. The mood would be good, alcohol would make it better, and this was totally different.

It was almost mechanical like they followed some invisible script. What if she messes up?

This was not just any guy. This was Commander George, her mate. What if she disappoints him?

Would he prefer if she was inexperienced? She heard that some guys prefer only pure, untouched girls.

Or should she show him a few moves she learned along the way?

Unaware of Dawn's internal conflicts, George was focused on Dawn's breasts, and he took a moment to decide on which one to suck first. The left one won.

The moment George's lips latched around Dawn's areola and his tongue caressed her nipple, electrifying sparks of their bond shoot through Dawn's body and she forgot about her insecurities.

Her hands moved from his shoulders into his hair and then glided over his back. She couldn't reach his ass because his body was too low, so she went back to fisting his hair.

By the time he moved to her other breast, Dawn was completely under his spell and the throbbing void at her core demanded to be filled.

"George...", she called breathily. "Please."

He looked up at her. "Please, what?"

Dawn squirmed under him in frustration. He knew very well what she wanted. Did she need to say it?

She was about to tell him to fuck her, but she realized how that was not right. She wanted much more than sex, because just sex was not enough. Not with George.

"Make me yours...", she said, and George's face lit up with delight.

In one swift move, he propped himself higher and kissed her on the lips. The kiss was slow and deep, with a lot of tongue and just a bit of teeth, and it told her how much he wanted her.

His torso pressed on hers to maximize the surface where their bodies connected and both of them relished the sparks that were urging them to get closer, much closer than they were.

In unhurried, rhythmical movements, George's hips moved, and his cock glided between her drenched folds, charging them both with arousal and anticipation of what's to come.

His insides trembled and he was not sure if that was from Dawn, his wolf, or maybe he was nervous. Why would he be nervous? Probably because this was Dawn, his mate. She was not the first woman he was about to have sex with. She was not even his first mate. However, she was the woman who accepted him, welcomed him, and she didn't even know that he was an Alpha.

Dawn assumed George will lose his position as the commander, and she wanted to support him. Instead of shrinking away, Dawn was ready to do whatever she could, so they stay together, and she wanted to take care of him, regardless of his status.

That selflessness and dedication were the only things he wanted from his mate. For the first time since finding out about his heritage, George didn't cringe at the idea of being an Alpha and leading a pack because he knew that Dawn will be a great Luna.

He wanted to prove himself as worthy.

Dawn gasped into his mouth when she felt the pressure at her entrance, and he made his way inside slowly, allowing her to fully grasp every glorious inch he was giving her.

He looked at her face for that last inch and he loved the way her eyes clouded with lust.

"Ah!", Dawn moaned when he jabbed himself inside her for that last fraction, and then there was a moment of complete stillness as they stared into each other's eyes.

"Mine...", George growled, and his hips started rocking.

George closed his eyes and acknowledged the sparks that drove him to the edge of sanity as he enjoyed profusely the sensation of Dawn's pussy gripping his cock, and he wanted it to last forever, yet he also wanted to get his release.

"George...", Dawn called breathlessly, and he opened his eyes to look at her face that was completely flushed. Her eyes were watery, and she clutched his shoulders tightly, and the whole experience was out of this world.

'Mates', George thought. That one word held so much weight, but only after meeting Dawn, he understood that it describes the feeling of belonging he never experienced before.

"Dawn... Dawn...", he murmured while kissing her sloppily, her flavors of cinnamon muddled with his mind, and he could feel his wolf urging him to increase the pace of his thrusts and claim his mate completely.

Dawn was a mess.

She was still reeling in the reality that George was her mate, and now he was inside her, and the friction came with sparks that shot into her brain violently, making her think only about the man who was holding onto her like he never wanted to let go, and she hoped that he never will.

George moved to kiss and suck on her neck, and she felt the pressure building up as her orgasm was approaching.

"George... George...", she called his name wantonly and he never heard anything more seductive in his life.

Dawn's eyes rolled at the back of her head when he increased the pace, and she was right there at the edge of a cliff beyond which rapture waited for her when she felt a stinging pain in her neck.

"Ah... Geo... ah... ugh... Geor... mmm... ah...", she cried unintelligibly.

Her breath was choppy, and her brain refused to work.

Dawn was overstimulated. George's body was pressing on hers, his hands held her body in place, and he was still thrusting inside her, giving her that final nudge toward the orgasm that was amplified by the scorching pain that spread from her neck to the rest of her body.

Dawn squirmed under him, and George held her tightly while releasing his venom into her system.

George muffled his groan into her neck when her insides coiled around his shaft and his ass buckled when he found his release. Every squirt of his hot seed came with an ecstatic sensation that was out of this world and he didn't want to stop movements of his hips.

Eventually, George unlatched himself from Dawn's neck. He checked her face to see that she was red and gasping for air, but the silly grin on her face told him she was fine.

He looked at her neck that had two streams of blood and his chest swelled with pride. That's where his mark will form.

George licked her neck to help the wounds heal and Dawn's body jerked every time his tongue touched her there. It was super-sensitive.

He was proud of his handiwork and his wolf jumped from joy in his mind, and it took some time for George to realize that he was releasing his Alpha aura uncontrollably. He was happy to confirm that Dawn was not affected. Was it because of his mark? Or because they were mates?

"George...", Dawn called when she found her voice. "Did you mark me?" She clearly felt the bite and the scorching sensation, and she also knew that their bond was much stronger than before, but she still wanted a confirmation.

His smile reached his eyes. "Mine."

Dawn opened her mouth to say something, but George's hips started moving again and her head plopped backward into the pillows, and she forgot what she wanted to say.

Chapter 390 – News About Dawn's Availability

In the packhouse...

Damon went to the study to deal with his matters, and Talia took on herself to deliver news about Dawn's absence. She wanted to do it in person, and Damon was glad that Talia took that task because he didn't want to tell Stephanie that one of her best helpers won't be around for a while.

Damon mind-linked Stephanie and confirmed that she was in the kitchen, so Talia knew where to go.

To Talia's surprise, it was not only Stephanie, but Zina, Ivy, and Lily were also there.

"What do you mean, we should proceed without Dawn?", Zina asked.

Zina, Ivy, Lily, and Dawn had plans to go to Darkbourne and enjoy sweets, and Dawn told them to go without her and she will catch up. However, when they finished work and saw how late it was, they decided to wait for Dawn so they can go together.

But Talia came without Dawn and said that Dawn won't come. How can Zina not be curious?

Stephanie was alerted. Normally, Stephanie wouldn't poke her nose in other people's business, but Talia said this like it was something important. Did Alpha Damon give Dawn an important task? Despite her goofy and playful nature, Dawn was one of the responsible Omegas in the packhouse, and considering that they had not only lunch but also a big party coming, Stephanie was counting on Dawn's presence.

"When will Dawn be available?", Stephanie asked.

"Uhm...", Talia was not sure how to answer this question. "Probably not today."

"Where is she? How come I can't contact her through mind-link?", Zina spoke with urgency.

Talia realized that she will need to reveal more information. Well, here it goes. "Dawn found her mate."

All four women stared at Talia and wondered if they heard her right.

"That's wonderful!", Stephanie was first to recover. No matter how much help she needed, she was really happy for Dawn.

Ivy and Lily bounced in place and clapped from excitement.

Zina was the only one with a strange expression. A mate? Zina knew very well where Talia and Dawn went. She went there last night. Unless Dawn's mate is a bear or some other forest creature, there was no way Dawn found her mate during that trip.

Sure, there were soldiers patrolling the area and safeguarding that house, but Zina and Dawn made several visits to the places where soldiers gather and if Dawn's mate was there, she would find him.

"Who is it?", Zina's question put the focus of attention back to Talia.

Talia wished that Zina asked this in private, but everyone would find out sooner or later, so it didn't matter.

"Commander George."

Ivy and Lily pressed their hands over their lips to suppress their squeals. They got a few peeks at the handsome commander, and they knew that Dawn scored a jackpot.

"What?", Zina asked Talia in disbelief. Maybe others didn't know, but Zina knew that Dawn saw George more than once since they came here, and they were close. And didn't George just get ditched by Marcy?

Talia saw invisible question marks above Zina's head, and she wanted to gesture to her silly friend to ask more later, but she couldn't do that discretely, so Talia decided to give them an acceptable version.

"Yes, Commander George.", Talia confirmed. "As you know, Dawn went with us to help carry things for our meal in the forest, and we met him along the way. They are now..." Talia made a knowing expression. "Getting to know each other."

When Talia said how George and Dawn met in the forest, Zina realized how that lie was a warning for her to stop asking questions. She felt guilty for letting her curiosity take over and nearly spill the beans.

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"I can't believe her luck.", Zina said while shaking her head. She turned to Ivy and Lily. "Ladies, how about instead of sweets we go drinking?"

"No!", Stephanie exclaimed. "I need you here back in one hour, with clear heads. You can drink after we are done with the party tonight."

Zina rolled her eyes dramatically. "I didn't mean that we should get drunk. It was just to celebrate. My best friend found her mate. I should be happy for her and not sad because I will be all alone..." Zina's chin shivered.

Talia's heart cracked and she gave Zina a hug.

Talia patted Zina's back. "There, there... Dawn finding her mate doesn't mean you lost her."

Zina sniffled. "I know you are saying that only to comfort me. Between silly me and a hunk who can give her endless orgasms, Dawn's choice will be obvious, and I won't blame her... but I will miss her."

Talia was not sure if she should laugh or cry.

"And there is the issue of different packs.", Lily chimed in. Ivy was tugging on Lily's hand to get her to stop talking, but it was too late, as words already slipped from Lily's lips, "Considering Commander George's status, Dawn will definitely go to the Red Moon pack..."

"Waaah!", Zina wailed loudly and buried her face in Talia's shoulder.

Talia didn't like this. Not the Zina dramatically crying, but the idea of Dawn going to the Red Moon pack. That was not a good place. They treated Omegas horribly, and outsiders even worse.

Talia knew that George is actually an Alpha, but with him concealing his identity, Dawn will be treated like some low-level servant. Talia could see Anna and her bunch of bullies ganging on Dawn. And Anna was just one of many.

How can that be OK?

Talia decided to talk about this with Damon. As an Alpha, Damon should be able to find a solution that will prevent Dawn from going to that wretched place and keep her with George.

"Calm down...", Talia said to Zina while patting her back. "Crying won't help anything." And she knew that Zina was overreacting. "You should go to Darkbourne and have those sweets you were planning to have. Chocolate will make you feel good." Talia knew this from her latest science lesson where she learned that chocolate increases the level of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that makes a person feel good. So, Talia's addiction to Damon went beyond just his impossibly good looks and sparks of their bond. Damon was truly addictive, like chocolate. Her chocolate.

At the thought of going to Darkbourne, Talia realized that Maya, Mindy, and Kalina were there also, and Damon was swamped with work, and she didn't have anything pressing at the moment other than her worry about Dawn, so... "I will join you to town.", Talia said to Zina. "I want to meet up with Maya." Seeing that Stephanie gave her a queer look, Talia added, "They are finalizing some things for the party, and I want to see if I can help."

Stephanie nodded in approval. At least someone was thinking about the party.

Of course, Talia had her motives. Her girlfriends knew about George's condition, and they might have some ideas about Dawn's situation. Maya and Mindy are endless sources of unusual solutions.

Talia had only one problem. Damon.

He struggled to let her go to the kitchen without him, how will he let her go to town on her own?

Damon didn't restrict her movements, but he wanted to keep an eye on her. He was always iffy about not having Talia nearby, and since he found out that Lisa spread the information about how Talia came from the Red Moon pack, he was on pins and needles.

Talia hoped that Damon's overprotectiveness will ease once he reveals they are mates, and people know she is his Luna, but on the other hand, she feared that his behavior might escalate.

She really wanted to go to town, and she needed a plan... and then she saw Stephanie.

"Steph, can you mind-link Damon that I'm heading to town with Zina, Ivy, and Lily?"

"Sure, dear.", Stephanie said without missing a beat.

"Wait!", Talia exclaimed when she saw that Steph was about to do it right now. "Can you tell him when we leave? Give us a minute or two head start..." Talia hoped that Damon will understand that she is not alone, not in danger, and won't come rushing after her to cause a scene.

Chapter 391 – Rumors About Damon's Luna

In the dungeon...

Lieutenant Klark gathered everyone in the dining room that was getting crowded with more than twenty people in it. Not everyone had a place to sit, as they would take turns eating, so now some of them were standing in the back.

Klark had an important thing to announce, "Alpha Damon is hosting a party in the packhouse for Elders and other officials of the pack."

Among twenty warriors present, Lisa stood in the back.

Lisa was NOT in a good mood.

Since she arrived at this horrid place, she was soaking and scraping and wiping, and even though she was wearing rubber gloves, her nails broke, and her skin looks like she was fifty years old! To make things worse, they were expecting her to cook!

Lisa knew she was in trouble because those were stern-faced warriors and she feared that she won't have a good ending if she gives them food poisoning.

She tried to explain that she is not much of a cook, but they accused her of avoiding work with, "Every Omega knows how to cook."

Well, she was obviously not like all other Omegas, but no one would listen to reason, and they looked at her strangely when she said how she never cooked, other than some limited experience her mother forced on her. When Lieutenant Klark said how she was courting time in the dungeon cell, Lisa piped it down.

Luckily, last night they had leftovers from lunch, so she reheated those and added some scrambled eggs, and no one suspected a thing.

For breakfast, they brought fresh bread from the town, and she made simple sandwiches and coffee while saying that due to all the cleaning, she doesn't have much time to prepare an elaborate meal.

They let it pass, but Lisa was not sure how long she can drag this.

Lisa felt like crying. She hated cleaning and she hated cooking even more. No one EVER expected her to do these things, but now she was stuck between a rock and a hard place.

The worst part was that Lieutenant Klark confirmed in front of many warriors how Lisa was free to leave once the cleaning was done, and after slaving for the whole day, she was done only with the first cell! There were thirty cells on the second level, and considering that there are two more levels below, Lisa feared that this might take years. YEARS!

By the time she finishes all of them, the first ones will get dusty!

Lisa wondered, how come they don't have a dedicated cleaning crew for these things? She wanted to ask Lieutenant Klark about it, but she couldn't find the right timing.

Lisa was so exhausted last night that she plopped on the bed and slept like a log. Through the haze of her sleep, Lisa thought that she heard a female voice screaming how she doesn't belong in the dungeon and that she was there by mistake.

"Yeah, join the club...", Lisa mumbled before she continued sleeping.

Was that a dream? Or did a noisy female really end up in the dungeon?

Even if that was real, Lisa had no sympathy for the woman who cried in the middle of the night how she was wronged. Did she need to clean? No. Lisa would rather sit in the dungeon than do this wretched work. Well, in a clean dungeon, not in a dirty one.

With Lieutenant Klark calling them to gather, Lisa hoped he will say that all this was a big joke and she can leave, or at least some of these bulky guys to help with cleaning, but instead, he spoke about a party at the packhouse. What nonsense was that? Was he rubbing it in how Damon, Talia, and others were enjoying while Lisa was slaving there?

"How does that impact us?", one warrior asked what was on Lisa's mind and she was glad that she didn't need to ask because everyone looked at her strangely when she would ask questions.

"We are aware of the strained relationship between our Alpha and senior leadership of the pack. This is an obvious sign of their relationship improving...", Klark said and lowered his voice, "And there are hints that soon we might get a Luna."

After Maya, Talia, Kalina, Mindy, Marcy, and Nora had lunch in town on the previous day, the whole Darkbourne was buzzing how their Alpha found them a Luna.

The warriors exploded into excited murmurs. Luna was a big deal.

"Quiet!", Lieutenant Pete (aka second in command) exclaimed, and the chatter stopped abruptly. "The information about the party is official, but about Luna is not. Keep that among yourselves until we get confirmation. Is that understood?"

"YES, SIR!", they roared in unison and Lisa shrunk. She didn't expect they will be so loud.

"But we are going to celebrate.", Lieutenant Klark said. "Jules! Ron!"

Two warriors stepped forward, and Klark continued, "The two of you will go to Darkbourne to get some drinks and meat for everyone. Tonight, we will have a barbecue. You leave in five minutes."

"Understood!", two warriors said in unison, and the crowd dispersed.

Lisa looked around while feeling a bit relaxed. With barbecue for dinner, they won't ask her to cook.

She looked at Jules and Ron dejectedly. How come they get to leave, and she was stuck to clean?

Suddenly, Lisa got an idea.

She approached Klark. "Lieutenant Klark", she called sweetly. "Can I go with them?"

"With Jules and Ron?", Klark asked and when Lisa confirmed, he asked, "Why?"

"I can help them buy stuff, and also... when I came here I didn't know I would be staying longer. I want to stop by my place and pick up a few necessities."

Klark had a feeling Lisa wanted to avoid work or maybe to escape altogether, but it didn't make sense. Even if she relaxes instead of working, that idle time will only prolong how long she will stay here, and with warriors accompanying her, she won't get a chance to escape. They are all guarding prisoners for a reason. No one escapes.

Well, if she really wanted just that, it won't be a problem. And if she wanted to give them a slip, she will find out how that's not an option.

"Sure. You can go with them.", Klark said, and Lisa smiled brightly.

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Lisa was happy that after only a small hike through the forest, they got into a car for the rest of their journey. Walking all the way back would be a problem.

"Do you know who the future Luna is?", Lisa started chit chat while Jules was driving. She knew that Marcy was about to arrive, but after considering how Damon was treating Talia, Lisa wanted confirmation.

"Lieutenant Klark told us to keep it to ourselves.", Ron reminded her. "We shouldn't spread or encourage gossip about Alpha."

Lisa rolled her eyes. "Aren't I one of you? At least while I'm on this task. Besides, it's not spreading if it stays between us."

Ron thought about how it makes sense. Luna was a big deal and he already talked about it with other guys, so... "Yesterday, a group of women had lunch in town. Beta Maya, Kalina from the Lightclaw pack, and Mindy from the Blue River pack were there. The main person was Marcy from the Red Moon pack. Everyone knows that she has her eyes on Alpha Damon, and with her eating in such a high-profile manner, things seem to be going in the right direction. Also, Alpha Damon specially sent treats. That never happened..."

They were not wrong, except when it came to the person. Their future Luna was at that table, but it was Talia. However, the gossip and people's guesses were navigating toward Marcy.

Lisa listened to every word hungrily and she let out a long sigh.

Of course. Marcy, the princess of the Red Moon pack. Why else would Damon accept someone who was not his fated mate?

They were having lunch in town and enjoying, while Lisa was stuck with dirty work.

Dejection swelled within Lisa.

If she had a noble background, would Tony mark her the moment she turned eighteen years old? If that happened, he wouldn't get to recognize Kalina as his mate, and Lisa wouldn't end up cleaning the fucking dungeon!

Lisa thought about Talia and that made her feel a bit better. Talia was discarded, just like Lisa. Lisa thought how that was something they had in common. Actually, Talia had it worse because Damon ditched her in favor of Marcy who was not even his fated mate.

Chapter 392 – Hiding One's Aura (1)

Darkbourne...

Lisa accompanied Jules and Ron to the butcher shop that was on the main street. She didn't want to do this chore, but it was better than cleaning the damned dungeon.

Per Lisa's insistence, they went first to Lisa's apartment. Lisa needed many things from there, but she mostly hoped to see her mother and figure out a way to get her out of that dungeon-cleaning task.

Lisa wanted to talk to Stephanie in person because her mother closed off the mind-link, and she wouldn't pick up the phone either.

Lisa couldn't believe the timing. Was Stephanie aware that her only daughter ended up doing that shitty job?

How Lisa saw this, Stephanie worked in the packhouse since Alpha Damon took over as the Alpha of the Dark Howlers pack; and even before that, Stephanie was friends with Damon's mother, and Lisa knew that Stephanie was one of the few people who were close to Damon, close enough that she can mind-link him directly.

Surely, Stephanie can ask for a simple favor like getting some other Omegas to clean that horrid place so that Lisa can get out of there.

Lisa only needed to clarify this big misunderstanding and she could go back to her life that didn't include scraping dried blood from between bricks.

Lisa eagerly looked at the apartment building as they approached it. She didn't like it when they moved in there, but after more than a day in that dark and stinky place, the building in front of her looked like a glitzy palace.

"You don't need to wait for me.", Lisa told Jules and Ron when they exited the car with her. "You can get drinks and meat and come pick me up when done. By then, I will pack my necessities."

Lisa wouldn't dare to give them a slip, but she wanted privacy with her mother, and she also planned to shower and get that dungeon-stench out of her hair.

"We are not pressured for time.", Jules responded with a friendly smile. "Lieutenant Klark told us to stick around and help you if needed."

Lisa was surprised that so far silent Jules was the one talking. His eyes were icy, despite his smile, and she understood that she won't get any privacy. What the hell!?

She cursed Klark silently. It was all his doing!

Ron and Jules went with Lisa to her apartment and waited in the living room.

Unfortunately, Stephanie was not there, so Lisa had no excuses to delay. She grabbed a carry-on suitcase and put inside a few changes of clothes and some cosmetic products.

Since Lisa and Stephanie moved into that apartment recently, she had all those things handy. Actually, Lisa didn't even unpack fully. She hoped that current living arrangements were temporary and they will return to the packhouse.

Lisa was done in less than fifteen minutes, and Ron said, "You were quick. If we went to do get drinks and food, you would end up sitting and waiting for us."

Lisa gave him a stiff smile in response. She wouldn't wait for them! She would do other things! But she didn't dare to complain.

She managed to leave a quick note for her mother, hoping that Stephanie will come to find her in the dungeon. They needed to talk!

Lisa was confident that her current predicament was the result of some mix-up. Surely, her mother won't allow her to suffer like that. Stephanie always doted on her and came whenever Lisa called.

...

The store where they got liquor was in a side street with nothing eventful around it. However, the butcher shop was opposite the town square, so Lisa got a good view of what was going on there.

It was a bright sunny day, with the sun climbing up as noon was approaching, but it was still not too hot to enjoy outside.

Pop music was drifting from somewhere, carried by the breeze. It was not loud, but the beats mixed with melodious voices were clearly heard.

People lingered in front of the boutiques and looked at display windows. Some teens were sitting on the benches in the shade of a few trees that were arranged around the tall clock tower, eating ice cream and telling stories that would make them burst into laughter. And then there were people at tables in front of local cafes that served beverages and snacks.

The atmosphere was lively and harmonious.

People were chatting, laughing, enjoying their lives... and Lisa was stuck with cleaning!

"Are you coming?"

Ron's question got Lisa's attention and she saw him gesturing toward the door of the butcher shop.

"Can you go without me?", Lisa asked. "I will be here and soak in the sun. I didn't get to enjoy the warmth since I arrived..." Lisa swallowed her next words when she saw Jules frowning at her.

Lisa got a warning not to reveal how they are on duty at the dungeon because someone might overhear and follow them. The location of the dungeon was not really top-secret, but they wanted to avoid outsiders finding out about it.

If humans heard something like 'dungeon', they might come to investigate because their lifestyles differ from the ones werewolves have, and the most important rule for werewolves was to conceal their existence in front of humans.

"Stay here so we can see you.", Ron said, and he and Jules went into the butcher store.

Lisa nodded obediently and turned back to observe the town square longingly.

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Talia found her girlfriends at the sweet shop; that was where Zina, Ivy, and Lily were going. They planned to relax and enjoy delicacies, and Talia joined Mindy, Maya, and Kalina in the task related to the upcoming party.

The middle-aged baker recognized Talia, and Talia remembered that he was Hamil, the owner of the sweet shop.

Talia nearly jumped in joy at the sight of samples of cakes and small cookies, and Hamil gave her an extra slice of scrumptious chocolate cake.

Hamil knew that Alpha Damon asked him to make sure Talia gets this serving in the restaurant, and when he saw Talia's bright smile as she eyed the chocolate cake, Hamil knew he made the right choice by giving her the same treat again.

Somehow, her smile reached her eyes and lit up the whole store and Hamil's heart warmed at the thought that products of his labor can make someone genuinely happy.

After confirming that things were as requested and on time, Mindy, Kalina, Maya, and Talia took their packets with samples and went to the local café on the town square to chat.

This was their last stop, because Maya, Mindy, and Kalina already checked with the butcher and the party store, and they had time to linger, enjoy leftover sweets, and hear what news Talia wanted to share.

Chapter 393 – Hiding One's Aura (2)

Talia went with her three girlfriends to the town square, and Maya picked where to sit.

It was outdoor seating at a local café that offered the best Irish coffee in Darkbourne (according to Maya). They also ordered lemonade and sparkling water, to wash down the sweetness from all the cookies they brought with them from the sweetshop.

Once the drinks arrived, and the staff provided them with utensils to indulge in sweet treats, four girlfriends started with chatter over a round table that was packed with goodies that would make anyone drool.

Maya knew that George is an Alpha, but Mindy and Kalina didn't. However, all three of them were aware of Marcy's rejection, and Talia's news of how George's second chance was Dawn made Maya, Mindy, and Kalina pause with a variety of expressions.

Kalina patted her chest dramatically. "Second chance mates. Finding hope when you think that there was none left. How romantic!"

Mindy pouted. "Great! They got their second chance mate, and I didn't get my first one."

"Maybe you didn't deserve it.", Kalina chimed in.

"What's that supposed to mean?", Mindy snapped.

Kalina shrugged. "You are sarcastic and living your life like you don't need a mate. If I need to guess, the Moon Goddess is either fulfilling your wish by letting you stay single, or she is preparing a nasty surprise

in the form of a man who will completely dominate you and make you relinquish your independence willingly."

Mindy was speechless. She didn't like either of those two options.

Seeing that Talia was nodding in agreement with Kalina's words, Mindy turned to Maya.

"Do you agree with this?"

Maya blinked at Mindy's question. "What? Sorry, I spaced out."

Kalina burst into giggles. "She just doesn't want to hurt your feelings."

"Now, now...", Mindy's temper was rising as she eyed Kalina. "Don't think that I will let you bully me just because you are Tony's Luna."

"Since when is telling the truth called bullying?", Kalina said teasingly.

Maya didn't pay attention to the friendly spat between Kalina and Mindy. She was processing the information that Dawn was George's mate.

With George being an Alpha, he won't wait to mark his mate, and once that happens, Dawn will get George's DNA and a boost in strength. It takes time to learn to control aura, and if they are not careful, George's secret will be revealed quickly. Sure, George's true identity won't be exposed, but Alpha's aura will attract attention and people will start digging until they find something. There are no more than a dozen of true Alphas in North America.

"Are they in the packhouse?", Maya asked Talia in low voice.

"The last time I saw them, they were in the other place.", Talia responded mysteriously, happy that Mindy and Kalina were bickering and not paying attention to them.

Maya relaxed a bit. With George and Dawn staying away from the party, even if Dawn uncontrollably releases aura, no one will notice.

But Maya couldn't stop herself from worrying because this party was getting more complicated by the second.

"You should see them.", Talia said dreamily. "George was sitting upright, and they were feeding each other. They were genuinely happy."

Maya nodded in agreement and took a big gulp of Irish coffee to hide her stiff expression.

The situation with George and Dawn was only one of the things that might go wrong.

How Maya saw it, the biggest problem were Elders who heard about yesterday's lunch, and based on the information Maya received, those old geezers were coming to the party with a mindset that Damon will introduce Marcy as his Luna.

Initially, Maya thought that people assuming Marcy will be their Luna will be a good thing. All eyes would be on Marcy, and once Marcy shows her true colors, people will dislike her without Maya lifting a finger.

However, the news how Lisa spread information that Talia came from the Red Moon pack messed up with their plan and they ended up rushing with this party, and Maya was not confident that things will go smoothly.

Guests are hoping that Damon will show up with Marcy by his side, and they are preparing to bootlick Marcy, and considering that things are happening before other pieces were in place and that Marcy won't show up at all, there was a big chance that this whole thing will explode in their face.

Damon was aware of all this, but he decided that Talia's safety comes first, and she won't be safe if pack members don't know how important she is.

Normally, Maya would support this. From the beginning, Maya thought how keeping Talia in the dark was a mistake, but now she wished for some extension because this was NOT good timing for the grand reveal.

Maya had a feeling that Talia showing up at the party tonight will be like throwing oil into the fire and hoping for the best.

It would be good if Shaman Gideon makes an appearance. Everyone from the older generation respects him, and Gideon would definitely speak in favor of the mate bond. Unfortunately, he is one of the few who still didn't respond to the invitation, and that usually hinted that he won't come.

Maya reminded herself that worrying won't accomplish anything. Things might go either way and she was unable to predict how fifty-something people will react when Damon reveals that Talia is his fated mate.

Maya paid attention to the chatter around the table, and Maya couldn't believe that Kalina and Mindy were still bickering.

"Hey, hey!", Maya called and spoke to Mindy. "If you want a mate, just stick to Talia."

Talia's eyebrows shoot up in surprise. "Me?" She was eating cookies and giggling at Mindy and Kalina. Why was Maya dragging her into that?

Maya nodded knowingly. "I never saw mates recognize each other before, yet mated couples are sprouting around you like mushrooms after rain."

"Maybe that's Talia's power.", Kalina said with sparkles in her eyes. She always liked theories that insinuated magical stuff. Mermaids included.

Talia bobbed her head. "Sure. But it's not just me. All of you were around. So maybe that's the power of us being together."

Kalina liked this even more. She raised her glass of lemonade and announced, "Let's drink for mates!"

"I don't have one.", Mindy grumbled.

"But you will. Soon.", Maya said mysteriously. "Because we are together."

Mindy didn't believe squat of what Maya said.

"You think so?", Mindy asked, her words laced with sarcasm.

Maya nodded confidently. "You are not leaving home without a mate, missy. Now raise that drink, and let's toast!"

Mindy shook her head, but she still smiled and got her glass. Mindy never thought much about mates, but now that she was sitting at the table with mated women, she felt like an odd one. And she was.

"So, what kind of a mate you desire?", Kalina asked Mindy. "Since we have the power to get you mated, we might fulfill your wishes."

Chapter 394 – Hiding One's Aura (3)

Talia really liked the easy-going teasing of Mindy, so she joined. "Do you want your mate to be tall, short, with a pointy nose...?"

Talia, Kalina, and Maya burst into giggles when Mindy made a face.

"Who wants pointy noses?", Mindy asked. "He should be pointy down there." She was gesturing to her crotch area.

"Pointy note taken!", Maya exclaimed. "What else? Come on. The more specific you are, the better we can serve you."

"You wanted to say that he can serve Mindy.", Kalina chimed in. "A must-have requirement for a mate should be broad, muscular shoulders, so you can hold onto them while he is serving you with his pointy thing..."

And another round of giggles began.

"How big should he be?", Maya asked and gestured with her hands in front of her chest, spreading them slowly and making faces the further she went.

"Keep going.", Mindy said with a sly smile. "Big is good."

Talia, Kalina, Mindy, and Maya were laughing and having a good time and they didn't notice a female approaching them.

Lisa was only three steps away from them when Maya stopped laughing abruptly. Kalina, Mindy, and Talia also looked at the newcomer.

"Lisa?", Maya called, unable to hide her surprise.

Maya knew very well that Lisa had no good thoughts about Kalina or Talia. Wasn't she supposed to clean the dungeon?

Maya was cursing internally while thinking of ways how she will punish those useless Lieutenants. How are they securing that place when they can't keep one female there? Maya strictly told them that Lisa can't leave that place until she is done cleaning, and it was obvious that she can't finish so quickly. What the hell?

Seeing Lisa's sour expression, Maya knew that Lisa will cause a scene.

Lisa narrowed her eyes while examining the faces of four young women, none was laughing anymore and they obviously all looked at Lisa while waiting to see what she will do.

With her werewolf sight, Lisa had no problems identifying four females at this table all the way from the butcher shop. She could see them laughing and chatting without a care in the world. Lisa's legs moved on their own, driven by curiosity and dejection, and she completely forgot about Jules and Ron who told her not to move from there.

As Lisa approached them, she gritted her teeth at the sight of tasty treats on their table, and she heard them chatting about mates. Lisa knew everyone at the table.

One was Kalina, the woman who now got to enjoy Tony's embrace and the title of the future Luna of the Lightclaw pack. Lisa never liked Maya who came to the Dark Howlers pack a few years ago and she was bossy from the start. Lisa thought about how she will retaliate against Maya once she becomes Luna, but that didn't happen. Lisa didn't have many thoughts about Mindy, but how can a wolf-less she-wolf like Talia enjoy with all these high-ranking members when Lisa was stuck in a freaking dungeon?

"What is this? Goodbye for the abandoned one?", Lisa asked while eyeing Talia.

Mindy's eyebrows came together in a frown. "Who is abandoned?" Mindy didn't know who Lisa was, but she couldn't imagine that any she-wolf from the Dark Howlers pack would cause a scene in Maya's presence.

Lisa lifted her nose. "Now that Damon is about to make Marcy his Luna, the third wheel needs to leave." She glanced at Kalina. "Are you enjoying your place by Tony's side?"

Kalina heard Maya calling Lisa by her name, but Kalina hoped that it was some other Lisa and not Tony's ex. However, just by the poison in Lisa's voice, Kalina confirmed Lisa's identity.

Maya stood up in slow motion and faced Lisa, blocking Lisa's view of the table with her body.

"You have no idea what you are talking about, Lisa. I suggest you apologize and leave."

"Apologize to whom?", Lisa asked Maya. "To the one who took my man? Or to Miss Talia?"

Lisa ignored Kalina's hostility and craned her neck to see Talia behind Maya. "Are you hiding behind Maya, since Damon won't lift a finger for you? Are you drowning your sorrows in sweets because Damon is busy with Marcy?"

Maya waved her arms in panic while considering if she should knock Lisa out here in the middle of the day in front of witnesses. Maya feared that Lisa will start blabbering how Talia came from the Red Moon pack, or that she will continue insulting Talia, or maybe switch to Kalina.

But before Maya could decide, Lisa was still talking to Talia.

"I told you that this will happen. Didn't I? I told you that Damon will find his Luna and it will be either his mate or a she-wolf worthy of being his Luna, and you are neither." Lisa glanced at Mindy and Kalina. "Are you hoping that they will find you another guy to stick to? Are you...? Ugh..." Lisa groaned and her whole body bent at an unusual angle.

Maya gritted her teeth while trying to keep standing, but she knew that the vicious aura assaulting her from the back was Talia's. Lisa crossed the line... Talia's line.

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"What did you say?", Talia asked Lisa through her teeth.

Maya scuttled to her right and plopped on her chair, allowing Talia to have a clear view of Lisa.

With her peripheral vision, Maya saw Jules and Ron rushing toward them, but when they came into the reach of Talia's aura, they stopped abruptly, as if they hit an invisible wall. Maya also saw that patrons at the neighboring tables were frozen in shock, unable to move.

Talia was completely focused on Lisa, and she was angry. How dares Lisa say how Damon's hands were busy with Marcy?

Talia didn't notice the commotion she caused. Even her friends, Kalina and Mindy, had their heads lowered, and Lisa who took the brunt of Talia's anger, was down on her knees and hands.

"Repeat that!", Talia snapped.

Lisa cried weakly. She felt like her body was crushed from all sides and there was a metallic taste in her mouth.

Talia saw red. She didn't care that Lisa was Stephanie's daughter. The only thing she saw was a vicious woman who thought that she had the right to hurt others just because she was hurting.

"Kitten...", Talia heard Damon's voice sounding close to her ear. He was breathy, and it was obvious he was running.

When Stephanie told Damon that Talia went to Darkbourne, he finished a few important things, and then went after Talia. He wanted to let her have fun with her friends, he really did, but he was also nervous about her safety, so he came to check on her. His plan was to see her from afar and not come close, but when he saw Lisa there, Damon rushed toward Talia, and not a minute too soon.

Damon's arms wrapped around Talia, and she leaned on him.

"Let me handle her.", he said.

Talia turned to look at Damon. "I thought you did. She is back."

Chapter 395 – Hiding One's Aura (4) [

At first, Talia gave Lisa the benefit of the doubt because she was Stephanie's daughter, because she grew up as Damon's sister, and Talia thought how Lisa was heartbroken because Tony found his mate. But now Talia understood that Lisa was just malicious and finding pleasure in someone else's misery.

What kind of a person will pull others down just because she suffered a loss?

It was obvious that Lisa was talking with assumption that Talia was abandoned. A normal reaction would be to show sympathy or to ignore it, but instead, Lisa gloated because someone else was dumped. And then she also said how Damon chose Marcy.

Talia knew that was not true. Was Lisa lying on purpose, or was she misinformed? It didn't matter. Those were lies. LIES! But Lisa's words were full of malevolence and they reminded Talia of numerous times she was bullied, and Talia lost it.

Talia was looking at Damon, but her anger toward Lisa didn't subside.

'SNAP... CRACK...'

The sounds weren't loud, but everyone heard them. Bones cracking.

"ARGH!" Lisa's scream was pitiful as her body twitched on the ground.

Damon could feel Talia's anger swelling, and he had no idea how far it could go, but he needed to stop it before it escalates, and people notice something was off.

Damon knew that Talia was adjusting to her powers and aura, and without the help of her wolf, it could take a while.

If Lisa gets permanently hurt, Talia would be sad (after she cools off), and Damon didn't want Talia to dirty her hands. If anyone needs to be tortured and killed, he would do it.

The only good thing was that other than a few humans present who observed them with curiosity, everyone else bowed in submission, and only Lisa was suffering, otherwise, it would be hard to contain this.

He cupped Talia's cheeks, and spoke softly, "Kitten. Stay with me. Don't let it consume you."

Talia felt Damon's worry and she took a deep breath to stabilize her emotions. His scent of the forest and dark chocolate helped.

Feeling that Talia was back in control, Damon threw an angry glance at Maya, and she didn't need a mind-link to know that she messed up. Lisa caught them all by surprise and it all happened in a matter of a few seconds, but still... Maya was supposed to prevent this.

"I will investigate to see how she got out. This will not happen again.", Maya said.

Of course, Maya was planning to roast Jules and Ron, and Lieutenant Klark also.

The poor warriors didn't know why Lisa ended up in the dungeon. Jules and Ron saw that Lisa was scheming something and they were confident that Lisa won't be able to give them a slip, so they allowed a longer leash in order to see what she was up to. If they knew that Lisa got in trouble due to her nasty mouth, they would gag her, or probably not bring her with them at all.

If it was just Beta Maya, it wouldn't be so bad, but it was obvious that Alpha Damon was furious. Will they be demoted or sent to the survival training? Well, things could be worse than that.

Kalina and Mindy looked at Talia with admiration and confusion. Both of them felt suppression that eased only when Damon showed up. It was definitely coming from Talia, and considering that Damon still didn't mark her, that aura was Talia's alone.

Mindy had her eyes on Talia from the Summer Solstice festival, and she didn't look down on Talia, but Mindy didn't know that Talia was this awesome either. Is this why her brother was interested in Talia and tried to bring her to the Blue River pack?

The most shocked one was Lisa. She sensed that the vicious aura came from Talia's direction, but... isn't Talia a wolf-less she-wolf?

Lisa felt a tickle at the edge of her lips, and she wiped it with the back of her hand. Her eyes widened when she saw blood. Well, that explained the metallic taste in her mouth.

"You are a monster...", Lisa spoke weakly while pushing herself to sit. Every cell of her body was aching, and she was confident that a few ribs and her right leg were broken.

Damon heard Lisa clearly and he knew that those words were directed at Talia.

The problem was that if he could hear Lisa, there was a chance that others heard that also, and he couldn't allow people to think badly of Talia, not before they see how wonderful she is first. He needed to make it look like it was his doing.

Before anyone could react, Damon moved like a flash, and gripped Lisa's neck, lifting her off the ground. Her body swayed limply.

"What did you call me?", Damon squeezed through his teeth. "What did you call your Alpha?"

Lisa's eyes bulged out as she struggled to breathe.

Another wave of murderous aura hit Lisa. Her animalistic instincts told her that her life was in danger, and she was not wrong. Damon would snap her neck like a twig if that meant assuring Talia's safety, regardless of how many humans were watching.

Lisa already made a lot of damage. Damon will never forget that Lisa ate food Talia made for him; it was the first meal Talia prepared for him, and Lisa took it away! And then Lisa said something that made Talia go into the forest and have a nasty encounter with rogues. Damon nearly lost her, damn it! And then Lisa blabbered how Talia was not worthy, and she came from the Red Moon pack... and now this. How much trouble can one bitter woman cause?

When Stephanie heard that Lisa was assigned to cleaning duty in the dungeon, Stephanie said that it was time for Lisa to grow up.

As a mother, Stephanie's instinct was to help Lisa and shelter her, no matter if she was right or wrong but Stephanie realized that her actions enabled Lisa to be unreasonable, so she decided to let Lisa face the world. Lisa was old enough to understand that actions and words have consequences. It was overdue.

"So-sorry...", Lisa stammered, and she plopped on the ground with a wail when Damon released her.

Lisa didn't dare to look up at Damon, so she stayed on the ground. She was never in such a pitiful state before. Lisa was drenched in sweat like she had just come out of the shower and her whole body ached to the point that she couldn't speak. Was it possible that she suffered internal injuries?

Lisa could see that Damon returned to half-kneel by Talia's side and he wrapped her in his arms, like she was the one who got hurt.

Lisa wondered if she got it wrongly. She was confident that the first aura came from Talia, but how can that nobody have such power? It must be Damon's aura. But... Why would Damon be so gentle toward Talia? What about Marcy?

"Alpha! Beta!", Jules and Ron greeted in unison, and Jules said grimly, "We apologize. She was supposed to be..."

"Save it!", Maya cut him off, and continued through mind-link for both Jules and Ron, 'Lock her up and make sure she doesn't come out. Medical assistance won't be provided unless her life is in danger. Lisa insulted our Alpha, and that's a serious crime. I want an official report from Lieutenant Klark on how she managed to get here.'

'Yes, Beta!', Jules and Ron responded in unison before grabbing Lisa below her armpits and taking her away with them.

Maya reluctantly turned toward Damon, ready to get more scoldings and she was surprised to see Damon scooping Talia in his arms.

"Let me take you home...", he said, and Talia leaned on him.

Talia was aware that people were watching, but she didn't care. Not now. She was sick of people pushing other women on Damon and she had no intention of hiding anymore.

Everyone present saw Damon walking out of the town square with a woman in his arms, and that woman was not Marcy or Cassie. It was Talia.

Maya plopped on the chair, happy that this crisis passed somehow.

"Did you know that Talia is an Alpha?", Mindy asked Maya in a whisper.

Maya responded by putting her finger over her lips, indicating it's a secret.

Kalina didn't know the true reason why Talia's background was kept a secret, but she understood that things were not simple.

Kalina remembered a story her grandma used to tell which explained why female Alphas were rare. Over the centuries, power-hungry werewolves would get their hands on female Alphas and they would mark them forcibly with the goal to breed and get Alpha offspring. That is why female Alphas would usually conceal their power until they find their mate who can protect them.

Kalina assumed that this was the case with Talia and once Damon officially makes Talia his Luna, Talia will be able to reveal who she truly is.

Chapter 396 – Damon's Patience For Talia

Damon carried Talia princess style down the main street of Darkbourne, and they ignored all gazes directed their way.

Damon's steps halted in front of the black armored Lexus SUV.

"Do you want a ride back to the packhouse, or should I carry you?", Damon asked with a lopsided smile that made Talia's heart skip a beat. She loved how he was able to carry her like she weighs nothing.

"Do we need to go back?"

Damon didn't understand why Talia's mood dropped. That was their home. "Why not?"

"Steph is there. After what I did to Lisa, I don't know how to face her."

"Don't worry about Lisa. She is a werewolf. No matter what you did, she will heal."

"Will Steph think that way?", Talia asked suspiciously.

"Don't worry about Steph. She is aware that Lisa crossed the line more than once."

Talia doubted that Stephanie was fine with Lisa being in the dungeon. Everyone knew that Stephanie doted on Lisa. A lot. "Is Steph fine with Lisa's punishment?"

"She is not.", Damon said flatly. "However, Steph tried talking to Lisa, I ordered Lisa to stay away, Maya spoke with her, but Lisa refuses to listen to reason and she is seeking trouble repeatedly. Steph knows that being in the dungeon is one of the lighter punishments for a she-wolf. Unless we are interrogating prisoners, they are not being mistreated. If Lisa uses this as a chance to grow up, she won't blame Steph or us, instead, she will apologize and fix her ways."

Talia thought how that was reasonable, but that didn't mean Lisa will see it that way. Just as Damon said, Lisa was repeatedly looking for trouble, she disregarded authority, and she was acting like the whole world was set on bullying her. But instead of fixing her ways, Lisa was escalating. Talia clearly remembered how Lisa gloated at the thought that Damon abandoned Talia. What was that about? Talia doubted that Lisa will change unless something drastic happens, and staying in the dungeon didn't seem to be enough.

"So?", Damon asked Talia. "Which one will it be?" He glanced at the car and then down the street, reminding her of options to return to the packhouse. "My services are available, and you won't need to walk, regardless of which one you choose."

Talia thought for a moment before responding. "I think that ride is more practical", and he shouldn't leave his car in the town, "but I really like when you hold me like this."

Damon chuckled. "One doesn't exclude the other."

He walked to the driver's side and pushed the button that slid the seat backward, and then he sat there with Talia in his lap.

"How is this?", Damon asked and started the engine.

Talia leaned on Damon and nuzzled his neck with her nose. "Perfect."

Her breath tickled his skin and the pressure in his groin area increased.

Damon cleared his throat. "Do that again, and I will drive this car into the nearest bush." He wiggled his eyebrows mischievously and Talia couldn't prevent her lips from lifting into a smile. Her Alpha was playful and insatiable, and she wouldn't want him any other way.

Talia's arms moved around Damon, and she relished the peace that resided in her heart. Her fears, irritation, and chaos of the world were gone, and Talia knew how that was the effect of Damon's proximity.

Something told her that as long as they were together, they will be undefeatable, and that sensation of security was addictive. She didn't want to let go of him, ever.

The drive to the packhouse was about five minutes long and Talia really wished it to last longer; until evening, or until forever, because she enjoyed profusely Damon's addictive scent and the heat that radiated from his body. That was her mate, her other half, her everything.

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"We are here, kitten...", Damon murmured, and Talia blinked to see that they were in the garage of the packhouse.

The garage is a separate building, less than a minute away from the packhouse. Normally, Damon would stop the car in front of the packhouse, and an Omega would park the car properly, but this time, Damon decided to go all the way because he could feel that Talia enjoyed the ride.

"Thank you.", Talia said.

"For?"

"For making it look like you suppressed Lisa at the town square." She knew that if people figured out it was her, there was a chance that people would fear her, and that was not a good impression for a Luna. Somehow, Damon always put her first, and Talia appreciated it.

Damon's lips lifted into a smirk. "That was not suppression."

"What was it?"

"Complete dominance, kitten. Your aura is stronger than mine."

Talia doubted that. "You would say anything to make me feel better."

"I am not joking. I can make people bow and obey my command, but I was never able to break bones."

"Maybe that was my ability.", Talia said while waving her fingers, simulating the silvery light that Damon described after he saw her in the lake when she stopped the currents.

Damon disagreed. "Your eyes were normal. This was not magic. It was your aura."

Talia was not sure what to think about this. Will she end up hurting people whenever she gets upset?

She thought how it was lucky that the mate bond prevented her from harming Damon. She loved him to pieces, but the reality was that he was the one making her angry the most.

"What's on your mind?", Damon asked.

"How to control the aura. I don't want to harm people accidentally. I know you said that I will figure it out in time, but I feel that I don't have time. Can you teach me?"

At moments like these, Damon wished for Talia's wolf to be present. His wolf taught him about those things and having an insider who can guide her while feeling the same emotions first-hand would be the best.

But Talia was right there, needing answers, and Damon did his best to coach her.

"You won't harm people accidentally. You can think of the aura as a projection of your will. In the town square, your anger was directed at Lisa, and she was the only one harmed."

Talia thought about Damon's words and realized he was right. This put her mind at ease a bit, but she hoped for more, so she looked at him expectantly.

"It might appear that it happens when your emotions are unstable, but that's only in the beginning. When it happens, remember that emotion, kitten. If you can repeat it at will, you will control the aura."

Talia knew that his words made sense, but... "I wish I can practice this somehow. You are the only one who knows about this and can teach me, but you are immune."

Damon's eyebrow twitched. "You would practice on me?"

"You said you will train me. How is that different compared to kicking and grappling?"

Damon was speechless. She was right, but at the same time, it didn't sound right. He was happy about the mate bond protecting him, otherwise, his adorable mate would turn him into a lab rat.

"Be patient. It will happen when it's supposed to happen.", Damon said.

"It's easy for you to say. You can release aura at will, while I feel like I'm a ticking bomb."

Damon didn't deny it. "I can release it at will, but I don't have full control. When my anger flares, I can see that people around me are affected, but I'm not in a state where I would care about it. There is a reason why weaklings stay away from me. The important part is to recognize when it happens..."

Talia sat in Damon's lap and enjoyed listening to Damon who was patiently answering her questions. And what made it extra special was that Talia knew Damon was patient only with her.

His voice was deep, his scent filled the interior of the car, the garage made it feel like the world outside was non-existent, and Talia wouldn't mind if they stayed in there forever.

Chapter 397 – Preparations For The Party (1)

The afternoon passed quickly with preparations for the upcoming party.

Everyone helped, and the packhouse was buzzing with activity.

Zina, Stephanie, Ivy, and Lily were busy in the kitchen, Rose was all over the place, and they also had a few additional Omegas to help where needed.

Other than food preparations, the main activity revolved around setting up the event hall and the garden with tables, chairs, and decorations.

The guests were supposed to arrive at five o'clock in the afternoon, so when Damon noticed that it was about one hour before the party started, he thanked Tony, Kalina, Paul, Nate, Greg, and Mindy for their help, and told them to go and get ready. The rest will be done by Omegas.

Mindy also got a task to mind-link Maddox and to remind him that he and Tanya should make appearances. Considering who was coming, Damon wanted to maximize high-ranking people who were on good terms with Talia.

During the afternoon, Dawn and George came to the packhouse.

When Dawn mind-linked Maya about this (Talia doesn't have the mind-link, and Dawn didn't dare to disturb Alpha Damon), Talia suggested that they arrange a room for them on the second floor. Since the group from the Midnight pack left abruptly with Meg, they already had rooms that were recently set up with toiletries and everything, and Rose needed only a few minutes to change bedsheets and bring fresh towels.

George was on the first floor only because of Marcy and because they wanted to give not-so-welcome treatment to the group from the Red Moon pack. However, a lot of things happened, and considering that George is an Alpha and Dawn's mate, Talia thought that he shouldn't get unfavorable treatment, so they moved his stuff into the room that Rose prepared.

Under Dawn's guidance, the newly mated couple changed their location, and settled into a room on the second floor of the packhouse, without bumping into anyone.

Of course, Talia asked Damon if he agreed with this room upgrade, and Damon approved.

Talia got another idea.

"You said that we should entertain James because he is helpful and we can't trust him. How about we set up three rooms on the first floor and ask Petra, Erik, and Zack to stay there while James is visiting? They were getting along well during breakfast, and based on reports they sent through the day, they were having fun..."

Damon liked this. As a bonus, Erik, Petra, and Zack can keep an eye on James.

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In a room on the second floor...

Dawn laid on the bed, sprawled on top of George whose arms were around her naked form, and she was beaming from happiness.

So many things happened, that she didn't have the time to process them.

She found her mate, got marked, and for the last couple of hours, they were having fantastic sex. Dawn was not sure if he grinned more while exploring her body, or while eating cinnamon rolls she prepared for him.

It was beyond her wildest imagination, and now, Dawn was staying in a room on the second floor of the packhouse! That's for important people!

Dawn would think how all this was just a wonderful dream, but the sparks of their bond prickled her skin wherever they touched and happiness pouring into her through the mate bond was real, and it was coming from George, and it confirmed that he was elated by the current events, just as she was.

George gazed at Dawn with a smile in his eyes, and he relished the sense of belonging he didn't know before.

His eyes sparkled when his attention fell on the mark that was forming on her neck. He gently touched her there, and Dawn inhaled a shaky breath, her eyelids falling halfway instantly as a wave of arousal swelled within her. That was such a sensitive spot.

Dawn's eyes lost focus for a moment, and he frowned with concern.

"What is it?", he asked. He knew that she was contacted through the mind-link and the fact that she was visibly surprised got him curious.

"It was Alpha Damon. He said that we can join the party if we want. He said that it will be good for you.", Dawn said and thought for a moment before saying, "I guess that as a Commander, you should represent your pack."

Dawn wondered if George will return to the Red Moon pack and risk scolding from Alpha Edward, or if he will stay here. She told him how that was a possibility. Did he have time to think about it? Probably not.

Dawn would love it if they decided to call the Dark Howlers pack their home. Dawn had many friends here, and she heard rumors that Omegas get bad treatment in the Red Moon pack. Sure, George has a status, but without his protection, she was a nobody. Things will be great when they are together, but what will happen when he goes to train, or on a mission?

If they go there, she will need to sever her ties to the Dark Howlers pack, and join the Red Moon pack, and that was not something she was looking forward to.

George didn't notice Dawn's mood dropping, as he was having his own worries.

As a Commander, George was not invited to social gatherings even at the Red Moon pack. His instincts told him that Damon's invitation was confirmation of how they know about his identity.

That brought George to another question, how did they find out about the rejection? Marcy was unconscious and she couldn't tell anyone what happened, and just by finding two incapacitated people, they should think about sickness, poison, attack, anything other than rejection by a mate. After all, that rarely happens.

George remembered that Dawn told him with certainty how she knew what got him into that state, and that pointed to the possibility of cameras in the room.

Well, that explained Damon's change in attitude when he congratulated him on finding his mate. He knew.

Damn it! Things just got complicated.

But Damon didn't call him out, and George was not sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing.

"George?"

Dawn's voice got George's attention.

"We don't need to go if you don't want to.", Dawn said.

George realized that his expression was not good, and Dawn was worried about him.

"Do you want to go?", he asked.

Was he kidding? Yes! For years, Dawn watched these parties from the side, and the fact that Alpha Damon rarely threw parties only made them more special. This was Dawn's chance to attend such a fancy occasion and not because she was serving drinks. But she also wanted to stay in bed with George.

George could see her expressions changing.

If it was up to him, he wouldn't go. But Alpha Damon's invitation was not for Commander George; it was for Alpha George. And it seemed that Dawn wanted to go. How can he decline this to his adorable mate?

George chuckled and rolled them over, ending on top of her.

"How about this...?", he paused to kiss her chin. "We will go. If you like it, we will stay, and if you don't like it, we will leave."

Dawn smiled brightly. She loved that he made it about her. Dawn knew that compared to George, she was a nobody, yet he treated her like she was important. She really really liked that.

"I accept to attend this party as your date, Commander George."

George hummed in approval. "As my date. As my mate."

Dawn sucked in a sharp breath and her brows came together.

"What?", he asked.

"I don't have anything to wear."

George propped himself on his elbows and glanced down at her naked body. "You are perfect. Stunning."

Dawn's cheeks heated. George just complimented her! That will never get old.

"But I don't want anyone to see you like this. That's mine.", George said grimly, and his tone softened as he continued, "Don't worry about the clothes. This is not a formal party. And even if it is, as my mate, you can wear whatever you want."

"Ha-ha...", Dawn laughed mockingly. "That's a good one. Maybe you can show up in a t-shirt and jeans and look amazing, but a girl needs a dress."

Dawn's eyes lost focus for a moment as she mind-linked Zina.

"Done?", George asked when Dawn's attention was back on him.

"Yes.", she confirmed.

George hummed in approval and glanced at the time.

Dawn didn't miss this, and the fire in his eyes told her that they won't be resting.

She hugged him tightly and returned his kisses, ready to get lost in his passionate embrace again.

Chapter 398 – Preparations For The Party (2)

Damon stood on the balcony off the master bedroom and looked down at the garden that was set up to accommodate guests who would come out of the event hall, probably when the sun sets, and the heat eases up.

There were eight round tables, each with a pristine white tablecloth on it, and a bouquet of white and purple flowers. Bunches of white and purple balloons were placed at certain points in the garden, to create an invisible border around the area designated for the event.

Bushes in the garden were covered with soft fairy lights that will be turned on in the evening to illuminate the space discretely.

It was almost five o'clock in the afternoon, and the guests still didn't arrive, so the only people in the garden were Omegas who were busy with finishing touches.

Damon sneered while thinking about people who will come tonight into his house. They were definitely not welcome.

When his father was the Alpha of the Dark Howlers pack, many people got a title of an Elder. Other than retired Betas and Gammas of the pack, Damon's father bestowed that title to retired generals, lieutenants, and also civilians such as the principal of the school, and the town mayor. Basically, everyone who contributed in some way got a title of an Elder upon retiring from their role.

Damon's father believed that Elders were advisors to the Alpha and act as Alpha's proxies in his absence, and he also believed that every person is important.

Those so-called Elders had no recognition outside the pack, but inside, they were influential; mostly because others believed that Elders were close to the Alpha and that by doing favors to Elders, they were currying favors with the Alpha.

When Damon took over as the Alpha, Elders officially lost their significance, but people were still used to looking up to them, so each of the Elders maintained some sort of influence to this day.

Werewolves have an innate desire for power, so instead of putting their heads together to work for the pack, it turned into Elders amassing power for themselves.

Damon still remembers how they tried to use him when he took over as the Alpha. Some of them advised him to give up the territory to other packs because he was young and inexperienced. They wrapped all that into lies of protecting the best interests of the pack, but Damon knew that those Elders were doing it for benefit. That's why Damon allowed them to keep the roles, but he removed them from any duties that might be impactful.

Damon's hostility toward Elders was amplified by his suspicion that some of them were involved in the so-called accident where his parents perished.

Damon released a long breath to stabilize his emotions. By thinking about the past, he was getting angry, and he didn't want Talia to feel his turmoil. She should be composed and happy because tonight is the night his kitten will finally step forward as his woman in front of pack members. Damon was excited.

...

Talia came out of the closet, and she paused at the majestic sight of Damon from the back.

He was standing ramrod straight, with his hands behind his broad back, in a black short-sleeved shirt that was tucked in his black pants, and his raven-black hair was slicked back. He was ready for the party, at least from the outside. Talia could feel emotions brewing inside him, and she knew that he had a lot on his mind.

She tiptoed toward Damon and hugged him from the back.

"It will be OK.", she said.

Damon put his hands over Talia's that were resting on his chest.

"It will."

They were comforting each other, even though neither of them knew how this evening will end.

Damon and Talia discussed this, objectively and rationally, and they knew that this was not the best time to reveal the truth that they were mates but... when was the good time?

"Let me see you.", Damon said and turned to face Talia.

She stepped back and twirled on her toes. "What do you think?"

He wanted her to wear white or silver because she was so pure and adorable, but she insisted on a dark color to match him.

Damon let her have it. In his eyes, she looked perfect in anything.

Talia was wearing a black short-sleeved dress that hugged her upper body and flared from the waist down, reaching just above her knees. The line in the area of her waist was embellished with small crystals and sparkling, and her hair was slightly wavy and pinned above her ears with pins that had sparkling crystals, just like her dress. Talia's appearance was youthful and elegant, with just a touch of makeup, and Damon thought that she looked like a fairy. His fairy.

"You are stunning.", Damon said and licked his lips slowly. "But I prefer you naked."

Talia rolled her eyes, but she enjoyed the compliment. And she knew that he meant it. Both of those.

Damon paused for a moment before saying, "Travis is on his way to the study. He just did a checkup on Marcy and has updates."

"Let's go." She also wanted to hear updates.

...

The news Travis brought was not catastrophic, but it was not good either. Marcy's condition was still deteriorating and if she doesn't show signs of improvement at the checkup the next morning, Travis wanted Marcy to be transferred to the hospital.

With that, Travis took his medical bag and headed out of the study.

"Will you come to the party?", Talia asked Travis before he reached the door. As the pack doctor, he was invited.

"Yes. I am going to check on Commander George, and then I will get ready." He gestured toward his t-shirt and shorts. "This is not party appropriate."

Talia smiled, happy that another friendly face will be there. She remembered one thing, "Did you mind-link Dawn? To make sure it's safe to... uhm... you know."

"I did, before coming here.", Travis assured her that things were under control. He knew that newly-mated couples can't get their hands off each other, and that's why he gave Dawn a heads-up so that she and George were not in a compromising situation when he comes. He didn't want to intrude.

"Dinner will be served at seven.", Talia reminded him.

"I will be back by then.", Travis said and bowed to Damon before heading out. He wanted to bow to Talia also, but he feared that Damon will be hostile. Travis decided to feign ignorance about Talia being their Luna until Damon announces it officially.

Travis nearly bumped into Caden and Maya who were about to knock on the door.

"Are we late for updates?", Caden asked. They knew that Travis was here.

"Come in.", Damon called. "We will tell you the gist of it. Travis has work to do before he can join the party."

Caden and Maya didn't like the news that Marcy's condition is worsening.

They were hoping that Marcy will appear at the party and be able to turn this situation around. Marcy was definitely hiding the fact that George was her mate, and Maya thought that they can use that information to blackmail Marcy into obedience.

Chapter 399 – Preparations For The Party (3)

"This party has a horrible timing, but it's too late to cancel.", Maya said. "First guests are arriving as we speak. Everything we planned either failed or was only halfway done and that brought us to the current situation where most of the guests will expect to see Marcy as our future Luna."

Damon pinched the roof of his nose. They had one thing that could discredit Marcy as his Luna, the video of George accepting Marcy's rejection. Unfortunately, that would disclose George's identity, and Damon wanted to avoid that if possible.

In Damon's opinion, George could be a valuable pawn, or maybe even an ally, but if they announce that the Alpha of the Frostcrest pack is alive, George will turn into an enemy and will be a threat, assuming that he lives long for that. And Damon knew that Talia won't forgive him if he endangers Dawn's mate.

They needed another way to deal with this situation.

"Any last-minute ideas?", Damon asked his Betas.

"I think that you should tell everyone that Talia is your mate, right away.", Caden said. "You know how they are, echoing each other's nonsense and finding strength in numbers. The longer we delay this, the more they will reinforce the idea that Talia is your assistant, and with Marcy not showing up, they will assume that she is going for the dramatic effect of the main guest coming last."

Maya didn't think it was that bad. "We don't need to announce Talia as the Luna right away. I agree. Guests will talk among each other, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. We can use that to sway opinions." She made a dramatic pause before continuing. "We can discredit Marcy and remind people about Talia's recent contributions. The more people have a favorable opinion of Talia, the better. And then, there is the bond. People who believe that the mate bond is sacred, won't dare to raise their voices against Talia."

"But I'm not marked.", Talia reminded everyone. "Why would they believe I'm Damon's mate, and not an excuse to reject Marcy and stir trouble with the Red Moon pack?"

"Shaman Gideon could help with that.", Caden said.

"Is he coming?", Damon asked.

Maya shook her head and shrugged, indicating that she was not sure. The man didn't RSVP, and his mind-link was shut down, so it was highly likely he had no plans to attend this event.

"Do you think he can help?", Talia asked as the spark of hope ignited in her.

"Definitely.", Maya and Caden said in unison, and Maya explained, "He could perform a ritual that will confirm you are mates. Many of these old geezers respect him because they believe that he is the spokesperson for the Moon Goddess."

Talia looked at Damon. "We need to make sure he comes."

Damon made a face. "Do you think I should drag him here?"

"I know you have a grudge with him, but we can ask him politely. In person.", Talia said.

Damon groaned. "He doesn't like me." And Damon didn't like him either.

"He was nice toward me.", Talia reminded Damon. Gideon was nice, all to the point when Damon came and broke the door and dragged Talia out of there.

"Nice doesn't cut it, kitten. Our grudges run deep."

Talia looked at him stubbornly. "I want to try."

Maya and Caden took a step back, ready to watch the show because this was their Luna standing up to the Alpha. The only thing missing was the popcorn for Betas to munch on.

Damon was exasperated. "We can't go now. It takes at least half an hour to reach there and come back, and who knows how much time it will take him to get ready, assuming that you can convince him to come. Guests are here, what will they say if hosts don't show up for the first hour or two of the party?"

"Host.", Talia said.

Damon didn't get it. "What?"

"Host.", Talia repeated. "They are expecting you. Not the two of us."

Damon's brows came together in a frown when he realized... "You want to go there without me. That's not happening."

Talia steeled her resolve. "You need to stay here, appear among guests, and stir the conversation in the direction where Marcy is bad and I'm good. I'm not needed for it. Actually, it's better if I'm not here because I will just sound like a bitter woman, and people will think that you are saying nice things about me only because I'm present."

Damon puffed his cheeks. Somehow, Talia's words made sense. But there was no way he will let her go alone. "Maya will go with you."

"No.", Talia firmly rejected.

Damon couldn't believe this. "What?"

"There are more than fifty guests. If you want to sway the opinions effectively, you will need more people. Who is better than Maya and Caden?"

"You are not going to see Shaman on your own."

"I won't go on my own, but I can't go with two people who are the most reliable."

Both Maya and Caden puffed their chest at Talia's words. She called them reliable.

Damon narrowed his eyes at Talia. "And who will go?"

Talia thought about her options. Everyone was mated or somehow important, leaving her with one person... "Mindy."

Damon didn't like this. Whenever Talia and Mindy were on their own, Mindy would end up corrupting Talia in some way. Damon will never forget that wretched dildo. While on the topic of that dildo, Damon flicked it through the window, and the thing just disappeared. Damon assumed that someone found it and took it away. It's a purple thing, definitely standing out in the green foliage of the garden.

Seeing that Damon's frown was deepening by the second, Talia added, "Assign two warriors to accompany me. I trust Mindy. She is quick-witted, and she can help me persuade Shaman Gideon to come..."

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Travis reached in front of the room on the second floor of the packhouse and he knocked on the door.

"Coming!", Dawn shouted, and Travis could hear rushed footsteps.

The door opened and Travis blinked at the sight of Dawn who was wrapped in a towel and holding it bunched at her chest level. Travis' eyes moved on their own, to confirm that the towel covered Dawn's important parts as the towel ended just below her buttocks.

"Doctor Travis!", Dawn exclaimed and took a step back. She was expecting Zina to bring her the dress.

Nudity is not a big deal, and she was not even nude, but Travis appeared unexpectedly, and she was startled.

Travis opened his mouth to say something and then he groaned when an unmistakable Alpha aura hit him full force.

His vision blurred, but he definitely saw George pulling Dawn to stand behind him.

Travis cursed his luck. What the hell? Was George an Alpha also?

He wanted to be a doctor and save people, but at this rate, he should change his profession because it's too dangerous.

Maybe he should spend his day in the gym, with warriors and other sport-ish people, like Keith. Travis remembered that Keith was on survival training in the mountains, and Travis thought how that's not a bad place to be. Anything was better than this.

"George...", Dawn called while tugging his arm. "That's the doctor. He came to check on you. It's my fault for opening the door like this."

George exhaled sharply and stabilized his emotions and Travis was able to breathe when the aura pressing on him subsided.

"Please, come in.", Dawn said sweetly to Travis. "You can do the check-up and I will go and find something to put on."

"My clothes are in the closet.", George said. "Pick something."

Dawn's cheeks heated at the thought of wearing his clothes. She nodded in small jerky movements and then dashed into the closet.

Travis wished that she didn't leave because she could control this unreasonable man.

George moved from the door and gestured to Travis to enter, and Travis was not sure if that was a good idea, but he steeled his resolve and reminded himself that he is a medical professional. He can do this.

Chapter 400 – The Party At The Packhouse (1)

Elder Samson and Elder Charlie arrived together at the party.

The duo of Elders moved toward the bar in the event hall while greeting people present. Everyone was familiar.

Just like the majority of guests present, Elder Samson and Elder Charlie had a feeling that this was about Damon announcing his Luna, but they were not sure if that will be Marcy or Talia.

Of course, they were hoping it was Marcy, but they also remembered that Damon told them how Talia was his fated mate. Talia was fierce, but considering that many confirmed Marcy was in their pack... which one will it be?

"Isn't that James?", Elder Charlie asked while eyeing a group of four teens sitting at a table.

Elder Samson looked in that direction to see James sitting with Petra, Erik, and Zack. The four of them were focused on their phones and chatting in a hushed but lively manner. They were playing an online game together.

"It is.", Elder Samson responded without trying to conceal his displeasure. "It seems that the future Alpha is behaving differently without his father around."

Both Elder Samson and Elder Charlie were familiar with the Redmayne family, and they knew James as a stalwart young man whose serious expression would project wisdom beyond his age, like a true promising Alpha, yet now he was no different compared to other kids.

"Are you excited?", a hushed female voice came from the side.

"Agatha...", Elder Charlie called with a nod in greeting.

Agatha is their senior, and also an Elder, so they needed to show respect, even if it's just for show.

For the outsiders, they were all a harmonious group of Elders, each working for the benefit of the Dark Howlers pack. But on the inside, their relationships were tense as they were always engaged in a show of power, regardless of if it was for securing perks that matter or getting their way in a simple spat.

Elder Charlie and Elder Samson looked down on many other Elders, like Elder Agatha who got her title just because she won some awards in the human city and was voted as the best teacher by her students year after year. On top of her questionable achievements, Elder Agatha was prone to gossip. Everyone likes to hear gossip; they were also aware that Elder Agatha would wrap them into her stories. No one was ever spared from this gossipy grandma, so they are trying to stay away from her.

"What should we be excited about?", Elder Samson asked.

"Didn't you hear?", Elder Agatha inched closer, and her sparkling eyes didn't match her aged appearance. She looked like a woman in her sixties, but werewolves have longer lifespans compared to humans, and she was at least double of that.

"Alpha Damon..." She lowered her voice. "That boy finally decided to stop waiting for his mate, and we will get a Luna."

Both Elder Charlie and Elder Samson were stupefied. Did she say that Alpha Damon was waiting for his mate? He was sleeping around like there is no tomorrow. How was that waiting!?

Elder Charlie was first to recover. "What makes you think so?"

"Don't tell me you didn't hear. Marcy from the Red Moon pack is here.", she said with a knowing look.

"So?", Elder Samson asked and waved toward the table where James was with three other teenagers. "Alpha Edward's son is also present. Should we assume that James is part of the dowry? Or that Alpha Edward would give his only daughter without being personally present?"

Elder Agatha frowned at his sarcastic tone. "Are you against this union?"

Elder Charlie responded, "We have no opinions at this point. Before you accuse us of anything, you should look at the big picture. Representatives from several packs are here, and maybe our Alpha will tell us tonight that he found his Luna, or maybe he will announce that we will build a shelter for abandoned children. As a teacher, you should understand that taking care of children is important, and if we are about to face a big project, all of us should contribute in some way."

Elder Agatha thought for a moment while scrutinizing two men in front of her. Everyone was aware of how Elder Samson and Elder Charlie were close to Alpha Edward. Sure, some other Elders also had connections in the Red Moon pack, but they paled in comparison to being able to reach the Alpha directly.

She expected that they will be gloating how their connections were finally coming in handy, and their attitudes pointed to one thing... "You know something."

"We only know that sharing opinions in this place...", Elder Charlie paused while looking around, indicating that 'this place' was the packhouse. "...can backfire if you are wrong. And if we assume that you are right, it won't bring any harm to not talk about it until the official announcement was made."

Elder Agatha frowned. Everyone was talking about the union of Alpha Damon and Marcy and guessing how it will impact the dynamics of the packs and their positions. She saw these two men coming and she thought of getting to them first. Who would imagine that they wouldn't be eager to talk about it? Were they gaining some massive benefits and were not willing to share?

"Do we need to remind you of the consequences of angering our Alpha?", Elder Charlie asked.

Elder Agatha pressed her lips into a line surrounded by numerous fine wrinkles.

Everyone knew that she used to be one of the key decision-makers related to education and extracurricular activities for youngsters in the Dark Howlers pack. Kids and parents were visiting her often with big smiles and even bigger gifts while trying to curry favor with her so that they end up selected for the best programs. However, since Alpha Damon took over, she was reduced to something like an advisor to the principal which was almost nothing. She even needed a pass to enter the school!

Elder Agatha exhaled sharply while shaking off negative thoughts. "I was just saying casually. Don't take it seriously."

"Don't worry, we won't.", Elder Samson said, and he chuckled when she left with her nose raised high. It was obvious that she was offended. "You should have let her talk."

Elder Charlie didn't agree. "She would do her monologue, and her next victim would hear a version of how she talked with us about it and drag us into her mess. The best we can do is stay away and see how tonight will develop."

...

Everyone's attention went on the main entrance when Damon made his appearance with Caden and Maya by his side. Some were disappointed that Marcy was not in that group.

Damon wished that Talia was with him, but she went to see the annoyingly stubborn Shaman.

Damon knew that Talia was with Mindy and two warriors, but his kitten was out of his visual range, and he was worried. That girl is a magnet for trouble.

Damon paused to see all faces in the room, almost everyone was present.

When the chatter simmered down, Damon spoke.

"Thank you for coming tonight. As you can see, we have guests from other packs, and I hope you will show them our hospitality. Dinner will be served at seven o'clock, and after that, we will have some announcements. Until then, enjoy."

With that, Caden and Maya went to greet the elders, and Damon moved to the table where James was with three teens.

"I heard you had fun today.", Damon said.

"Yes. Thank you, Alpha Damon.", James confirmed, his playful expression was replaced with a serious one. "Don't worry. I know what to do."

Damon forced a stiff smile. He hated that this youngster had something on him, and if James decided to spill the beans how something was off with Marcy, things would go south quickly.

The safest thing would be to throw James into the dungeon and not leave him out ever, but with everyone knowing that the group from the Red Moon pack was here, Damon needed James to cover up for the lack of Marcy and Nora.

Damon noticed that George was still not in attendance. Damon was not sure how much the newly-mated Alpha will help the current situation, but Damon could guess that George won't have anything nice to say about Marcy.

Unfortunately, they didn't have a chance to negotiate, so that was another variable Damon couldn't control.

Damon told himself not to panic. If things get out of hand, he will use his aura to suppress everyone and think about damage control later. Much later.