

Alphas Bride 401

Chapter 401 – Visiting The Shaman (1)

Mindy and Talia sat in the back of the car that was going toward the house where Shaman Gideon lives.

Damon picked two warriors to take Talia and Mindy there and to ensure Talia's safety.

"So, what's the deal with this Shaman?", Mindy asked. Considering the urgency and the timing, Mindy knew it was important.

"Later...", Talia said while gesturing with her eyes toward the warriors and Mindy nodded in understanding.

The two warriors were stern and unapproachable, and when Talia asked them about their names, they opened the doors of the car for Talia and Mindy with, "Alpha told us to hurry up." Well, they were in a hurry.

Shaman's house is isolated in the forest, and they will need to cross the last stretch on foot, so Talia and Mindy had a silent agreement to use that walk to discuss why they were heading there and maybe come up with some plan.

Talia and Mindy chatted about the party and random stuff to fill the time.

Unfortunately, after they came out of the car, the two warriors were sticking to them.

Mindy turned back and spoke impatiently, "Can you give us more space? We need to talk in private."

Both soldiers frowned, showing that they were not willing. One of them spoke, "Even if we are a hundred steps away, we can still hear you."

Mindy rolled her eyes. "Then, be a hundred and one steps away. Girls need privacy."

Seeing the stern faces of two men, Talia tried a different approach. "What should I call you?"

"Alpha said that we should focus on the mission and not on pleasantries.", one of the soldiers responded.

Talia couldn't believe this. Did Damon forbid them from introducing themselves? It looked like it. Was it possible that Damon was so jealous and insecure? Silly Alpha. She gave up on finding out their names.

"Alpha Damon is not here, so there is no need to be so stiff.", Talia said. "We are not asking you to go against Damon's orders, but we are in the territory of the Dark Howlers pack. What can happen? Keep the distance so that you can see us and do your best not to listen. How does that sound?"

With this, two warriors nodded reluctantly, and they pointed them in the right direction before waiting for Talia and Mindy to proceed forward.

Talia was at Gideon's house once, but at that time she wandered into his garden accidentally, so now she needed guidance.

A warrior saying 'that way' didn't help much, so Talia took her phone to orient herself on the map via GPS. Maya pinned the coordinates where Shaman's house was, so it was easy to follow.

"So? Why are we looking for the old guy?", Mindy asked Talia in a hushed voice when she assessed that they put enough distance between them and the two warriors.

"Old guy?", Talia asked with confusion obvious in her voice.

"The Shaman.", Mindy explained.

"Do you know him?"

"No. A few times I visited, it was in the packhouse, and it's not a secret that Alpha Damon is not getting along with his Shaman."

Talia agreed with this. Damon and Shaman were not getting along, and not trying to conceal it. But Talia still had to ask, "Why do you think he is old?"

Talia wouldn't call him old, at least not by appearance. Alpha Edward looked older than Gideon.

"Come on, Lia...", Mindy said. "You should know that it takes decades of studying and apprenticeship to become a Shaman. I didn't meet one that's younger than a hundred years old."

Werewolves age similar to humans until they reach maturity, which is normally in their early twenties. After that, their aging reflects the strength of their wolf. The stronger one's wolf is, the slower they will age, and the longer their natural lifespan will be.

That's also one of the reasons why most of the werewolves wish to be mated to high-ranking members. The marking bite comes with the DNA of the stronger one, acting like a tonic that prolongs life.

Mindy was aware of cases where some Alphas were captured and drained of blood for others to drink in an attempt to strengthen themselves. There were no records if that actually worked. The practice is strongly condemned, but there are always some willing to take risks. Who doesn't want to live forever? OK. Not really forever, but three hundred years sounds much better than one hundred.

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Talia told Mindy about the current situation, and how the guests will probably expect Damon to show up with Marcy. "Shaman can help us convince people that mate bond is sacred, and they will accept me as Damon's Luna. At least that's the plan."

"It all depends on Shaman's reputation in the pack. The fact that Alpha Damon ostracized him for a decade won't help.", Mindy said.

"But if we convince him to come and speak for Damon, that can be seen as a sign that mate bond is so important they were willing to improve their relationship."

Mindy shrugged. "If you say so."

Talia pouted. "You don't sound convinced."

Mindy didn't deny it. "It's not me you need to convince."

Talia agreed with this point. "Our goal is to assure he will come to the party. We are already here, so let's do our best."

Mindy looked around as the trees stopped and they found themselves in a meadow. "By the way, where are we?"

Talia smiled mysteriously and kept her phone back in her purse. It was not needed anymore.

Mindy took a deep breath and her lips stretched into a dreamy smile.

Talia noticed. "It smells good. Right? It's his garden."

"Where?"

Talia giggled. "Here. We are in it."

Mindy looked around. "There is no fence." And no house in sight.

Talia noticed the lack of a fence last time, that's how she ended up wandering into Gideon's garden.

"This is away from the town, so there are no trespassers. His house is over there." Talia pointed toward a row of trees. She saw Mindy leaning to sniff the lavender. Did she forget that they were short on time? How can she stop to smell the flowers? "What are you doing?"

"I love lavender, but I never smelled anything so good. Go ahead without me. I will join you in a minute. You can start thawing the grumpy Shaman, and I will come to deliver the final blow."

Talia looked at Mindy helplessly and then she decided to leave her behind.

Mindy sniffed the lavender and she spotted the vibrantly pink echinacea. The whole area looked like a meadow full of wildflowers, yet there was order in chaos, and Mindy thought that it was fantastic.

With the corner of her eye, Mindy saw two soldiers following after Talia.

Mindy put her hands akimbo and made a face. Did they just ignore her like she was not important, and the only one worth protecting was Talia? She knew that Damon was focused on Talia, but this was too much.

After a moment of hesitation, Mindy decided to go after them. No matter how rude Damon was, she came here to help Talia and she won't help by lingering in the garden.

Chapter 402 – Visiting The Shaman (2)

While approaching the cabin that was nestled between the trees and high bushes, Talia noticed that the front door was open.

She looked around and called, "Hello! Shaman Gideon! It's me, Talia. I came to visit you..."

No one responded, and Talia moved closer to the cabin. "Hello?"

The door was visibly newer compared to the rest of the cabin, obviously because Gideon replaced the one that Damon destroyed. Talia hoped that Gideon won't blame her for that incident.

After a slight hesitation, Talia pushed the door open and called from there, "Shaman Gideon? Hellooo..."

Talia wondered if something happened to him. Maybe that's why he didn't show up at the party or respond to the invitation. What if he was attacked by rogues? He lives alone, maybe it happened days ago!

The more Talia thought about it, the more she was unsettled.

"I'm coming in!", she called and stepped inside.

The place was just as she remembered it. Kitchen, dining area, sitting area with a sofa and two chairs. The doors on the left were closed, and the whole cabin smelled of lavender, basil, mint, and something else that was sweet and soothing.

"Hello!"

Talia jumped in fright when Gideon emerged from the first room on the left.

"I didn't expect visitors, Talia.", he said.

Talia patted her chest to calm down. "I apologize for not calling ahead." Actually, the man doesn't have a phone, and both Maya and Caden said that his mind-link was shut down, but Talia didn't want to point out those technicalities. "Sorry for entering your home without permission, but I was calling and..."

"And I didn't think of answering from the restroom. Don't worry about it. How can I help you? I assume your presence here is not a casual visit."

Talia realized that Gideon was not as pleasant as the last time and she wondered if that was because Damon broke his door, or because she barged in. Probably both.

She knew that beating around the bush will only make him angry, so she went straight to the point.

"I believe you know about the event at the packhouse.", she said.

"The one where Elders are invited?"

"You are invited also."

"Is that why you are here?"

Talia nodded in response.

"Did Alpha Damon send you?"

"No. It was my idea."

"Why?", he questioned.

"I think you know why." Talia really had a feeling that this man knew everything better than anyone, even though he was stuck in the middle of the forest.

Gideon was visibly amused. "Maybe I want to hear you say it."

"We need your help.", Talia said.

"You sound like that will be enough for me to do something. And who is that 'we' you spoke about?"

"Damon and I."

He looked around. "I see only you."

Talia realized that Gideon expected Damon to come in person. Well, she couldn't blame him, but...
"Guests are already at the packhouse. It would be inconvenient for Damon to come."

"Well then, it's inconvenient for me to go there."

Talia looked at the man whose stubbornness was comparable to Damon's. Ah, this will be a problem. It was obvious that Gideon didn't have a good opinion of Damon, so she wanted to ask him to help her, but then... who was she to ask favors? However, there was something that topped it all, and that was why she was there.

"Do you believe that the mate bond is sacred?", Talia asked.

Gideon paused. "What does it have to do with that brat destroying my house? And he did it more than once. If he is not the Alpha, I would spank him into obedience. You want me to help him? Do you really expect me to move a finger for a person who didn't even come to apologize?"

"Will you help us if he apologizes?"

"That will depend on his sincerity, but it will be a start."

Talia had a feeling that she hit a wall.

Gideon wanted Damon to lower himself and apologize, and it's not that Gideon was wrong but... they were out of time, and she needed to come up with something effective or give up on the idea of Gideon helping them.

Can they handle those Elders without Gideon?

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Talia's brows came together in confusion when she saw that Gideon was staring behind her, with an expression of disbelief like he was seeing a ghost.

She turned around to see... Mindy.

Mindy was at the door, staring back at Gideon, and Talia had a feeling of déjà vu. Where did she see something like this before?

Talia moved to the side and observed the duo that stood there without moving a muscle.

After a few exceedingly long seconds, Mindy stepped into the cabin and walked straight toward Gideon, the two of them never broke eye contact.

Mindy stopped one step away from Gideon and extended her hand to touch his face.

Talia clearly saw Mindy's arm jerking a bit the moment the tips of Mindy's fingers came in contact with Gideon's cheek, dispelling any doubts Talia had so far.

Mates.

This was unbelievable! What bad timing! And who said nonsense how seeing mates recognize each other was rare!?

Mindy and Gideon stared at each other without blinking and Talia felt like the third wheel.

"Uhm... so...", Talia really didn't know what to say. Should she congratulate them? Will Gideon come to help them now? Probably not.

Gideon's lips stretched into a smile, and he lifted Mindy like she weighs nothing and walked toward the dining area with Mindy in his arms, and then he put her to sit on the table.

"Congratu...", Talia's word was cut halfway when she saw that Mindy and Gideon were making out like there was no tomorrow. They ignored her completely.

That confirmed it. Gideon will not help them, but not because he was pissy at Damon, but because he will have sex. With Mindy.

Great!

Ah, they were tugging at each other's clothes already!

Talia swiftly walked toward the exit and stepped out while closing the door behind her.

She looked at two warriors who waited for her.

"Let's go back to the packhouse."

Two warriors exchanged confused gazes, and Talia answered the questions they didn't ask, "Mindy is not coming, and neither is Shaman. It's just us. Let's go." She thought of something else. "Don't tell Alpha about this. I will tell him when we get back."

Talia shook her head while walking back to the car. She couldn't believe it. Mindy and Gideon! What a pairing!

Mindy was always talking about her charities, goals, and traveling with pride, but in that cabin, Talia saw a woman who was willing to tend to the herbs in the garden.

Talia didn't know how Damon will react to the news that Gideon was not coming, or how Maddox will react when he hears that his sister's mate is the Shaman of the Dark Howlers pack... and she had no idea how they will deal with the Elders at the party, but she was happy for her friend.

Chapter 403 – Mindy And Gideon (1) [Bonus Chapter]

When Mindy approached the cabin, she picked up the scent of lavender that was even better than the one in the garden.

Mindy always loved lavender, but this was so good that it was nearly addictive. She hoped that this is the scent that the Shaman can pack into a scented pouch or some other container so that she takes it with her. She was ready to pay!

Mindy made her way into the cabin through the door that was wide open, and she saw Talia's back, but what really got her attention was the most exquisite man she ever laid her eyes on.

Was that the Shaman? That man was not old. He was a dreamboat!

Did Talia say that his name is Gideon? It didn't matter because Mindy already decided to call him Daddy in the bedroom.

Gideon's mature appearance complimented his muscular physique, but above all, she was attracted to his eyes. His light brown eyes reminded her of sugar cookies, that were warm and melting in the mouth with just the right amount of sweetness, but below that yumminess, she heard whispers of wisdom and passion and Mindy could imagine him pillaging her insides.

Was she getting aroused because he was looking at her? Unbelievable!

But then something even more unbelievable happened and Mindy heard a voice in her head, "Mate".

Her breath hitched. Did she hear that right?

Mindy's legs moved on autopilot, her every step created an illusion of the world disappearing, leaving only the man in front of her and the path to reach him. He was a stranger, yet there was an air of familiarity around him. It was fantastic.

In the back of her mind, Mindy was aware that she came here with a purpose, and that there was someone else present. Was it important? It felt like it... almost. But the closer she got to Gideon, the

more she was confident that her goal in life was the man in front of her, and that if she thinks about anything else, it would be a mistake.

Mindy touched his cheek, just above his neatly trimmed beard, and jerked upon contact. Sparks. Sparks of their bond.

Mindy couldn't believe it. She finally found him. Her mate.

Gideon's hands landed on her waist, and she thought that he will kiss her, but he lifted her up and the next thing Mindy knew... she was sitting on the dining table with Gideon standing between her legs.

That was hot!

Gideon closed his eyes and took a deep breath and his smile told her that he approved. Mindy heard how mates recognize each other by the specific scent that only mates can sense, and she knew that Gideon's scent for her was lavender. Mindy wondered, how does she smell to him?

Gideon glanced at Mindy's lips, silently asking for permission to kiss her, and she smiled in response.

Gideon couldn't believe that this was happening. He was waiting for his mate for so long, and he wondered if the Moon Goddess decided to leave him mateless.

And then Mindy walked in.

His mate.

Gideon believed that the Moon Goddess knew what she was doing, and this girl with chestnut-colored hair was just what he needed, but... he wished that she was older.

It was more than fifty years how a girl in her twenties aroused his interest, but then he picked up her crisp scent of pumpkin, and the pants in his crotch area tightened. Incredible!

Yes, as a Shaman, he knew very well that pumpkin is an aphrodisiac, but this girl in front of him was an aphrodisiac that was made exclusively for him.

Gideon leaned closer and hummed when their lips connected.

The sparks were there, confirming that he didn't get it wrong. She was his mate.

Mindy kissed him back shyly, and he wondered if she was inexperienced. In the next moment, he could feel her emotions through the mate bond, and he understood that she wanted him to take charge.

Gideon's hand landed at the back of her head, trapping Mindy between his palm and his lips and he deepened the kiss, her flavors of pumpkin made him crave for more, and her arousal told him that she liked it.

Mindy was dizzy. Yes, it was just a kiss, but it came with lavender and addictive sparks, and she ended up tugging on his shirt, wanting to undress him so that she can explore freely his muscular body that was not concealed by his clothes.

Just when she got to the good part of getting her hands under his shirt, Gideon grabbed her wrists, preventing her from proceeding to feel him out.

"What?", Mindy asked breathily.

"Your name."

His deep voice reverberated in her body, sending a wave of heat at the cradle of her thighs.

Mindy couldn't believe it. Even his voice was sexy!

"Mindy."

Gideon narrowed his eyes slightly. He knew everyone from the Dark Howlers pack, and he definitely knew who the guests were in the packhouse. Considering that Mindy came with Talia, it was not difficult to guess... "From the Blue River pack?"

Mindy confirmed. "Is that a problem?"

"No.", he said right away. "No matter who you are, to me, you are Mindy, my mate."

Normally, Mindy hated guys who would claim their mate like claiming possessions, but at that moment she was aroused, and he was right there, and he smelled great, and somehow... it sounded right, so she didn't complain.

He kissed the inside of her palms and then he kept her hands down before saying, "Mindy, I am..."

"Gideon.", she said impatiently. "The Shaman of the Dark Howlers pack. I know. Now, can we continue?"

"Why are you in a hurry?"

Mindy glanced at his crotch area. "Look who is talking."

"I am talking.", Gideon said with amusement in his voice. "That guy down there has a mind on his own." He pinched her chin with his index finger and the thumb and lifted her head so that she looks into his face. "As my mate, you should learn some patience."

Mindy pressed her lips into a line and looked at him defiantly. She knew that Shamans are wise men who think before they act, but is he really going to give her behavioral lessons instead of mind-blowing sex?

"If you want me to listen to you, you will need to prove that the guy down there is for more than just stretching your pants."

"If you think that I will please my mate just with my cock, you are in for a surprise, princess."

Mindy's insides shook. Did he think that his words will make her calm down? It was the opposite!

"Show me.", Mindy demanded.

Gideon ran his thumb over her lower lip. "What did I say?"

Mindy swallowed hard. What did he say? Oh, yes... "Patience." She let out a long breath. "Are you really going to take this slow?"

"I waited for you for a long time, Mindy.", Gideon said and this time she could feel the anguish and loneliness seeping into her through their mate bond.

Chapter 404 – Mindy And Gideon (2)

Mindy's heart cracked when the heaviness of Gideon's emotions hit her hard, and she realized that her joy of finding a mate doesn't compare to his.

Mindy knew that Shamans are spiritual guides. Werewolves come to them to hear stories and advice related to anything and everything, mates included. She could feel Gideon's pain that accumulated over a long time as he devoted his life to helping many, while he was all alone.

Why was he living in isolation, here in the forest, instead of in the middle of Darkbourne?

No one chooses loneliness; it happens when a person is disappointed with the society.

Gideon saw a lot in his life, and Mindy wished to be one of the people who won't let him down; maybe he could even rely on her.

Mindy gingerly wrapped her arms around Gideon and leaned into him until her face was stuck to his chest.

She took a deep breath that filled her system with his scent of lavender, and she thought how it's silly that a free spirit like herself who loves travel, gets dazzled by shiny stuff, and thrives among people, was

actually feeling at home in this modest cabin and in the arms of a man she just met. She had an impression that this is all she will ever need to be happy.

Other than his name, occupation, and facts that he was outrageously handsome and smelled great, she didn't know anything about Gideon, but every cell in her body screamed for his proximity. She never felt anything like it.

"I am here to stay", she said. "Slow is fine. We will do as you say."

"I'm not taking it slow. This is a special moment for me, Mindy. And I hope it's for you as well."

Mindy nodded in response. Of course, it's special. Finding a mate is once in a lifetime. The only difference was that he waited longer compared to her.

He leaned to murmur close to her ear, "I want to enjoy every inch of your body."

Mindy sucked in a sharp breath. She thought that they were going for an emotional approach first, and that he will brew them tea so they can chat deep into the night and get to know each other before they move onto carnal pleasures, but then he turned on the heat again.

She looked at him apprehensively. "Just to make things clear. Are we going to have sex now?"

Gideon chuckled, amused by her bluntness. "Yes. That's what mates do when they meet, Mindy. We are going to have sex, and I am going to mark you. Unless you object."

"No objections!", Mindy said with urgency, hoping that he won't change his mind again. Not about the marking, that could wait, but the sex part was important. She really wanted to feel him inside her.

Her eyes darted from his face to the buttons of his shirt, silently asking for permission to undo them. She didn't want him to hold her hands again. Any type of disapproval from Gideon was creating knots in Mindy's chest, and she didn't want to disappoint him.

Seeing that Gideon didn't react to her nonverbal signs, Mindy's hands moved slowly to unbutton his shirt, one button at a time.

Mindy's eyes widened more as she revealed his firm pecs that were blanketed with a layer of dark brown chest hair. Very manly. She couldn't stop herself from putting her hand in there and touching the soft hair that coiled around her fingers. There was plenty of it, yet it was not thick enough to look like fur. It was perfect.

When all the buttons were undone, and she could see his whole torso, Mindy leaned closer to rub her cheek on his chest. It was ticklish and infused with lavender, and she loved it very much.

"Mine...", she said and at that moment she decided to use that part of Gideon's body as her personal love blanket.

Gideon enjoyed the plethora of Mindy's emotions that seeped into him through the mate bond.

Mindy was like a young branch of a tree, vibrant with blooms, unspoiled, beautiful, and brittle, and he was determined to envelop her with his knowledge and protect her from the elements so that she can grow and bear fruits... fruits... that would be his pups. There were times when he thought about his mate, but he never thought about offspring.

Gideon took a mental note of wonders the mate brings into one's life. It just took one brunette to enter his life and he already saw himself as a family man, with his pups running around while Mindy and he tend to the garden. It was surreal.

Little by little, they undressed each other, and Gideon's eyes darkened when his eyes fell on Mindy's exposed breasts.

Mindy was leaning backward with her elbows resting on the table, giving him a full view of her full and round breasts with a perfectly hardened nipple on each peak.

Mindy thought how all this was new. She hooked up with a guy more than once, but they would at least have a drink first, or dance, or talk... something. This was much more than a hookup, this was for life, yet they went to undressing right away.

Her promiscuous brother had breakfast with Tanya before they went upstairs. Sure, it all collapsed, and it took them a near-drowning experience to get it right, but the point was that they didn't immediately go for the sex part, yet here she was, nearly naked on the dining table of a man she met only minutes ago.

Mindy wondered, is this sex at first sight?

She was down to her panties, and he was only in his boxer shorts, and they were definitely going to have sex.

Mindy watched with anticipation as Gideon licked his lips and moved toward her breasts. She thought that he will lick, kiss, suck, or anything... but he just stood there and took a deep breath.

"How do I smell to you?", she asked.

"Pumpkin."

Mindy was not sure what to think about this. Pumpkin? It was not a sexy fruit. She hoped she will be something sexy to her mate, and not a round orange thing.

Gideon observed her with all the seriousness in the world. "You don't seem happy."

"Well...", Mindy paused while choosing her words. "Pumpkins are so... plain."

"Mmm...", Gideon hummed in disapproval. "You say plain, and I say versatile. It all depends on preparation. It can turn into a spice, a beverage, a dessert, or a main dish. I love pumpkins. They are my favorite fruits."

"When you say it that way, it sounds special."

"But you are special, my princess. I could look at your shiny exterior all day and not get bored of it, yet I crave to feast on your scrumptious flesh and delicious seeds that are deep inside you."

Mindy swallowed hard.

He just compared her to a pumpkin and made it sound sexy.

She was not sure if he called her princess because of her background, or because he gave her a pet name. Before she could ask about it, he licked her left nipple, and Mindy's whole body jolted as electric currents ran through her body.

A low growl ripped from Gideon's chest as Mindy's flavors of pumpkin overloaded his system, firing up every nerve in his body and he sucked on her harshly while enjoying the tenderness that filled his mouth. She was perfect. More than perfect.

The scent of her arousal muddled with his brain and for the first time in decades, he allowed his urges to take over as his wolf took over.

He moved down her body with urgency and he bit on the delicate fabric of her panties, using his elongated fangs to tear through it with ease, transforming it into tatters that fell on the floor in slow motion.

Gideon's hands moved to spread her legs, and there was Mindy, lying on the table with her legs spread as far as they go, exposing her private parts for Gideon to see.

He was not sure where to look first... at her flushed face from arousal, her breasts that swayed as she breathed, or at her glistening pussy that was right there for him.

Chapter 405 – Mindy And Gideon (3)

Gideon took half a step back, and he didn't let go of Mindy's legs while observing the pumpkin-infused beauty in front of him.

It was all there, on the table, a mouthwatering feast, and it was all his.

Mindy bit her lower lip in anticipation as Gideon lowered himself at the cradle of her thighs and took a deep breath.

If she knew this would happen, she would tidy up down there. It's not that she was unkempt, but he was her mate, and it was special, and she wanted to leave a good impression. She regretted not getting a Brazilian waxing the last time she went to a spa.

But he didn't seem to mind. Actually, he seemed delighted by the sight in front of him.

Gideon used his right leg to pull a chair closer, and he sat on the chair with his head hovering above Mindy's intimate bush.

The whole scene looked like Gideon sat for a meal, and Mindy was it.

She saw him getting lower, and his breath fanned her moist flesh, and there it was...

"AH!", Mindy inhaled loudly, and her eyes rolled at the back of her head when he licked her clit in a long, mighty stroke. And then he buried his face there and licked and sucked her like there is no tomorrow, releasing low growls that vibrated against her flesh.

Mindy struggled to breathe. She had guys go down on her before, but this was out of this world. Gideon obviously knew what he was doing, and the sensational sparks amplified the experience several folds.

She could see his head stuck between her legs that were spread wide because he was holding onto her thighs. She wanted to reach for his head or hand, but she was leaning on her elbows and if she extended her arm, she would plop completely flat on her back, and she really wanted to see Gideon worshipping her pussy with his tongue.

That was her mate, and she was not sure if her orgasm was building so quickly because he knew how to handle a woman's body, or because they were mates. She chose the latter because the sheer thought of

Gideon doing something like this to another woman made Mindy see red. He was hers and she was not willing to share, not now, and not ever!

"What are you thinking about?", he spoke against her flesh.

"What?", she asked breathily.

He tilted his head to see her, and she didn't approve that he stopped his ministrations.

"Your mind is wandering, princess."

She realized that he could feel her emotions and just now she was... jealous.

Mindy's eyes widened when he stood up. Is he going to leave her like that? She really wanted him to get back there. She was close, damnit!

She held back her words of protest when Gideon tugged his boxer shorts down, exposing his erect cock, right there, between her legs. He was so close that she could feel his heat splashing against her body.

Her lips lifted into a smile. "I thought you spoke about patience and how you want to worship every inch of my body."

Gideon smirked and pulled her closer until her ass was at the edge of the table. "I did. But I never said that I will leave your pussy for the end."

Mindy's breath stopped in her throat at the sight of his boyish grin and eyes that were full of passion and fire. Why did she think that Shamans are old and boring?

Gideon put his hand between her legs, and his fingers glided between her drenched folds.

"Lay on your back, princess...", he said, and she saw him using his wet hand to spread her juices on his cock.

Mindy got flat on her back and her hands landed on her breasts.

Gideon's eyes flashed when he saw Mindy twisting her nipples. It was very erotic. He loved that she was free to play with her body in front of him.

"Ah...", a shaky sigh escaped her lips when Gideon's cock pushed between her folds. He was moving up and down, spreading her juices everywhere and rubbing on her clit, and she couldn't wait to feel him stretch her insides.

"In public, you will be my princess.", Gideon said in a sexy low voice. "In private, you are my dirty little girl."

Mindy's lips lifted into a smile. It confirmed that Gideon calling her 'princess' was not because she came from an Alpha family. She liked that. She liked it a lot.

Her whole body hummed when she felt the pressure and the stretch, and the sparks made her feel so good that she feared she will lose her mind.

"By the Moon Goddess!", Gideon hissed when he was all the way sheathed inside Mindy. "You are perfect."

His hips inched away from her, and then he pushed back in.

"MINE!", he growled and started pumping himself into her vigorously.

"SHIT!", Mindy exclaimed and threw her head back, arching her body in sheer pleasure.

She didn't care that she was completely naked, with her legs spread wide on the dining table. The only thing on her mind was the glorious cock that was sliding in and out of her, and the friction and the sparks and she wanted to get her release.

"Ah, ah... Gideon... Ah...", she mumbled, her voice rising in pitch with his every thrust.

Gideon grabbed her upper arm and yanked her up, into a seated position.

Mindy immediately wrapped her arms around his torso and gripped his back, his chest pressed on hers and it was the best feeling ever!

The new angle of his cock thrusting inside her provided a different stimulation and Mindy knew that she was only seconds away from plunging into rapture.

She could feel him moving her hair to expose the left side of her neck and she craned her head to give him better access while admiring the fact that his hips didn't falter in the slightest.

His lips glided over the tender skin of her neck, looking for the perfect spot, and he knew that she was almost there. Both of them were.

"Mmm... ahh...", unintelligible sounds came from Mindy's lips, and she gasped when the orgasm hit her full force. She was grateful that he continued thrusting inside her, prolonging her flight.

Gideon groaned when her insides coiled around his cock, pushing him into overdrive and he felt the bliss of shooting his hot seed deep inside her.

"Ahh... ahh... AHHH!", Mindy's lustful sounds morphed into a shriek when a piercing pain radiated from her neck and she knew that was Gideon marking her, but she didn't expect that will amplify her orgasm to the point of her seeing stars in front of her closed eyes.

She loved it and she feared that she will pass out or maybe lose her mind, all in one.

And when the pain subsided, her body pulsated in the pleasurable rhythm of her heartbeats that matched Gideons, and she enjoyed that his strong arms were holding her gently as he tended to the wound he just created.

Gideon hummed while licking the spot where his mark will form.

With this, the bond was sealed. She was his, and he had his mate... finally.

Mindy felt like floating, and she opened her eyes to see Gideon carrying her to the second door on the left. It was a storage-like room. Shelves lined the walls and were filled with boxes, jars, and other containers. The back wall had stairs that led up.

After a flight of stairs, they emerged on the upper floor whose ceiling was slanted, following the roof, and the whole floor was an open space with a room on the side. Through the open door, Mindy could see that was the bathroom.

A bed was along the furthest wall, a big armoire served as a closet, and there was a desk with some papers and shelves full of books, and the whole place smelled of lavender. It was Gideon's scent that only Mindy could pick up.

Before Mindy could see more of the space, she was sinking into the mattress with Gideon on top of her.

"How are you feeling, princess?", he asked while nuzzling her nose with his.

"Fantastic.", she responded with a dreamy smile. "You?"

"Never better."

And then he gave her a mind-spinning kiss that was an announcement of another crazy ride.

Mindy gasped when he pushed inside her again, and she embraced him with her arms and legs, hoping that he will never let go of her.

Chapter 406 – The Party At The Packhouse (2) [Bonus Chapter]

In the packhouse...

James was having fun with Petra, Erik, and Zack. The four of them didn't shout or raise their feet on the table (they would do that if the atmosphere was teenager-friendly). However, they were happily playing with their phones and chatting in a lively mood which stood out because everyone else was visibly older and much more serious.

Petra, Erik, and Zack were in high spirits. When they got their mission to accompany future Alpha James, they were apprehensive about it, but after experiencing the whole day of fun, they realized that they were wrong about it.

First, they had a scrumptious breakfast in the packhouse, which was followed by a whole day of playing in the town with James. All expenses were covered, courtesy of Alpha Damon.

Second, they got to stay in the packhouse for the time being, with each of them getting a room. It was like a vacation!

Third, they were attending this event with big shots from the pack, and James' presence allowed them to be casual about it. It was fantastic!

James was enjoying his time with his new friends, but part of his attention was on his surroundings.

He overheard many talks about Marcy as the future Luna of the Dark Howlers pack, how Damon will announce their union, and they wondered when she will make her appearance. The excitement about Marcy was building up.

Some groups were talking about Talia; how she secured them a tribute from the Steelbite pack and provided a scent concealer for their warriors, but those talks quickly simmered down in favor of Marcy, no matter how much Maya and Caden tried to stir the conversation about Talia. At most, people acknowledged her as Alpha Damon's assistant.

One of the Elders even said, "As a member of our pack, it's normal that she contributes. Every one of us did the same...", and then he asked when Marcy will come.

James also noticed that Elder Samson and Elder Charlie were eyeing his table, and he knew that they were waiting for the right timing to approach him. After two drinks, the duo decided to make their move.

Elder Samson and Elder Charlie were the only Elders who heard that Talia was Damon's mate, so they didn't want to talk in favor of Marcy or Talia. However, no matter what happens to Marcy, disregarding James would be a bad move because he is the future Alpha of the Red Moon pack.

"Future Alpha James", Elder Samson called in his official tone.

James looked up at the Elders and he nodded at each of them while calling out names, "Elder Samson, Elder Charlie, Elder Agatha. Nice to see you.", he ended with a pleasantry.

Elder Samson and Elder Charlie were not aware that at the last minute Elder Agatha attached herself to their group of two.

The duo turned toward Elder Agatha who looked like she was always there, and they cursed internally. Gossip-hungry wench!

Elder Agatha was happy that James called her name. He recognized her! It made her feel important. She didn't know that Alpha Edward got James to memorize Elders from all major packs, including their background and roles.

James was surprised to see so many Elders in the Dark Howlers pack. Other packs would give those titles to retired high-ranking members, but only to the ones with Alpha, Beta, and Gamma bloodlines. Maybe, a retired general who made significant contributions would get this title. The most Elders James counted was four, in the Spring Leaf pack, and this group of fifty-something Elders was more like a circus.

James' tutor explained to the youngster that Alpha Jacob (aka Damon's father) was generous in giving these titles because he believed that dividing power will reduce corruption. How wrong he was. It only made Elders fight for a larger piece of the pie, many resorting to establishing connections with other

packs and causing discord from within. That eventually lead to the downfall of Alpha Jacob and Luna Violet. Of course, those were just theories, but it's a fact that the Dark Howlers pack has many Elders, yet neither of them wields any power as Alpha Damon is not even using them as his advisors.

All of them hold empty titles.

If he didn't need to play his role, James would ignore those old geezers.

"We see you are having fun, so we just came to greet you.", Elder Charlie said.

"How nice of you. My father will be pleased." James knew exactly what to say to make those Elders happy, and he hoped they will leave as soon as possible.

"It seems that you made friends with young stars of our pack...", Elder Samson said while gesturing toward Erik, Zack, and Petra to what James nodded in response.

"I am lucky to have them as guides and company. They are telling me about the opportunities you are offering here and I will discuss with my father if we can have something like that in the Red Moon pack."

James hoped that there won't be questions about what they were doing, because he didn't want to lie, but he also didn't want to say how they were playing in the town instead of training.

James wondered if he, Zack, Erik, and Petra can leave. Maybe they could go to the lounge? That should be empty. There they can talk and continue playing games without being interrupted.

Instead of leaving, Elder Agatha asked, "When can we expect your sister to join us?"

Elder Charlie and Elder Samson had matching stiff expressions. It was obvious that Elder Agatha snuck on them with an intention to probe the situation related to Marcy. Did she already forget their warnings to keep her opinions to herself until Alpha Damon makes it official?

The duo wondered if they return to the bar. After exchanging quick glances, they each took a step back, leaving Elder Agatha in front, as a silent signal that the old woman was on her own.

"Why do you think that my sister will join?", James asked.

"Well...", Elder Agatha was confused. "Marcy just came from Europe recently and is visiting our pack for the first time. I heard a lot of good things about her, and I'm eager to meet her."

"You are right.", James responded. "She just came from Europe and seeing a big pack other than ours is novel. My sister visited Darkbourne yesterday and she spent today in the human city. She didn't confirm her presence at this event."

"She didn't?", Elder Agatha said absentmindedly.

James smirked. "It seems that you are confused. Did your invitation say how my sister will be present?"

"No. But this is the event for the Elders and the visiting guests, so I assumed..."

"I am a visiting guest.", James cut her off. "Other than me, there are three more people at this table. They are also visiting. If you look around, you will see people from other packs. My sister's presence is not crucial for this dinner event. At least that's what she told me."

Elder Agatha glanced around helplessly only to see that Elder Charlie and Elder Samson left at some point. She was on her own.

James was looking at her with a mocking grin that told her he was looking down on her, silently reminding her that he is an Alpha and she is not.

"I apologize, future Alpha James. It was my mistake.", she said stiffly.

"It seems you are making mistakes often, Elder Agatha."

The elder woman frowned at James. "What do you mean?"

"Your reputation reached me before you did.", James said stoically. "I thought that it was just an exaggeration, but now I understand why Alpha Damon diminished your importance."

Elder Agatha wondered if her ears malfunctioned. Did this pup just insult her? But he was a son of an Alpha... and not just any Alpha, but Alpha Edward, the Alpha of the Red Moon pack, the second largest pack in North America. She didn't dare show arrogance.

Chapter 407 – The Party At The Packhouse (3)

Elder Agatha gritted her teeth and lowered her head in front of James. "Again, I apologize, future Alpha James. I know what I did wrong."

"Do you?", James asked, his voice full of arrogance. "I hope you do. If this repeats, Alpha Damon and my father will hear about it. You may leave."

Elder Agatha turned around and walked away while sulking.

The truth was that she didn't know why James showed hostility. She only asked when Marcy will come down to the party. But then... Elder Agatha knew that those young Alphas have no respect for Elders, and every next generation was worse than the previous one.

With her peripheral vision, Elder Agatha could see mocking glances directed her way. Of course, these were werewolves, and even though they were not close, they could clearly hear what was said, as long as they were paying attention.

She knew that none of them sympathized with her. Why would they? If she was down, it meant they have one less Elder to compete with. Scoundrels!

At the table with four teenagers, James' eyes moved to the right, and he saw Damon looking back at him.

They spoke before the party, and James agreed to give neutral responses to everyone who asks about Marcy, not confirming her attendance at the party, but not denying her presence in the packhouse either.

James and Damon exchanged barely noticeable nods, and then James gave his attention to his three friends at the table who looked at him with a mix of awe and disbelief.

Zack was first to speak. "Is that how you normally act?"

James waved, indicating that they should move to another topic. "Don't worry about it. If I don't show them who is the boss, they will start lecturing me, and that's not why I'm here."

"Man... that was Elder Agatha.", Erik said in a hushed voice.

James scoffed. "So?"

"She holds grudges.", Petra said and leaned closer, her voice going down to barely above a whisper. "They all do."

James shrugged like it's not a big deal. "As I said, it's no wonder that Alpha Damon diminished their importance."

James looked in the direction where Elder Agatha went. "Do you think that any of them would come here if my father is not an Alpha? They don't know anything about me, yet they are showing fake respect and trying to leave a good impression. They are acting like they are above others because they are Elders. How can one be important when there are so many of them on the same level?"

Petra was gesturing to James to lower his voice, but he didn't care, and he continued talking, "Every person should have the right to show what he or she can do, and the best one gets the prize. However, once they stop performing at a satisfactory level, they should step down. Titles shouldn't be given lightly, and no position should be for life regardless of the bloodline or previous achievements."

Petra, Erik, and Zack looked at James with complicated expressions. They never heard someone with a bloodline that grants him status speak that way.

James knew what his three friends were thinking, and he felt a bit guilty. Would they accept him if they knew that he suspects how Alpha Edward was not his father? James didn't want to go there.

This was the most fun he had in his life, and he didn't want to spoil it. He would rather let them think that he is a righteous young prince than to see him as an impostor.

His eighteenth birthday was still two years away, but whenever he thought about not having his Alpha aura, that birthday felt like it was just around the corner, bringing an uncertain future with it.

The truth will be revealed naturally when the time comes, and James hoped that he can extend that deadline, because right there, at that moment, he felt that he could breathe freely.

...

Maddox and Tatiana entered the event hall and made their way toward Damon who was at the table with Tony and Kalina.

Maddox didn't care about these Elders; he already knew that they were giving a hard time to Damon. If Maddox showed goodwill, they might get an illusion that he disapproves of Damon, and latch onto him. He knew many like that and avoided them like plague. If this was not for Damon and his mate (aka Talia), Maddox wouldn't be here.

Tatiana said that she was not ready to go to the Blue River pack, and Maddox had no problems with that. He was already planning to get them a hotel suite in town, something with a nice view. But Damon extended his welcome to as long as they want, and Maddox took him on that offer. It would be hard to explain to humans all the grunting, moaning, and occasional howling.

"Nice of you to join us.", Kalina said teasingly with a big smile while eyeing her sister who wore a sleeveless black knee-length dress with golden details that fit her perfectly, and matching jewelry. Tatiana always had outfits ready for any social occasion.

Maddox also looked sharp in black trousers and a white shirt.

After exchanging greetings, Maddox pulled a chair for Tatiana to sit and took a seat next to her. His arm rested around Tatiana's shoulders as he looked around and then he asked, "Where are Mindy and Talia?" He tried mind-linking Mindy before they came down, but she was not responding.

"They went out for a bit.", Damon responded and glanced at the time. "Actually, they should be back soon."

With every passing minute, Damon's displeasure was rising.

He could feel Talia's emotions, and he tried to gauge what was going on there. She was not in distress, but she was not truly happy either. It was like she had a lot on her mind. Damon sent her a few texts, and she responded that they will talk when she comes back. Strange.

But his uneasiness was swelling by the minute as he heard whispers related to Marcy.

The good thing was that after James' talk with Elder Agatha, the Elders toned down their chatter about Marcy showing up in a grand way.

Unfortunately, they were talking about Talia as his assistant, and Maya's idea of reminding them of Talia's contributions didn't catch on as expected. They were all focused on Marcy like she was someone important.

Well, objectively, Marcy was important because she is the daughter of Alpha Edward, but that's it.

Damon was irritated. How come none of these people were willing to acknowledge how awesome Talia is?

He wanted to talk to the Elders, but Maya told him how that's not a good idea. "If you talk in Talia's favor, they will assume you are doing it because she seduced you. We know that they see you as an immature and impulsive Alpha. Let's not give them more ammunition. We don't want them to think that the only thing Talia has is her skills in bed..."

Damon knew that Maya was right, but the more he listened, the more his instincts for disaster were tingling. Unless something super-unexpected happened, this evening will be a total failure.

Chapter 408 – The Party At The Packhouse (4)

With his uneasiness increasing, Damon was contemplating to meet Talia in front of the packhouse. They would sit in a car, drive into the night, and never look back.

Even Damon's wolf thought how escaping might be a good idea. The old beast was always advising him to take care of his pack, so this change in priorities confirmed that their current situation was not good.

With Marcy's bad condition worsening, Alpha Edward will definitely use it as leverage against Damon. In addition to that, the power struggle among Elders and many others who were not present at the party was never-ending and it was draining him physically and emotionally.

If Damon followed the well-established practices (which his father abandoned), the only woman with qualifications to be an Elder was Stephanie. She was not a Beta, but her mate was a Beta and she definitely contributed to the pack as Luna Violet's confidant, and as a person Damon could rely on. Ironically, she didn't want it.

When Damon took over as the Alpha, he thought of removing the Elder role completely. However, that would cause outrage and internal conflicts, and he had a lot of crap to deal with from the outside, so the things dragged.

Before Talia entered his life, Damon was focused on securing a good lifestyle for his pack members and protecting them from attackers. He would fight and argue when someone confronted him, and he enjoyed fleeting pleasures of alcohol and women. Damon thought how that was as good as it gets.

But, now he had Talia.

With Talia by his side, Damon experienced what it meant to be relaxed, happy, accepted, and he wanted to be with his mate and leave all the troubles behind.

There was a time when he put the needs of his pack first, but Talia's happiness was becoming more important by the day, and his happiness was tied to hers.

As the danger to Talia's safety increased, Damon was actually considering leaving everything behind.

Yes, he was born and raised as an Alpha, that was in his blood, but what was the point of having a pack, power, and riches, if his most important person gets hurt?

It was a tough choice, and Damon hoped that he won't end up in a position where he needed to choose.

--

A wave of murmurs swept the event hall when George and Dawn made an appearance.

George was wearing jeans pants and a blue shirt, while Dawn was in a red summer dress that had spaghetti straps and it reached below her knees. They were both casual, yet not offensive, but what stood out was George's arm around Dawn's shoulders.

Damon frowned when he heard whispers.

[I thought that Commander George will accompany Marcy. Isn't he Marcy's guard?]

[Isn't that our Dawn with him?]

[When do you think Marcy will arrive?]

[Why is Commander George so close to Dawn? It's one thing what they are doing in private, but this is a public event.]

[Is Commander's appearance a sign that Alpha Damon should go and fetch Marcy?]

Damon facepalmed. Marcy-this, Marcy-that. It was like this crowd drank some Marcy-related drug and can't talk about anything other than her. The only good thing was that no one mentioned the other woman (aka Nora) who was in the dungeon. At least he didn't need to come up with a cover-up to explain her absence.

But this event was now more than just clarifying Damon's availability for marriage. This was about figuring out if George will be an ally, a puppet, or an enemy.

Damon was surrounded by hyenas who were eager for him to mess it up, and this was the situation where he would figure out who will really help him, and who was just talking.

It's easy to be friends in good times. Only when facing challenges, will the true nature of a person be exposed.

So far, James showed himself to be useful. It was George's turn.

Damon stood up and went to meet George and Dawn.

Dawn stiffened when she saw Damon walking toward them.

She thought that attending this event with George will be a blast, but when she saw all those Elders scrutinizing her, she thought how maybe that was not such a good idea.

No one was dancing. People were standing or sitting in small groups and talking in murmurs, creating a stifling atmosphere that made Dawn's hairs stand on ends. How was this a party? And now even Alpha Damon was coming toward them and the only thing preventing Dawn from running away was George's firm arm around her shoulders.

"Commander George", Damon was first to extend his greeting. He glanced at Dawn and gave her a small nod. "Dawn..." His eyes lingered at the left side of her neck and he could see that it was red and some patterns were forming. It was George's mark.

The more Damon saw newly mated couples getting marked, the more he regretted not doing that with Talia. If she wore his mark, no one would doubt her identity. He was so stupid! Damon decided to push the marking up on the list of his priorities. Who cares about Talia's wolf? When the old beast comes around, she will understand, and if she doesn't... well, she will have to accept it.

After exchanging pleasantries, Damon returned his attention to George. "I am happy that you could join us. I know that you would rather be somewhere else."

"We are here on Dawn's insistence.", George responded. "I'm not sure if we will stay until the end. I hope you will forgive us if we leave early."

"As long as you stay for dinner, that will be enough.", Damon said. "By the time you finish with dessert, I will be done with my announcements. I hope you will join us at the table."

Damon really wanted to go to the study and have a long private talk with George, but this was not the time. For tonight, Damon thought of having George nearby and gauging his attitude.

Dawn swallowed a lump of air. Did Alpha Damon say how they should eat with them at the table? Dawn would love to be close to Talia, but everyone else was intimidating. Her ears were buzzing, and she was not sure if George accepted the offer or not.

She was working in the packhouse for years and knew it like the back of her palm, yet now it felt foreign and Dawn wanted to leave.

Dawn was looking left and right, and she spotted Zina at the table with refreshments. She was refilling the plate with cocktail meatballs.

At that moment, Zina looked like a beacon of safety in the middle of a stormy night, and Dawn really needed to see a friendly face.

"Excuse me...", Dawn said in a small voice and looked up at George. "I will be back in a minute." She shimmied out of his hold and headed toward Zina. Dawn was not comfortable talking with Alpha Damon, and George can tell her later what he decided.

As long as she was with George, it will be fine. Hopefully.

Chapter 409 – The Party At The Packhouse (5) [Bonus Chapter]

"You should put those closer together...", Dawn said when she approached Zina.

Zina turned to see behind her, to make sure it was not just her imagination. "Dawn."

Zina was really happy to see her friend. They saw each other earlier that afternoon when Zina brought things to Dawn, but that was only briefly with George around. Dawn and Zina were together most of the time, so this day-long separation felt like forever.

"You look stunning."

Dawn smiled. "You think? Thank you for the dress."

If Zina didn't bring her the dress, Dawn wouldn't have anything to wear. And Zina brought her more than just a dress. She brought a carry-on with several changes of clothes and toiletries, and Zina did that by rushing to Dawn's apartment while potatoes were in the oven. Ivy and Lily made sure nothing burned until Zina came back.

Zina shook her head. "It's not about the dress. It's you, D. You are glowing."

Dawn smiled until her cheeks hurt. She was happy.

Zina had so many questions, but she knew that this was not the time to sit and talk about juicy details. However, she was eager to find out some bits.

"So, how is life in high society?", Zina asked Dawn teasingly. She leaned closer and spoke in a whisper, "Or should I ask, how is the life under Commander George?"

Dawn's eyes flashed in outrage, but she couldn't suppress the giggles that burst unexpectedly. Dawn quickly blocked her mouth with her hands while hoping that people were not staring at her. She didn't dare to look around and verify.

"Come on.", Zina urged Dawn to say something. "Did you get what you wanted? Is he a sex machine that provides endless orgasms?"

"Shh...", Dawn waved her hands. It's one thing when they were goofing around in private, but this was a fancy party, and they shouldn't have sex talks.

Zina rolled her eyes. "Don't you shush me. I could smell it in the room sin. Pure sin. Now tell me while I refill this tray... how big is he? Is it just the size, or does he have technique also?"

Dawn could feel her cheeks heating up. "I'm not going to talk about it here. People might hear."

"Yeah, like anyone cares what we will talk about." Zina inched closer and said in a whisper, "They are mostly talking about Marcy."

At the mention of Marcy, Dawn's chest tightened. Other than Marcy being unconscious, she was also George's first mate, and Dawn couldn't stay indifferent while thinking about that woman.

Part of Dawn was angry at Marcy because she rejected and hurt George, and another part feared if George had any lingering feelings toward Marcy. Sure, he was totally focused on Dawn, but what will happen when Marcy wakes up? What if Marcy regrets rejection and asks George to take her back? Dawn didn't want to think about it.

"What are they saying about Marcy?", Dawn asked stiffly.

"You know... things like... when will she make her appearance."

Dawn felt guilty. Her mind was muddled by the fluffy clouds that resembled George, and she forgot that they were in a state of emergency. If people found out that Marcy is in a sorry state and that Alpha

Damon is concealing it... who knows what will happen? It was a serious situation, yet Dawn ditched them from the moment she realized that George was her mate.

"What's the status on our side?"

Zina shrugged. "Her condition is unchanged and..." Zina stopped talking when she saw two Elders approaching the table where she was with Dawn.

It was an older man and an older woman, known as Elder Thomas and Elder Patsy. Not the most pleasant ones in the bunch. They all had an inflated sense of self-importance, and their sour expressions told Zina and Dawn that they were coming to cause trouble.

"Should you be lingering here and chatting?", Elder Patsy asked and then her eyes settled on Dawn. "You don't look like you came to work."

Dawn didn't like their attitude, but she didn't want to bicker and stir a commotion.

--

Zina responded in Dawn's place, "Dawn is not working tonight. She is a guest."

Elder Thomas sneered. They all knew that Dawn was one of the Omegas who worked in the packhouse. "A guest? Do you think that because you have Commander George's favor you can do as you please?" He stiffened when he saw George approaching them in large strides.

George reached Dawn in a flash.

"Are you OK?"

Dawn nodded in confirmation, genuinely touched by his care. She really didn't expect that he will come to her like that, and she could feel his concern for her.

George put his arm around Dawn's shoulders and looked at two Elders. "Dawn is with me. Do you have a problem with that?"

While talking to Damon, George felt that Dawn's mood suddenly dropped, and he told Damon that he needed to check on her. He didn't expect that before he reached them, two Elders will be there. George heard them clearly saying how she was latching onto him.

George saw this type of disrespect many times in the Red Moon pack, but he didn't expect it here where Omegas are treated fairly; at least that's what the reports about the Dark Howlers pack say.

Dawn was flabbergasted. The truth was that no one spoke to her like this before, and this was at a party, in front of George, and even Alpha Damon was there. Why did he come after George?

Damon narrowed his eyes at two Elders. "Thomas, Patsy...", he called without using their titles, which rubbed the duo the wrong way, but they didn't dare to object.

Damon might be several times their junior, but he was the Alpha, and he could make them submit and spill their secrets with a sheer thought. That would be a disaster.

"Didn't I ask you to show hospitality to our guests? Is this the impression we want to leave?"

Elder Patsy smiled stiffly. "Alpha Damon. We were talking with two Omegas..."

"I heard what you said.", Damon cut her off. "Even Commander George heard the insult you threw at his mate."

Both Elder Patsy and Elder Thomas visibly paled and their eyes moved to Dawn's neck. They didn't pay attention so far, but now that Damon mentioned it, Dawn clearly had some marks on the left side of her neck.

Two Elders cursed internally. Why didn't Dawn say anything?

Dawn leaned closer into George because she didn't like how they were looking at her.

"Do I need to remind you that Commander George is the highest-ranking Commander in the Red Moon pack?", Damon spoke sternly. "Do you know that by offending his mate you are offending him? Are you aware of how this might escalate if he decides to raise it as an issue with Alpha Edward? Or should I just offer your heads and hope it will be enough to avoid war?"

The more Damon spoke, the more Elder Patsy and Elder Thomas shrunk.

Chapter 410 – The Party At The Packhouse (6)

Elder Patsy and Elder Thomas were irritated that Damon invited them to a party without any set agenda, and then he left them to their own devices to guess the reason why they were here, and no one confirmed or denied the relevance of Marcy.

Alpha Damon was sitting at the table leisurely and ignoring his guests.

Dawn showing up here all dressed up was the trigger to make them go and vent some of their frustration. How can a plain Omega join a party with Elders and act like she belongs there?

But now that Damon revealed she was Commander George's mate, Dawn was not just an Omega. This was serious.

Elder Patsy and Elder Thomas were not sure what to do.

"Will you apologize? Or are you expecting me to do it in your place?", Damon asked two Elders stiffly. "If Commander George doesn't feel your sincerity, I will need to ask you to leave. As a host, I can't allow my guests to be uncomfortable, and tomorrow he will decide on how to deal with this. I believe that we all agree on the point of how jeopardizing our relationship with the Red Moon pack is not a good idea."

Elder Patsy and Elder Thomas exchanged quick glances.

'What should we do?', Elder Patsy asked Elder Thomas through the mind-link.

'Do you think we have a choice?', the other one responded.

'It's either you apologize, or I put you in the dungeon for colluding to start a war.', Damon's stern voice was heard by both Elders who looked at Damon in horror. Somehow, they forgot that Alpha can effortlessly get into any mind-link communication between his pack members. Nothing is private. That's the power of an Alpha.

Elder Patsy was first to bow to George. "I apologize. It was my mistake for acting without thinking."

George scoffed. "It's not me you need to apologize to."

Elder Patsy's face paled. Was she supposed to apologize to an Omega? But what were her options?

"I hope you will be magnanimous and forgive this old woman for her shortsightedness.", Elder Patsy said to Dawn.

"Please accept my apologies as well.", Elder Thomas was quick to add.

Dawn blinked once, twice, and then she looked up at George who was smiling at her.

"It's on you to figure out if they are sincere enough.", George said to Dawn.

Dawn glanced at two Elders who still had their heads lowered. Were they sincere? Absolutely not! She knew very well that if not for George's identity, and Alpha Damon being there, those two wouldn't spare her a single glance. But they were making a spectacle, so Dawn decided to be the bigger person. However, she needed to vent some of her frustration.

"Elder Parker.", Dawn called. "You hurt my feelings. You know my grandma well, and you watched me grow up. How can you assume that I will come to this kind of a party because I seduced a man? I forgive you, but I am disappointed."

She looked at the other Elder. "Elder Thomas, you and my grandpa go fishing together every Sunday. I will tell him what you said, and how you embarrassed me and our pack in front of my mate."

"Thank you, dear.", Elder Parker said, and she tugged Elder Thomas to move backward with her, and after bowing to George and Damon, the duo swiftly walked to the other side of the event hall.

"Thank you.", George said to Damon.

"No need to thank me.", Damon said. "This gave you firsthand experience into what I'm dealing with. There are not many in my pack who would look down on Omegas, but I can guarantee that most of them are right now in this room."

George understood that Damon was not telling him this without a reason. "How can I help?"

Damon shook his head. "This is my mess, and you shouldn't dirty your hands with it. Tomorrow morning, let's meet in my study and discuss opportunities for future collaborations. As for tonight, I hope that you won't contribute to the recoil after I make my announcement. That's all."

Damon walked away, and George looked after him with a complex expression.

"George?", Dawn called. "Do you want to eat something? Or..."

"I want to feed you.", George interrupted her and went to fetch two plates. He returned by Dawn's side and eyed the table that was full of various food items. Every table had one plate with bite-sized appetizers, but this table was full of all kinds of delicacies, and George was not sure from where to start.

"What's good here?"

"Everything is good.", Dawn said and glanced at Zina who was still there, but a few steps away, to give them privacy. "My best friend made these so they must be delicious."

George glanced at Zina and gave her a small nod before starting to pile up food on plates.

Dawn looked at Zina and the two friends exchanged smiles. Zina waved and left the event hall, happy for Dawn, but feeling a bit lonely.

Normally, this would be Zina and Dawn together, excitedly chattering about hot guys they spotted or some gossip they overheard while refilling serving trays, but now it was just Zina, and there was no one to talk to.

Zina wondered when will she find her mate. Dawn was twenty years old, and Zina turned twenty-five already. If they followed some order, Zina should be first, but it seemed that the Moon Goddess had other plans for her.

"What took you so long?", Ivy asked when Zina appeared in the kitchen. Ivy and Lily were finalizing preparations for the dinner.

"I saw Dawn and we spoke a bit.", Zina responded.

"Is the mark forming on her neck already?", Lily asked excitedly.

Zina confirmed and decided to change the topic. "Is there anything else to take there?", she asked Stephanie.

"No. Dinner will be served in fifteen minutes.", Stephanie said. "Pour soup in serving bowls. Zina, you will be in charge of ensuring that everyone is served in a timely manner. Ivy, you take care of breadsticks, Lily, you are on beverages..." Stephanie started issuing orders and she summoned Rose and

a few more Omegas to help them with serving. Dinner was the busiest part of the evening and it needed to be perfect.

...

Dawn continued looking at the side door for some time after Zina's figure disappeared through there. She guessed what her friend was feeling, and she wished for the power to help Zina find that special someone who will make her happy.

Dawn looked at George and her eyes widened when she saw that he was holding two plates heaping with food, and he was still putting food on there!

"That's enough.", Dawn spoke with urgency. "This is before dinner."

George gave her a lopsided smile. "It's fine. We will need it." He winked. "The night is long, and I plan to use every minute of it."

Dawn could feel her cheeks heating. The way he looked at her made her feel naked, but she didn't hate it. That was her mate, her other half. It was supposed to be that way.

Chapter 411 – The Party At The Packhouse (7)

George led the way toward the largest table in the event hall where Damon was sitting with Maya, Caden, Maddox, Tanya, Tony, and Kalina.

The table next to it had Paul, Nate, and Greg sitting with three Generals of the Dark Howlers pack, and a table further down was with James, Petra, Erik, and Zack.

Other tables were occupied by the Elders and some other important people from the Dark Howlers pack.

George kept two plates with food on the table and pulled a chair for Dawn to sit.

Dawn gingerly took a seat and looked at the lineup at the table. She really wished for Talia to be there.

The truth was that even George was surprised when Damon invited them to sit at his table. George assumed that they will be seated with Paul, Nate, and Greg because, based on rankings, that's where he belonged.

This seating upgrade confirmed George's suspicion that Damon knew about his real identity as the Alpha, and he had a strong hunch how tomorrow's talk with Damon will address that topic.

"You must be Dawn.", Kalina spoke first. "Nice to meet you. I am Kalina, Tony's mate. We all heard that Commander George found his mate. Allow me to congratulate you and wish you all the best in the years to come."

Dawn nodded while thanking Kalina and Dawn's words came out choppy because she was super-nervous. Dawn knew very well who Kalina was. The whole edition of WW Magazine was dedicated to covering her Luna announcement ceremony.

"Relax, Dawn.", Maya said. "No one will bite you."

"I might.", George said under his breath and Dawn's head whipped to look at him. How can he say something so outrageous with all these high-ranking people at the table?

Maya stifled a laugh. She found it amusing that Dawn, who usually talks dirty without any shame, was suddenly acting like a shy schoolgirl. And this straightforward blurt from George solidified Maya's theory that all high-ranking werewolves become shameless when they find their mate.

"Let me introduce you.", Maya said while taking the role of a host in Talia's absence. "We all know each other, but let's make it official..."

Dawn paid attention to Maya as she talked, and Dawn was startled when a fork with food on it appeared in front of her mouth. It was George and his expression told her that rejecting was not an option. Well, she was hungry.

Dawn obediently opened her mouth and returned her attention to Maya while enjoying the feel of George's heat seeping from his palm into her shoulder, and it all came with delicious sparks that

confirmed this was really happening, it was real... she was sitting at the table with her mate and other important people.

How Dawn saw this, the only ones missing were Talia and Zina. She was not sure where Talia went, as for Zina... regardless of how fairly they treated Omegas in the Dark Howlers pack, Zina was not qualified to sit at that table.

--

Damon's expression lit up when he saw Talia appear at the door. His warriors mind-linked him when they arrived and said that Talia was on her way to the event hall, but his heart still beat wildly as she walked toward him.

Damon stood up when Talia approached their table.

He pulled a chair for her. "That took a while.", he grumbled. Yes, it was just over an hour, but it felt like forever.

"I'm back on time for dinner. Isn't that what we agreed upon?", Talia asked.

Damon glanced to see that no one else came with Talia. She was on her own.

Damon was aware of how many grudges he and Shaman had, and he didn't have much hope that Talia will convince him to come, but he still hoped for a miracle. He didn't care about Mindy.

"Let me get some food for you.", Damon said, and he paused when Talia put her hand over his.

"No need. Dinner should be here soon.", Talia said and glanced at the plate in front of Damon. "You can give me a few of those. It doesn't look like you ate much."

Damon gave up on getting more and poked with his fork a sausage that was wrapped in puff pastry to give to Talia. She was right. He didn't eat because he was waiting for her to return.

Talia smiled at the sight of Dawn who sat there and ate what George fed her. It was such a heartwarming scene, especially Dawn's awkwardness and cheeks full of food that reminded Talia of herself only a few weeks back.

"When will Mindy come?", Kalina asked Talia. She assumed that Mindy went to change clothes or fix her hair before making her appearance.

"She won't.", Talia answered, getting everyone's attention.

Maddox was alerted. Mindy wouldn't miss this party unless it was serious. "What happened?"

Talia was not sure how to say this, so she went to the point, "Mindy found her mate."

"Eeeeh!!?", Tatiana and Kalina made silly sounds in unison.

"Is it one of the warriors who accompanied you?", Damon asked. That would explain why they didn't respond properly to questions he asked through the mind-link. But he watched them enter the car, and there was nothing unusual when they met.

"No. It's Gideon.", Talia said.

Intense silence descended on the largest table in the event hall.

"Ha, ha, ha...", Maddox laughed in slow motion. "Good one. My sister and the pack Shaman?" Isn't he like... ancient? "Why don't you try another joke?" Two seconds later, Maddox's brows came together to form a frown. "You are not joking."

"Woah!", Kalina exclaimed. "Then, we can assume that Mindy won't join us for dinner." Kalina wiggled her eyebrows. "Mindy and the Shaman are having their own private party."

Maddox groaned and Tatiana patted Maddox's hand. "What's with that reaction? Your sister found a mate. Shouldn't you be happy?"

"Uhm... To be honest, I don't know how to feel. This is all too sudden." And the old dude is just too old while his sister is still wet behind her ears. What the hell!?

"You say it's sudden, but I expected it.", Kalina said smugly. When Maddox looked at her questionably, she gestured toward Talia. "We have a theory that Lia has an ability to get mates together."

Maddox didn't share Kalina's and Maya's belief in magic. He heard from Tatiana that the magic-crazed duo was planning to go diving into the lake in search of mermaids.

Maddox grimaced and shook his head at Kalina. "Yeah, right. If Lia can get mates together, I can sprinkle fairy dust out of my ass and make you fly."

"No, no... listen.", Kalina said. "Tanya was with us at the table when she realized you are her mate. Meg was also close to Lia when she saw Kai."

"Talia was in the room when I recognized George as my mate.", Dawn said with a mouthful and Kalina pointed at Dawn excitedly, happy that Dawn added more proof.

"And now Mindy.", Maya said while nodding knowingly and her eyes lit up. "Whoever is unmated should just stick to Lia and her ability will summon a fated mate within twenty-four hours guaranteed."

Kalina immediately agreed with this idea, and she looked at Talia with sparkles in her eyes. "You can charge a lot of money for that service."

Talia's eyes darted from Kalina to Maya. "Please, stop talking nonsense. Someone might hear you and think it's a real thing." Talia was still traumatized by soccer players kissing her hand while believing how

it brings good luck. She didn't know that werewolves are so superstitious. "All those were just coincidences. There is no such thing as power to find one's mate." Or to make one score a goal.

"Truth or not, you can still make a lot of money.", Tatiana chimed in, and she, Kalina, and Maya laughed.

Damon didn't think it was funny. He actually believed in that possibility. His kitten was amazing.

Damon's mood dropped when he realized that Gideon and Mindy being mates means that Mindy will become a member of the Dark Howlers pack.

The dildo-gifting woman will be close to Talia! Who knows in what ways will Mindy corrupt Talia!?

Damon didn't like it. Not even a little bit.

Chapter 412 – The Party At The Packhouse (8) [Bonus Chapter]

Doctor Travis arrived shortly after Talia, and he sat at the table with some other important people from the pack.

Dinner was served and the sound of utensils clinking over low murmurs filled the space.

Kalina and Maya chatted in a lively atmosphere with Tatiana adding to it occasionally.

Tony and Caden enjoyed watching their mates having fun, and Maddox was totally focused on Tatiana and making sure that she always had food and drinks in front of her.

Dawn and George were in their own bubble, feeding each other and talking in whispers, like they had no idea werewolves surrounded them and how anyone who paid attention could hear their naughty talk.

At one glance, the atmosphere at the largest table was harmonious.

However, Talia could feel Damon's anxiety building up with every passing minute, and there were occasions when Talia noticed that Maya and Caden were also alerted. Maddox, Tatiana, Tony, Kalina, George, and Dawn seemed carefree, but neither of them was totally relaxed.

Damon looked at Talia gently, fed her, and held her hand on the table, but Talia could feel that Damon was on the verge of snapping when the dessert was served.

Talia didn't need to guess why Damon's emotions were all over the place because she could clearly hear the chatter of people around them.

[Dinner is almost over. Is it possible that Marcy won't join?]

[Why is Alpha so close to his assistant? Isn't that a slap in Marcy's face?]

[Nobodies are at the table with Alpha. Now I've seen everything... Don't say that. Didn't you hear that our Dawn is mated to Commander George? ... Really? But what about the other one? ... You mean, his assistant?]

[How long until Alpha makes the announcement? My contacts from the Red Moon pack want me to stream it... I know, Alpha said no recordings, but still...]

[I don't know how Alpha Edward will react when he finds out that Marcy was excluded.]

[Alpha has a nasty temper. What if he did something to Marcy? ... Shhh... Lower your voice... I know what you are trying to say. With Commander and young Alpha being here, it's odd that Marcy is absent...]

It was obvious that the guests were expecting Marcy to be in Talia's place and Talia feared that this will end badly. Can they just cancel the whole thing? What if she just leaves this hall?

Talia glanced at Damon and their eyes met. At that moment, the whole world stilled, leaving just the two of them moving and Talia had a feeling that no matter what happens next, Damon will be by her side, and that was the only thing that mattered.

Talia smiled a little. She followed Damon into a waterfall, and she would follow him everywhere. Here included.

Even if these old-timers turn against Damon, she will fight by his side because there was no way she will give up on him.

Without breaking eye contact with Talia, Damon stood up and a swift burst of his aura got everyone's attention. The whole event hall descended into silence.

Damon looked around and he was pleased to see that people looked at him expectantly.

"I invited you all here because I have an announcement to make.", Damon started.

Damon thought of many ways to go about this, but nothing worked in his mind, and the storm was inevitable. If he was about to make waves, he will do it in a big way.

He could see George, Maddox, Tony, and Caden doting on their mates at that same table. Why was he holding back? Wasn't he the most powerful Alpha of their generation?

Damon decided. No more games.

"I can hear what you are talking about, and I know most of you are assuming that Marcy from the Red Moon pack will become my Luna. Well, that's not happening."

Murmurs swelled from all directions, and Damon used his aura to shut them up.

"You will get your turn to talk. When I'm done.", Damon said stiffly. "As you know, Marcy arrived at the Dark Howlers pack. After careful consideration, we established that our union is not possible. She is

currently not in the packhouse. I didn't put her in a dungeon or restricted her movements in any way." This was the truth. "So, I hope that you will stop talking nonsense."

Damon looked at faces that showed disbelief and anticipation and he took a deep breath before continuing. "I want you to be the first ones to know that I found my Luna." He moved to stand behind Talia and put his hands on her shoulders. "I hope you will all welcome as your Luna, Talia. My fated mate."

Crickets.

No one said a word.

After a few endless seconds, Maya clicked her tongue and stood up. "Is this how you welcome your Luna?"

Caden also stood up and moved to Damon's left. Everyone could see Talia sitting with Damon behind her, and Caden and Maya flanking them on each side.

"Luna?", Elder Agatha spoke from the back, her voice was unusually loud in an otherwise silent room hall. "Isn't she Alpha's assistant?"

"Yes and no.", Damon responded. "Talia is assisting me, but that's because she wanted to find out about the pack before we make it official, so I offered her to work with me."

"She was here for the Summer Solstice. Why didn't you say anything then?", a voice came from the other side.

"And she is not marked!", another voice chimed in.

"Do you think we are stupid?"

"Who is she?"

"What's her background?"

"Do you expect us to believe she is your mate?"

One voice after another sounded, sometimes they overlapped until they morphed into an indistinct clamor of disapproval.

"ENOUGH!", Damon roared with just the right amount of pressure to make everyone shut up.

Talia could feel Damon's anger swelling and she stood up to stand next to him. The hostility aimed at them was tangible, and she wanted to be Damon's equal and share his burden.

Talia held Damon's hand and their fingers interlaced.

"You are right.", Talia said. Her voice was not loud, but everyone had a feeling like it came from right next to them. "Damon didn't mark me yet, and you don't know who I am, but isn't that more of a reason for you to get to know me? Is my background important?" She glanced at Damon. "I found it hard to believe at first that Damon is my mate, but the Moon Goddess paired us up, and I decided to embrace it." Her eyes swept over the people, and she could see their scrutinized gazes directed at her. "Are you daring enough to challenge us? Are you bold enough to challenge the Moon Goddess?"

"This is not about challenging you or the Moon Goddess.", a voice came from the side, and Damon narrowed his eyes when he saw Elder Thompson standing up while talking. "This is about clarifying the situation. First thing first. We are all curious to find out what made the union between Miss Marcy and Alpha Damon impossible."

Talia's brows came together in confusion. "Didn't you hear the part where I am Damon's fated mate?"

"So, he rejected Miss Marcy because of you?", Elder Thomas said thoughtfully.

Chapter 413 – The Party At The Packhouse (9)

Damon gave Talia's hand a squeeze, indicating that he will take over. The way this was going, they were about to blame Talia if anything goes wrong with the Red Moon pack. He knew that these people perfected the game in shifting the blame.

"You are missing the point, Elder Thomas.", Damon said stiffly. "You are not qualified to know what exactly happened between me and Miss Marcy. You should focus on things that are relevant to you. I found my fated mate. That should be a reason to celebrate, and that is why we gathered here. We will schedule Talia's Luna ceremony soon."

"What is to say that she is your fated mate?" This voice belonged to Elder Patsy who was standing up. "I am around for a long time, and I never heard of an Alpha finding his mate and procrastinating in claiming what is his."

Murmurs of agreement swelled through the event hall.

A few voices said how this was disrespect to Alpha, but they were quickly drowned by others.

Seeing that this was spiraling downwards, Damon was contemplating using his aura to suppress everyone and send them to the dungeon. But that was not a long-term solution because he couldn't kill them as they all had families within the pack. How long can he keep them locked up before their children and grandchildren complain?

Maybe he could buy an island and send them there, like retirement for Elders. When the island is set up with basic necessities, he would move pesky Elders from the dungeon there. It sounded perfect.

"I have no intention of convincing you that Talia is my fated mate or that she will be my Luna.", Damon said, making others fall into silence while wondering what he was up to.

He gave up on arguing with these old geezers, and was preparing himself to suppress them all in one swift swoop when he heard someone talking...

"But you don't need to convince us." It was Elder Samson.

Damon frowned while wondering what Elder Samson was up to, and he gave Talia's hand another squeeze to assure her that he will handle this.

Elder Samson and Elder Charlie were observing this circus unfold and were waiting for the right timing to interject.

The main goal was to stabilize the current situation. Just attacking Alpha Damon openly won't have a good ending.

Elder Samson and Elder Charlie couldn't believe how foolish other Elders were. How can they get so easily fired up just because someone spoke first? Didn't they notice that Elder Thomas and Elder Patsy were sitting and enjoying the show?

Elder Samson and Elder Charlie couldn't understand how could other Elders ignore Alphas and high-ranking individuals that were at the same table with Alpha Damon. It was obvious that Damon had the support of the Blue River pack, the Lightclaw pack, and with George there and James watching all this with amusement, Elder Samson and Elder Charlie suspected that even the Red Moon pack might have a stake in this commotion.

Just Alpha Damon could make them all kiss the ground, and with these additional people, rebelling Elders were stupid to challenge Alpha in this setting. Their strength was in utilizing their connections and stirring the masses, and this open confrontation was doomed for failure.

Elder Charlie stood up and explained the meaning behind Elder Samson's words. "We are the older generation, and we are in the back seat for some time. Everyone knows that as an Alpha you are investing in youngsters. There is nothing wrong with that approach, and as your Elders, we support you. It's good to see that our children and grandchildren are growing strong enough to carry the glory of our pack. That also means they are the ones who should accept Miss Talia as their Luna. If you can accomplish that, we will naturally follow the suit."

Damon knew that those two had an agenda. They were always scheming, and this won't be different.

"I assume you have something on your mind.", Damon said.

Elder Samson smiled knowingly. "You might be too young to remember, but we all know what kept the pack united and how your predecessors assured we know who the best choice is to lead us."

Damon had a bad feeling about this, and his instincts were proven right when Elder Samson continued.

"On every full moon, our Alpha and Luna would lead the pack run. We didn't have one since Alpha Jacob and Luna Violet passed, but now that you found your Luna, the tradition we followed for centuries can be revived." Elder Samson paused and spoke to others in the room, "Full moon is a week from now. I suggest that we all keep to ourselves what we heard tonight until we see how our Alpha and his Luna perform during the pack run."

The murmurs swelled again, and Elder Charlie waved his arms, to get everyone to quiet down. "What do you say? Should we give them a chance to prove themselves? There were times when we questioned Alpha Damon's methods, but no one can deny that he always protected the pack and worked in everyone's interest. When we leave this place, we will tell everyone how a week from now, our Alpha will lead a pack run with his future Luna. Will that be Talia or some other female, it will be Alpha Damon's decision. Our active pack members will decide if the Luna Alpha Damon brings will be accepted..."

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Guests dispersed, and Maya and Caden were escorting everyone out and ensuring that no one was left lingering.

Greg, Paul, and Nate went to the Shifters nightclub with several people they met during dinner.

"Do you need me now?", Maddox asked Damon. Maddox and Tatiana were the last ones left at their table with Damon and Talia.

"No. Go and enjoy with your mate. Thanks for tonight.", Damon responded. "Your presence was the support I needed."

Damon had a feeling that most of the Elders held back because of guests from other packs. They put a lot of weight on their external image.

With their table cleared up, Doctor Travis approached them. "I'm sorry Alpha. I tried to tell them..."

"I know.", Damon interrupted him. "I appreciate your efforts but there was nothing you could do." Damon heard Travis telling Elders how what they were doing was disregarding Alpha's authority, but Elders echoed each other's displeasure and found strength in numbers.

Travis bowed toward Talia and Damon. "Congratulations on finding your Luna, Alpha. I know that Talia will be an amazing Luna."

Travis straightened his back before saying to Talia, "I'm not sure how much you know about our history, but Elders hold a decade-long grudge, and Alpha didn't punish them harshly because he is considering the whole pack. Some people call him ruthless, but only a few are aware of how hard he works for his people." Travis patched up Damon more times than he wanted to remember after fights with rogues and other enemies, and Damon would ask him to keep it low-key. "In defense of Elders, it is difficult for them to accept that their significance is fading. Most of them have only harsh words to express their frustration. No matter what Elders say, our generation supports you."

"Thank you, Travis. It means a lot to hear that from you.", Talia said and Travis smiled.

Travis wanted to say more, but he held back. This was obviously not the time for chit-chat.

"I'm sure you have a lot to discuss. I will check on the patient before heading home. If you don't hear from me tonight, you can assume that her condition is the same. If you need me for something, feel free to contact me. Anytime."

"Thank you, Travis.", Damon said, his voice showing how exhausted he was.

With Travis leaving, almost everyone was gone, and Talia turned to look at Damon.

"Why do you look like this outcome is not good?", Talia asked. How she saw it, Elders were stirring trouble, but things ended rather well. There is something they will need to do a week from now as Alpha and Luna, and everything will fall into place.

Damon looked at Talia helplessly. "Let's go to the study. Maya and Caden will meet us there."

Chapter 414 – Late Night Strategy Meeting (1)

Damon, Talia, Maya, and Caden were in the study.

Damon sat on a sofa chair with Talia on his lap, and Maya and Caden were on the sofa.

Talia could feel Damon's displeasure. He was inhaling her scent, and that told her he was using her proximity to calm down. She let him hold her.

Talia looked at Maya and Caden whose expressions showed concern, but no one said anything so they sat in silence for some time.

Damon was first to speak.

"I regret not suppressing them and throwing them in the dungeon."

"You did well by holding back.", Caden said. "As much as we don't like them, they are members of our pack with an extensive network of relatives and friends. If you locked them all up, it would ruin the image that you built over a decade."

Maya agreed. "If they are outsiders, no one would care. But Elders are ours and we need to find a way to work around them or we will risk our pack seeing you as a tyrant."

Damon managed to hold reign over the Dark Howlers pack with such a small number of high-ranking members because regular pack members believed in him and followed him willingly. If he became a

villain in their eyes, that might change and then they would end up with a much bigger problem than fifty-something grumpy old people.

Talia didn't understand why the atmosphere was so solemn. "Is this about them showing disrespect?"

Maya responded, "Yes and no. Because of their disrespect, they caused this stir and now the dam cracked. We need to find ways to patch it up before it breaks completely."

Talia was utterly confused. What dam and cracks? "Can you speak English?"

Maya bobbed her head before she started talking, "I'm sure you heard their suspicions related to Marcy's absence." When Talia nodded, Maya continued, "We can expect that Alpha Edward already knows what happened here tonight, and by morning he will call to hear Marcy's side of the story. With James' and George's cooperation, we could delay that for some time, however, Marcy's condition is not improving. Travis wants us to get her into the pack hospital and that means how others will find out about her condition. Now that people know you are Alpha Damon's mate..."

"They will assume I harmed Marcy.", Talia ended instead of Maya.

Maya confirmed. "Either you or Alpha Damon. They won't care about facts. Even if George says that Marcy was his mate, and Travis confirms that Marcy is suffering from the consequences of rejecting the mate bond, the ones who are looking for trouble will twist it into a cover-up staged by Alpha Damon. Alpha Edward is itchy to find a way to latch onto us and harming his daughter will give him a perfect excuse to attack and get support from others. Maybe they won't support the Red Moon pack, but they won't help us either."

"And if she dies, our problems will amplify.", Caden said.

Talia lowered her head. "This is my fault.", she said in a small voice.

"No.", Damon said. "This is my fault. If I didn't play games, we wouldn't be here. I was supposed to tell you we are mates from the beginning, and to announce it to everyone. I was stupid to think that I'm protecting you by keeping it a secret... even from you."

He didn't think much about it, but when he saw George and Maddox enjoying with their mates they met only days ago, Damon realized how much he missed by concealing that Talia was his mate. Talia was insecure, bullied, and she nearly died in the hands of rogues, and now Elders looked at her like she was an impostor, and none of that would happen if he only told her the truth.

Talia put her palm on Damon's cheek. "If you didn't keep it a secret, I wouldn't have time to adjust to all the changes. If people looked at me as your mate from the day I arrived here, it would be too much pressure and I would either run away or cave in. You thought about what I needed at that time. Don't blame yourself for it. If I was not broken, you wouldn't do those things."

Damon tilted his head and placed a kiss on the inside of Talia's palm. "You were not broken, kitten. You were exactly what I needed to realize how broken I was."

Talia smiled foolishly at Damon. Why was he comforting her when he was the one who was upset? Isn't he the sweetest man on the planet?

"Can the two of you tone down the flirting?", Maya asked dryly. "Or should we continue this talk in the morning?"

It was a long day and a lot of things happened, and nothing happened as planned. The situation was calm at the moment, but it could explode at any time. They had so many problems that Maya had a headache just thinking about it.

Maya wanted to get a hot bath and snuggle with Caden and unwind and forget about all problems until morning, but Damon summoned them in the study. She was fine with a late-night strategy meeting, but she didn't want to waste her time watching this PDA.

Talia looked at Maya guiltily and summarized, "Marcy is our big problem as her father will cause trouble." But this was not a new thing, Talia thought, and she concluded that there was more to it. "What else we need to tackle?"

"We are not done discussing the first one.", Maya responded. "Any ideas on how to deal with Marcy? Or should we let Travis take her to the pack hospital in the morning and we hope for the best?"

Talia had an idea of how to deal with Marcy.

Damon glanced at Maya and Caden and saw that they had nothing. One look at Talia told him what she was thinking. "No."

"I know you don't want me to take risks, but I would like to try helping Marcy."

"No.", Damon said sternly.

"You know it's reasonable."

"No."

"Damon..."

"No! Why don't you listen?"

"Why are you set on keeping me on the side?", Talia asked.

"Because I want to protect you."

"And I want to help."

Damon shook his head. "Not if it harms you."

"You don't know if it will harm me."

Damon couldn't believe it. Did she forget that when she healed him, she passed out? And after the incident in the lake, she was super-exhausted! What if she crosses her limits and doesn't wake up after the next time? "I'm not willing to risk it."

"It should be my decision to make."

"It's my duty to keep you safe."

Talia and Damon glared at each other, neither willing to back down.

"You can help Marcy?", Maya asked, unable to contain her curiosity, even though her Alpha and Luna were engaged in an intense staring contest.

Damon's eyes flashed in a warning and Talia knew that Damon was telling her not to reveal her abilities. She gave him a comforting smile and responded to Maya.

"There is a mix of herbs I would like to try."

Maya narrowed her eyes suspiciously. "If it's just a mix of herbs, what's the problem?"

"Damon is worried that if Marcy's conditions worsens, people will blame me. He would prefer that I stay away from her.", Talia responded without missing a beat.

Chapter 415 – Late Night Strategy Meeting (2)

Maya was not sure what the big deal was about Talia trying to help Marcy recover with some herbs. Wasn't that what she was already doing? But who would know what was on Alpha Damon's mind? He was overprotective and borderline unreasonable when it came to Talia.

However, when thinking about the grim prognosis related to Marcy's condition, Maya decided to remind them... "Doctor Travis said that there is not much we can do about Marcy and that her stay in the hospital won't go beyond stabilizing her condition. Shaman Gideon confirmed that Marcy's recovery depends on the strength of her spirit. Considering that Marcy's condition is deteriorating, I would suggest that we let Talia do her thing. It can't hurt."

"Damon and I will talk about it more.", Talia responded. She knew that Damon was only worried about her, and she didn't blame him because she would do the same if the roles were reversed. Talia was eager to start convincing Damon to give in, but before that, she wanted to confirm, "Is there something else we should worry about?"

"It's about the upcoming pack run.", Caden responded.

"What about it?", Talia asked.

"Do you know what a pack run is?", Maya asked.

Talia's blank expression answered that question.

Damon answered. "I was too young to participate but I remember that my parents would lead the pack run on every full moon. Pack members would gather to witness Shaman perform the ritual of worshipping the Moon Goddess. After that, elderly and underage members would go home while grownups head to the forest to run, hunt, and mate."

Talia didn't want to think about werewolves going at it in random spots through the forest, but the rest didn't sound intimidating. "Why do you sound like it's a problem?"

"Because..." Damon let out a long breath. "The part with running and hunting is done in wolf form."

Talia's mouth fell slack open when she realized where the problem was. In wolf form? She never shifted, and her wolf only made a few nasty remarks at Damon before going back to wherever she came from.

"Do you think that Elders Samson and Charlie suggested the pack run because they knew about Talia's condition?", Caden asked.

Maya frowned. "You think they set us up?"

Caden shrugged, indicating that he was not sure. "Would you be surprised?"

Maya thought for a moment before sharing her thoughts. "If they heard the rumors how Talia doesn't have a wolf, this was an interesting scheme. In the eyes of other Elders, they were magnanimous in giving you a chance to revive an old tradition and to strengthen the pack by having a Luna of your choice, but in reality, they set you up for failure in front of the whole pack."

Talia wanted to ask how they would know that she doesn't have a wolf, but then she remembered Lisa. Among other things, Lisa called Talia in her face a wolf-less she-wolf, and Talia couldn't imagine what nasty things Lisa said when Talia was not around.

Caden puffed his cheeks. "There is a good chance that they considered the bad relationship between Alpha and Shaman. With this, Damon would need to lower himself and ask Shaman to perform the ceremony as a favor, otherwise, the pack run would start on a bad note."

Maya smiled smugly. "If that's what they were going for, the nasty duo miscalculated. They obviously don't know that Shaman found his mate. We just need to tell Mindy to ask Gideon about the ceremony, and he will do it gladly only to please her."

"Well, at least we have that going for us.", Talia said dejectedly. "Maybe his ceremony is so awesome that no one notices I didn't turn into a wolf."

Damon rubbed Talia's back gently and he thought about leaving all this crap behind. They could buy a small house in the middle of nowhere and live a comfortable life without anyone bothering them. Talia said that she loves the forest, and he could get them a home with access to a lake... somewhere high in the mountains where humans don't come often. He would hunt for them and it will be perfect.

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"You know...", Caden started and hesitated.

"Go on.", Damon urged him. "We have so many bad things piled up, one more won't matter."

"This one week delay could be them buying time to contact Alpha Edward and come up with a plan to attack us."

Damon knew that Caden's theory might be true. After all, Elder Samson and Elder Charlie were confirmed with connections in the Red Moon pack, and they also knew that Talia was his mate. How far ahead were they planning?

Damon frowned. Did he fall into their trap?

'Will it make any difference?', Damon's wolf sounded in his head. 'Trap or not, we are in an unfavorable situation, and you need to find the best way to get back on top. You did well by giving our mate identity in front of everyone. Treat this as your first challenge together and keep an eye on Elders. With what they did tonight, you have the right to monitor them. If they do anything suspicious, it will give you a reason to lock them up. And leave those silly thoughts about a solitary life as a last resort.'

'Thanks.' Damon was glad that his wolf chimed in and pointed out what matters. Damon was too overwhelmed with everything that happened, and his brain stopped working.

Normally, Damon's wolf would listen and the two of them would discuss things when others were not around. It was a habit they established to minimize the possibility of anyone finding out that Damon's wolf was special.

But with Damon's wolf having access to Damon's thoughts and emotions, the old creature was able to speak up at the critical moment and keep Damon on the right path. Like now.

"It doesn't matter why Samson and Charlie did this.", Damon said. "Alpha Edward would find out how his plan to make Marcy my Luna fell apart. It was a matter of days. Actually, we were lucky to get this extension thanks to James' collaboration, but we knew that it wouldn't last forever. I estimate that Alpha Edward already knows what happened tonight."

Talia stiffened at Damon's words, and he tightened his hold on her while continuing, "I am done hiding Talia. She is my mate and I want the whole world to know it. I realized that postponing the inevitable only brought us more problems. If I told everyone who Talia is on the day she arrived here, things would be unpleasant, but they wouldn't escalate to this point. The bottom line is that Marcy will not be my Luna, and neither will any other woman because I have my mate, and if anyone thinks otherwise, I am ready to accept his challenge."

Talia looked at Maya, Caden, and Damon. Three of them were worried and she really felt that it was her fault. If she was not from the Red Moon pack, if she had a wolf, if she had a background, if she was strong enough... none of this would happen.

The three of them were the first people who treated her nicely. They gave her home, food, and treated her as their equal. How can she allow them to suffer because of her?

Talia felt the urgency to do something. Anything.

Chapter 416 – Late Night Strategy Meeting (3)

"Let's think about this one at a time.", Talia said.

Damon, Maya, and Caden turned to look at Talia, all three wondering what she was up to.

"We are open to ideas.", Maya said.

"The pack run is a week from now. A lot of things can happen until then. I never shifted into my wolf form and I have no idea how that's done, but..." Talia glanced at Damon and smiled a little. "I am confident that if anyone can teach me to shift, that will be you."

Damon was amazed by her optimism, and he knew that it was fueled by her faith in him.

Damon's smile fell when Talia added, "And I will ask Shaman Gideon for help."

Talia remembered that Shaman was not very friendly when she visited that afternoon, but now he was mated to Mindy, and Talia thought that she can leverage that. Surely, after a night of sex, he should be in a better mood.

Damon was not happy that Talia would ask someone for help also. He wanted her to rely on him, but he knew that this was an emergency and he didn't want to sound childish.

"We have a week to figure it out and to come up with backup plans, so that shouldn't be the most pressing matter.", Talia said before switching the topic. "We can't allow Marcy to stay in this state. I don't know if I can help her, but I want to try."

"What do you think will happen if she wakes up?", Damon asked dryly. It was not good that Marcy was comatose, but in the case she woke up, Damon could imagine Marcy throwing a fit. Damon had a mate, and he made it public. Marcy won't be happy. He really didn't want another problem now.

"If she doesn't wake up, people will blame us. Let's not give Alpha Edward another reason to attack us."

Damon pinched the roof of his nose. He knew that Talia was right, but he didn't like the idea of her exposing her abilities.

"And third..."

Damon lifted his head to look at Talia because she had more things on her mind.

She looked at him with all determination she could muster before announcing, "I want you to mark me."

Damon felt butterflies going crazy in his stomach, and he forgot about all his worries while his eyes eagerly inspected Talia's face. Did he hear her right? Did Talia say that she wants him to mark her?

Damon was suppressing his urge to mark her for such a long time, that he was used to living with the knot in his chest, and now he can finally do what his instincts told him from the beginning... claim his mate.

Damon didn't realize that he was smiling foolishly. He didn't look like a scary Alpha who was facing dangers from outside and inside his pack; he resembled a love-stricken teenager who couldn't stop

grinning while looking at his crush who was blushing because she could feel his erection poking her bottom.

"We have a plan.", Maya said. "I will go with you in the morning to talk to Shaman."

Damon dispersed his lustful thoughts. Carnal pleasures will need to wait a bit because they were still talking.

"I will go with Talia.", Damon said.

Maya didn't agree. "Your presence will make it worse."

"I'm not going as Alpha. I will go as Talia's mate.", Damon said. He had no intention of separating from Talia. Not now when all those Elders knew how important she was, and not now when she said that he can mark her. He will sink his fangs into Talia's tender neck and fuck her thoroughly.

Maya noticed the air around Damon and Talia changing, and she wanted to leave, but there was another thing. "Elder Charlie and Elder Samson emphasized that the younger generation needs to support Talia as our Luna. It doesn't matter if they said that as a trap, but let's make that blow up in their faces. Regardless of how the pack run goes, if enough people support Talia, the Elders will need to step back."

"I like the sound of that, but how do we make it happen?", Caden asked.

Maya smirked knowingly. "Do you remember the Summer Solstice festival?"

"Which part of it?"

"The soccer tournament.", Maya said, and she tried not to laugh at Damon's sour expression. It was obvious that he remembered soccer players kneeling and kissing Talia's hand and that was exactly what

Maya was going for. "We need to get our team and Coach Keith back from their training. We all saw them showing respect to Talia. Maybe other people forgot Talia's contributions as the team spirit and her being crowned as the MVP of that tournament, but I'm sure that our team remembers it. They are some of our best warriors, and I'm confident that with them around, others will think twice before stirring trouble." She turned to Damon. "What do you think?"

Damon didn't have objections. He liked that Maya came up with a backup plan and he wanted them to finish this meeting as soon as possible. "Send order that they can return immediately. They will have two free days before they need to report to their regular duties..."

With that, Maya and Caden left the study.

Damon looked at Talia eagerly. They were alone. At last.

"So..." He licked his lips. "When can we...?" He didn't finish, but Talia knew what he was talking about.

"Axel said how we should give it a few days for marking. I assume that had something to do with my powers. Let's do the important things first."

"Like?", Damon asked apprehensively.

"Marcy and visiting Shaman Gideon.", Talia said. "You mentioned that you have a cottage nearby that can provide privacy. How about we go there tomorrow?"

Damon feared that Talia will say how it will take days or longer, but then she said 'tomorrow'.

"That's OUR cottage, kitten.", he corrected her before asking, "Tomorrow? What if you can't help Marcy?"

Talia shrugged. "If I can help her, that would be the best. But if I can't help her, then she will end up in the pack hospital and Doctor Travis will take care of her with Maya and Caden keeping an eye on things."

Damon still didn't agree on Talia healing Marcy, but she said it like it was a done deal. However, he couldn't deny her this. He was still thinking about marking.

"Regardless of how this goes, I will need to talk to George and James in the morning, and then we will visit the Shaman."

Talia smiled happily. "After that, you should deal with any urgent matters, and as soon as you are done, we can go to the cabin." Talia had another request. "I want to meet your wolf before marking."

Damon could feel that the old beast was happy that Talia wanted to meet him. And Damon was happy also. By tomorrow this time, his mark will be forming on Talia's neck and Damon was eager to see what it will look like.

Chapter 417 – Middle Of The Night Operation [Bonus Chapter]

Damon and Talia agreed that Marcy's situation was urgent, and it should be handled as soon as possible, so the duo headed to the house where Marcy was.

As preparation for damage control, Damon told his warriors who guarded the perimeter that they will be testing new light fixtures in the house and if there is a flash not to panic. Damon hoped that will be enough to conceal any unusual glow that Talia might produce.

After numerous warnings to Talia that if anything seems off she should stop, Damon stood at the door of Marcy's room and observed Talia who was standing by the window and looking at the bed where Marcy was lying.

Talia was confident that she can help Marcy, but now that she was facing her, Talia realized that she had no idea how to go about it.

Talia decided to think about what she knew.

Damon told her that she repelled rogues, and healed him, but Talia had no recollections of those events. She remembered the incident in the lake and glowing Meg in the car, and on those two occasions, Talia followed her instincts.

The trouble was that there were no instincts on how to heal Marcy.

What was she missing?

When Damon taught Talia about the Alpha aura, he said to think of it as a manifestation of her will. Talia didn't think that her aura and so-called abilities were different.

'Is that it?', Talia wondered. 'I need to want for Marcy to get better?'

But the problem was that Talia didn't have kind of feelings toward Marcy.

In the Red Moon pack, Marcy beat Talia twice and said many mean words. Now Marcy was in the Dark Howlers pack with an intention to become Damon's Luna and Marcy spoke to Talia like she was a disposable mistress.

Marcy was Talia's bully, a woman who was coveting Damon. How can Talia wish for such a woman to get better? Wouldn't it be best if Marcy stays that way and never wakes up?

Talia lowered her head while wondering if she was a bad person. If she wishes bad things to happen to people, didn't she become a bully?

Talia shook her head while trying to dispel the dark thoughts. She hated bullies the most; they hurt the ones who are weak and vulnerable, and Talia refused to lower herself to that level.

"Don't beat yourself over it.", Damon's deep voice came from behind Talia. He could feel her fluctuating emotions and he knew that Talia was struggling with the concept of helping someone who hurt her more than once. "Do how much you can, and remember that doing nothing is an option. Marcy's condition is the consequence of her actions. It's not your responsibility to help her."

"I'm not doing this for Marcy.", Talia responded. "I want to do it for us." This was the truth. "As your mate, I get to share your glory and your hardships."

Damon beamed at Talia's words that warmed his soul.

After saying those words, Talia realized that this might be something she could work with. If her desire to accomplish something is the trigger to her powers, maybe she shouldn't think about healing Marcy, but about her and Damon.

Talia looked out the window to see the Moon that was in the first quarter.

She remembered stories of how the Moon Goddess lives there and is watching over all werewolves like they were her children.

Did Talia believe in the Moon Goddess? Talia was not sure. If the Moon Goddess was real, why did she allow Talia to live in that attic for a decade and to be bullied? Is that what a mother would do? Or did the Moon Goddess abandon her?

But this was not the time to question her fate. Talia chose to believe that she can fix this situation and if that included talking to the Moon Goddess, so be it.

"If you are up there, help me make things right...", Talia said while looking at the half-circle that illuminated the dark sky speckled with stars. "Marcy committed a sin by rejecting her mate, and this is her punishment. I don't have the right to decide how big Marcy's offense is, but I know that if she doesn't wake up, people I cherish will be harmed. They are good people and don't deserve to suffer because of something Marcy did. Help me wake her up. She needs to be awake in order to fix her wrongs..."

Damon smiled while listening to the small woman who was talking to the Moon with her hand extended that way like she was trying to reach for it.

If he could, he would capture the Moon and all the stars and give them to Talia. Maybe as a wedding gift.

Damon's eyebrows shoot up when Talia's hand that was bathed in the moon rays started glowing. Less than a second later, Talia's whole body was glowing, and that glow stretched lazily toward the bed where Marcy was.

Damon's jaw fell slack open as he watched Marcy being enveloped in the pulsating light, and it all came from Talia whose silver eyes shone and the ethereal outer glow made her appear like a Goddess who descended to Earth. Breathtaking.

Through his infatuation, Damon was frantically focusing on Talia, ready to catch her if her legs show signs of giving in. He had no idea how much energy Talia exerted to accomplish this, but he was determined to not let her fall.

Damon was not sure if it lasted a second or an hour before the light subsided, and he swiftly moved to support Talia who swayed.

"Are you OK?", Damon asked Talia when she leaned into him.

Talia gave him a weak smile. Her head was buzzing, and she turned to look at Marcy.

"Did it work?"

Damon released the breath he was holding, and he focused on Marcy for a few moments before responding, "You did it, kitten. Her heartbeat is much stronger." He didn't know more than that. "I will call Travis to check on her. Let's go to the next room and wait there." Damon wanted Talia to lay down and rest.

"Here is fine.", Talia responded. She wanted to keep an eye on Marcy. Talia was not sure what she did and if the effect is permanent or temporary.

Was it possible that the Moon Goddess helped her improve Marcy's condition? Or was that Talia's doing?

Talia wished to understand her ability and test its limits, but that will need to wait. She acknowledged overall weakness, pleased that she was not at the point where she needed to sleep.

Talia gestured toward a small table that had two chairs next to it. "We can sit there. Can you hold me?"

Damon chuckled at her silly request. "I wouldn't let go of you, kitten, even if you ask me."

He sat on one of the chairs with Talia on his lap, and he cradled her in his arms.

Talia leaned on Damon and allowed his addictive scent to fill her system.

Damon was immensely relieved that Talia was in good spirits. She was awake and talking and he wondered if that had anything to do with the Moon, or maybe her powers were increasing... or maybe those two were related. Old folks say that werewolves are more powerful when the full moon is out. Sure, the moon was not full, but half of it was still better than nothing.

Chapter 418 – Morning Negotiations (1)

The dawn was peeking through the window of the master bedroom on the third floor of the packhouse.

Damon and Talia didn't get any sleep, and for the first time since they got together, the lack of sleep was not due to the copious amount of carnal pleasures.

When Doctor Travis arrived at the house where Marcy was, he did a quick checkup to confirm that her condition improved significantly and that she should wake up soon.

Knowing that Damon and Talia had a lot on their hands, Travis offered to stay back with Marcy so the duo can go to the packhouse and rest.

"I will contact you if any changes happen.", Travis said. "This is the least I can do for my Alpha and Luna. Please, allow me to contribute..."

Damon accepted Travis' offer because Talia was tired after using her ability, but since they got in bed, Talia was tossing and turning, the much-needed sleep refused to take over. Her proximity and sparks were turning him on, and her addictive scent added to his arousal, but Damon knew that Talia was exhausted, and he kept his hands to himself.

Travis sent updates every hour, and they knew that Marcy's condition was steadily improving. Based on Travis' estimates, Marcy should wake up sometimes during the next day, if not sooner.

Back to the present...

"Why don't you sleep?", Damon asked Talia.

"I have a lot on my mind.", Talia said.

"It will all be alright.", Damon assured her.

She let out a long breath. "How do you know?"

"Because we are together.", Damon responded matter-of-factly. "I'm sure that most of the people by now know that I found my Luna. No more secrets, kitten. There are many things ahead of us, good and bad. Among all of them, I look forward to walking through Darkbourne while holding your hand for everyone to see."

Talia's lips stretched into a smile as she imagined a sunny day, and the two of them walking hand-in-hand with no one giving them strange or derisive looks because they would know that she belongs there, by his side. It was a pleasant mental image.

Talia's smile faltered when she remembered that they have a number of challenges to cross until that can come true. And one thing seemed more daunting than the other.

She sounded brave in the study, but the truth was that she was a nervous wreck. The pack run was coming, and she had no idea about shifting. And then there was Alpha Edward who will definitely throw a fit when he finds out that Damon introduced his Luna, and it was not Marcy. What if the war is coming? And she was also anxious about the marking, and her not understanding her powers... there were a lot of things.

Talia hugged Damon tightly and buried her face in his chest, taking deep breaths and allowing his addictive scent of the forest and dark chocolate to carry her into their lovey-dovey bubble where it's just the two of them and nothing else.

Damon could feel her insecurities bubbling, and he felt helpless in easing her troubles. Talia was prone to overthinking things, and at that moment Damon didn't have quick solutions. The only thing they could do was to face challenges as they come and to prepare for them to the best of their abilities. Lack of sleep wouldn't help.

"I wish that you rest", Damon said. "Try to sleep. Even an hour or two is better than nothing."

Talia looked up at him. "My turbulent mind is not letting me sleep. Maybe you can distract me."

Damon's lips lifted into a smile. "What do you have on your mind?"

Talia scooted higher and he thought that she will kiss him, but Talia's lips latched to the side of his neck, her tongue moved in circles, each sending electric pulses through his body.

He squeezed her buttocks harshly and buried his face in the crook of her neck, returning the favor of kissing and licking her neck, and within a minute their bodies were entangled, and outrageous sounds filled the space.

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In the bathroom of a guest bedroom on the second floor...

George pulled a t-shirt over his head and fixed his hair while checking himself in the mirror to ensure he was visually presentable.

When he got out of the bathroom, he paused at the sight of the blonde woman sleeping soundly on the bed. Dawn. That was his mate, his second chance of happiness... and he was determined not to mess it up. Dawn was caring and she didn't object to him marking her right away, and that was all he ever

wanted from a mate; acceptance and assurance that they will stay together no matter what. That's how it should be.

He smiled at the memory of Dawn telling him how she will support him. It was heartwarming to know that someone was willing to take care of him.

George took a deep breath that filled his chest with the scent of cinnamon that permeated the air. He felt saliva pooling in his mouth because he associated that scent with Dawn's flavors. She was delectable.

Now that he experienced a true mate bond, George thought how he was silly to have hopes about Marcy who rejected him on the spot. However, if he didn't cling to Marcy, he wouldn't meet Dawn, and he wouldn't get his second chance, so in a way... even his futile fight against Marcy's rejection served a purpose because it led to a happy ending. For him, at least. As for Marcy, he didn't have any form of pity for her. His whole life George suffered because of the Redmayne family, and Marcy proved that she was no better. After the hell she put him through, he was glad that his wolf stopped urging him to get close to her and salvage what was left. It was pathetic.

George hated the idea of leaving Dawn behind, but he needed to talk to Alpha Damon, and he didn't want to wake her up. Besides, he still didn't tell her about his real identity, and he didn't want Dawn to find out about it from Alpha Damon.

But, what if she wakes up in his absence? Won't she think that he abandoned her?

Since they found out they were mates, George and Dawn spent most of their time indulging in carnal pleasures and exchanging sweet nothings, but that was not enough to establish a trustworthy relationship.

George thought about what to do, and then he decided to leave her a note.

He found a piece of paper and a pen and scribbled a few words so that Dawn knows he went to settle some things and he will return when done. George hoped that he will be back before she woke up.

'Settling things' meant discussing what Alpha Damon wanted to talk about, and George had a feeling that it included his real identity and dealing with the fallout from last night. He had no idea why Alpha Damon didn't expose him, but he pushed his anxiety away. He will deal with it as it comes.

Chapter 419 – Morning Negotiations (2)

George entered the study and paused at the sight of Talia who was there with Damon.

George wondered if Talia will be part of this secretive talk. Or maybe he overthought everything and this was just to discuss Marcy's condition. Maybe.

George decided to start with pleasantries.

"I failed to congratulate you on finding your mate and your Luna.", George said to Damon. "Pardon my tardiness. I wish you all the best in the years to come."

"No need to apologize.", Damon responded. "It's understandable, considering the commotion the news caused with the Elders."

George remembered the circus from the previous evening. It didn't match the image of a scary and stern Alpha that Damon usually carried. If that happened in the Red Moon pack, Alpha Edward would execute the ringleaders on the spot, to set an example for others, yet Damon just stood there and allowed it to unfold.

George had to ask, "Are your Elders always so disobedient?"

Damon was amused that George asked him so bluntly, but he didn't mind. It was refreshing not to guess what was on the other person's mind. "They are remnants of the system I'm trying to abolish."

"What's stopping you from reminding them who is their Alpha?"

Damon didn't feel like explaining his failures. Sure, he could suppress the Elders and send them to hell, but Caden was right... if Damon did that, it would come with consequences. Many of those Elders are bellowed grandfathers and grandmothers to many from the Dark Howlers pack, and if it was just a few

Elders, Damon could punish them, but with most of them causing a ruckus, Damon ended up letting it unfold.

Damon already decided to deal with them covertly. No one will get away with challenging him or his Luna, but it wouldn't be wise to strike them openly with so many eyes on him.

Instead of answering George's question, Damon had a question of his own. "Are you asking this for your future reference, Alpha George?"

George's brows furrowed when Damon confirmed George's suspicion. He knew, but the question was, how much Damon knew?

George glanced at Talia and Damon spoke, "Don't worry about Talia. We can talk in front of her."

Talia was not sure if she can contribute, but she wanted to be present. If nothing else, she will silently support Damon.

Talia glanced at Damon and she smiled as Damon continued, "Talia is my mate, my Luna, my equal. What I know, she knows."

George cleared his throat awkwardly. Did Alpha Damon need to be lovey-dovey right in front of him? He decided to go back to the topic. The sooner they finish, the sooner he can go back to Dawn. "How much do you know?"

"I know that you are George Shaw, Alpha of the Frostcrest pack. I can understand why you are concealing your identity, but I don't know what are you doing in the Red Moon pack." Damon leaned over his desk. "Of course, considering the fate of the Frostcrest pack, I have a few guesses and I wonder if you will tell me which one is the correct one."

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George frowned. He didn't like his current situation. Before admitting anything, he needed to clarify.
"Does James know who I am?"

Damon shrugged. "If he knows, he didn't find it out from me."

"I assume there is a reason we are having this conversation in private."

Damon raised his hands, palms facing George, indicating to him to tone down the hostility.

"I mean no harm. I only hope we can collaborate."

"You mean, blackmail?"

"That's not how you call a deal that would benefit both of us."

George released a long breath. How is it beneficial for both, if Damon can blackmail him, yet George had nothing? "What do you want, Alpha Damon? I am not a person who plays games."

"I believe that Alpha Edward knows what happened here last night, and it safe to assume that he is not happy. I would appreciate your assistance so that things don't go out of control."

George now knew where this was going. "In exchange for keeping my identity a secret?"

Damon confirmed and added, "Among other things."

"Other things? Like what?"

"That would depend on what you need.", Damon responded. "As long as it's not putting any of my people in danger, I am willing to assist you in whatever you are doing. Take your time and think about it but I hope you will realize the urgency in dealing with Alpha Edward. If things escalate, the deal is off the table."

George thought about his options for a moment before saying, "What do you think I can do to pacify Alpha Edward? He sent Marcy here with an intention for her to become your Luna. Anything less than that won't make him happy. It was my duty to escort her here, and I did, but Alpha Edward's wrath won't be selective. I will be punished for Marcy's failure even without him knowing what happened between us."

George couldn't make himself say the words that he and Marcy were mates. Or did Damon know that George and Marcy had sex? George didn't want to think about it.

"You will find out that James will lend you a hand.", Damon said. Seeing that George was alerted, Damon added, "He doesn't know your identity, nor about what happened between you and Marcy. However, James was aware that you and Marcy were not available, and he covered it up for Alpha Edward in your absence. I suggest that we call James here and discuss options. But I wanted to talk to you first and see if you are OK with it."

George made a face. "You sound like I have a choice."

"Great!", Damon exclaimed while ignoring George's sarcasm. "Do you have anything you want to tell me in private before James joins us?"

George shook his head, indicating that he doesn't.

Before calling James, Damon decided to make a few points. "Your real identity is not important for this, however, James will need to know that you and Marcy were mates. I don't expect that you will spill your secrets, but if we are going to prevent a war, we need to be open about things that are relevant. So let me ask you again, is there something you wish to tell me?"

George was about to say no, but then he paused. Damon agreed not to disclose his real identity, which meant that George still had his possibility of revenge. And the fact that Damon was willing to negotiate meant that Damon won't use him as a scapegoat in this whole thing.

George's opinion of Damon improved, and he decided to share one thing.

"I suspect that James is not Alpha Edward's son."

Chapter 420 – Morning Negotiations (3) [Bonus Chapter]

Damon blinked a few times while processing this bomb that George threw at him. James is not Alpha Edward's son? This was huge!

A wave of confusion and sorrow hit him, and Damon had no idea from where it came. It took him a minute to look at Talia. Of course, she would feel sorry for the teenager, even if he was from the family who did her wrong.

"Come here, kitten...", Damon called and extended his hand toward her.

Talia was grateful for the mate bond that told Damon she needed his proximity.

She put her hand into Damon's and allowed him to pull her onto her lap. His arms circled her small frame, and she rested her head on his shoulder to breathe him in.

The fact was that Talia didn't know much about James. He was a boy who would always be either studying or training. From the gossiping Omegas, Talia overheard that James was not attention-grabbing in a good or in a bad way, and Talia thought how that was admirable considering that he was the future Alpha of the Red Moon pack.

Talia knew that Alpha Edward was power-hungry and manipulative, and she couldn't imagine what James' fate will be if Alpha Edward finds out that the boy was not his son. Or did he know already? She was not sure which one would be worse.

"What makes you think that James is not Alpha Edward's son?", Damon asked George.

George pressed his lips into a line at the sight of Damon who was gently caressing Talia's back and talking to him seriously like nothing lovey-dovey was happening.

Ah, he was missing Dawn!

"James has no Alpha aura.", George responded after a brief pause. "Either he is not Alpha Edward's biological son, or he is the biggest loser in the DNA lottery. Based on my research, the dominant gene will be carried to offspring, and it takes several generations to thin them out. There are confirmed cases when the inherited Alpha aura weakens from parents to children, but James has none. On a scale of one to ten with the ten being the strongest Alpha aura, Alpha Edward would be a seven. If James is Alpha Edward's son, anything from eight to six would be considered normal. However, the boy has none, and that would make him the first case that didn't inherit the dominant gene and it went from seven to zero in one generation."

Damon admired the confidence George used while explaining this. George's tone spoke more than the numbers he threw at Damon.

Damon realized that James didn't have it easy. After all, some things can't be hidden as young Alphas can't wait to show off and compare their strength. And there was also a question... "How come Alpha Edward is fine with James having no aura?" Maybe they can give various excuses to random people, but Alpha Edward should know about it.

George's lips lifted into a smug smile. "I told them that there are cases of late bloomers where Alpha aura develops later, and it will manifest itself no later than the eighteenth birthday. Alpha Edward was too lazy to verify, and he was eager to conceal that James doesn't have an aura in order to preserve his image. As for others, they believe that I created a training regime for James that includes him suppressing his aura completely in order to steel his body and mind."

Damon thought how that made sense. Even he had sessions where his trainers requested of him not to use his aura, so it's not unusual. However... "This is good to know, but it won't impact our current situation."

"You won't use it against James?"

Damon shook his head. "Assuming that James is not Alpha Edward's biological son, revealing that will not help us in any way. If James will be useful, we need Alpha Edward to trust him. Waving this in front of James' face might make him think about backup strategies that could include setting us up in order to appease Alpha Edward."

George agreed with this. That's why he covered up for James' deficiency.

After this brief exchange, both George and Damon adjusted assessments of the other one.

Damon's eyes lost focus as he contacted one of the Omegas with instructions to summon James to his study.

"Commander George", the so-far silent Talia called. She wanted to tell him something before James joins them.

"I assume that you being here on your own means that Dawn doesn't know who you really are."

George's silence answered Talia's question.

"Dawn is a good person, and she would do anything for her mate, even forgive lies. But don't let it drag for too long. Dawn forgiving you doesn't mean she won't be hurt because you are concealing things from her."

Damon's ears perked up. Was Talia talking about him and how he concealed the truth about them being mates?

George smiled at Talia's words. He found it fascinating that they were discussing a serious issue that could lead to a war, yet Talia was concerned about her friend. Isn't that what Luna does? Takes care of her people?

"I will tell her as soon as I get a chance.", George assured Talia. "I didn't mean to keep my mate in the dark, but I didn't find the right timing to bring it up."

Talia remembered Meg and thought of another thing. "You marked Dawn, so with your DNA, she will get Alpha's aura. The sooner you tell her, the sooner she can practice to control it."

George pressed his lips into a line. Talia was right. If Dawn gets emotionally compromised and releases her aura uncontrollably, his cover will be blown.

George wondered, how does Talia know about aura and training? He would think that it was from her experience, but she was obviously not marked.

"Keep looking at my mate like that, and our cooperation is over.", Damon growled, startling George out of his thoughts.

"I apologize.", George said quickly. He really didn't mean to stare, but he was looking at Talia's neck and... it just happened.

Talia was uncomfortable. She didn't notice that George was looking at her, but she knew that George wouldn't have inappropriate thoughts considering that he has Dawn. But Damon made it awkward.

"Damon...", Talia said in a low voice and wrapped her arms around Damon's neck. "Didn't we talk about this? You can't be angry at people just because they are looking at me."

"He was looking for too long.", Damon said in his defense.

"I would be arguing forever if I start a quarrel with every woman who looks at you longer than I approve...." Or maybe she would send them to the dungeon, and it would overflow quickly.