

Alphas Bride 471

Chapter 471 The new Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack (2)

Talia looked at the paper that Alpha Sophia and Alpha Isaac signed with their blood. It was the written agreement to hand over their Alpha position to Talia.

Her thoughts wandered toward Damon. He was always telling her that she will be a wonderful Luna, and she didn't think she is Luna material, or that she will have the courage to step into the spotlight and be a leader, yet here she was, about to become an Alpha... without him.

'We are doing this for mate.', Liseli reminded her.

'I know.' But it didn't mean she didn't miss him immensely, every heartbeat came a bit empty because he was not there.

Talia hoped that this will pass without incidents. She was nervous, but more than that, she wanted to be done with this so they can head to the portal and seek witches.

Cassandra stepped forward, to address the people gathered.

"My fellow pack members", Cassandra said, her voice was not loud, but she was talking to a pack of werewolves, and they could hear her clearly. "Just like seasons take turns in nature, and new replaces old, we reached the point for new to replace old in our pack."

People shuffled and murmured, and Cassandra continued.

"We gathered here to show respect to the Alpha pair that led us so far, and to welcome the new generation."

No one said a word, but the tension was tangible. They obviously didn't expect this.

Axel felt that a commotion might erupt at any moment and he stepped forward to speak while the situation was manageable.

"You know me, and you know my parents. They decided to step down..."

"Did you find your mate?", someone couldn't contain his curiosity from the side.

"No."

"Then, how can you take over the Alpha position?", another voice was heard, and murmurs followed.

Talia stood next to Axel. She didn't want this to become a circus and Liseli agreed.

"Silence!", Talia exclaimed, and her voice echoed a few times. "I will be the new Alpha. Axel will lead this pack with me. Not as mates, but as partners." It would be simpler if she claimed the Alpha position as Axel's sister, but that would bring more questions and she didn't want to be associated with Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia.

Chatter swelled. Questions and doubts, mostly on the topic of how can they be partners if they were not mates, and does that mean they won't awaken their powers? No one would accept leaders without powers in a world where the strongest ones sit at the top.

Talia lifted her chin defiantly and released her aura on the crowd that suddenly descended into silence again under her pressure.

"As you can see, I am Alpha. From today onward, I will be the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack.", Talia said with confidence. "Axel will work with me as an equal, and in my absence, he will be my proxy. Kai and Meg will be our Betas, and Tyler will be Gamma." Talia turned to glance at Alpha Isaac, Alpha Sophia, and their Betas and Gammas. "The previous leadership will stay in the main house, and provide guidance when needed. It will be a process, but we are all committed to a smooth transition so that you are not impacted negatively."

Alpha Sophia and Alpha Isaac smiled stiffly. They knew very well that this whole staying in the main house was just Talia's way of keeping an eye on them. They will technically be under house arrest, and without their powers, they will be helpless. The only thing they had was their authority, and Talia was effectively taking it away.

"Why so sudden?", someone asked.

"This is not sudden.", Talia responded, and Axel shot her a side-glance while hoping that she knew what she was saying. They didn't prepare for this.

Talia met Axel's eyes with a smile that told him she's got this, and then she spoke to the crowd that gathered, "I spent quite some time in the outside world, and Axel was visiting me. We discussed the challenges everyone here is facing and we are planning to introduce some changes. Our first priority is to ease the restrictions on you leaving this territory. We know that many of you are unmated, and your instincts are urging you to get out and find your other half. Please, bear with it for a bit longer. Axel and I are determined to come up with safety protocols and measures so that you can go out and minimize the risk of exposure..."

Axel's lips lifted into a smile when he saw their people nodding with sparkles in their eyes. Talia asked about the pack, and he spoke about the difficulty of finding mates because his parents are prioritizing security over everything else. He didn't know that Talia will use that to pacify people. As far as he could see, there was not a single frown in the audience.

Axel looked at Talia in awe. She was the true leader, an Alpha, and he was proud that she was his sister.

"Alpha Sophia and Alpha Isaac agree with our plans, and that is why they signed the document in which they are passing their positions to us.", Talia said while holding the parchment paper high up in the air, for everyone to see. "If you have any objections, speak now. If you have any questions, leave them for later because Cassandra is eager to commence the ritual."

The clamor of approval and chuckles was heard, and Talia and Axel stepped back to stand on Cassandra's right.

Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia stood on Cassandra's left and the ceremony started.

Cassandra was chanting and singing, and sometimes snorting while waving her arms around the flames. She would throw things that her helpers passed into the fire, and colorful sparks flew in the air.

"New Alpha needs to use his ability on the fire. Depending on how the fire reacts, it will predict how successful the ruling will be.", Axel spoke to Talia in a hushed voice.

Talia's insides tightened. Why didn't he say this earlier? What successful ruling?

She had no desire to be the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack. This was just to get Alpha Sophia and Alpha Isaac off their thrones, and she had every intention to let Axel be the star of the show. Her plan was that as soon as Axel finds his mate, Talia would hand over everything to him officially.

'Don't worry about these small things.', Liseli spoke in Talia's mind. 'Let me handle the fire.'

Talia released the breath she was holding. 'Thanks.' She was really grateful to have a wolf like Liseli.

The signed parchment flew in the fire last and it was time for Talia to use her ability.

Talia extended her hands with palms facing the fire, and Liseli did her thing.

Talia's palms shimmered in silver light that shot straight for the fire. The flames twisted and turned unnaturally before extending up, up, up... and then the flames silently exploded to create wonderful fireworks in reds, blues, and greens that were clearly visible in broad daylight.

Gasps of awe were heard from the people and Talia could feel invisible bonds forming between her and every person present. It was like they could feel each other. They were one. It was surreal.

Talia was looking up at the colorful display, and her eyes filled with tears as memories of her sitting on the lap of a cheeky Alpha resurfaced. He held her gently in a solid embrace, and he pressed her palm against his bare chest. He said how she should get used to touching him while his gaze peered into her soul and made butterflies go crazy in her stomach.

This was the first time for Talia to see fireworks without Damon. She missed him immensely.

"All hail Alpha Talia, the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack!!!", Cassandra shouted. "May the Moon Goddess grant her the wisdom so that her ruling brings us many years of prosperity with Alpha Axel by her side!!!"

The crowd erupted in cheers and howls, and Talia could feel their approval and hope.

Axel took Talia's hand into his and turned her to face their people.

"LONG LIVE ALPHA TALIA!", Axel shouted over the clamor.

He lifted his arm together with Talia's, and the noise became so loud that the ground shook.

"LONG LIVE ALPHA TALIA! LONG LIVE ALPHA TALIA!", the pack members chanted enthusiastically.

Talia held her breath. For better or for worse, it was done.

Chapter 472 Waiting for the portal to open

Talia and Axel were sitting on the ground and observing Cassandra who was busying herself around a massive rock that was angled like it was resting on the edge of a hill. Other than its smooth surface, nothing stood out, but Cassandra was confident how that's where the portal is.

Talia leaned backward to rest on her elbows and she took a deep breath.

The weather was pleasant. The sun was high on the cloud-speckled sky, and the refreshing light breeze carried the sweet scent of wildflowers.

It was a perfect day for lazing around, but Talia couldn't relax. They were about to step into the unknown and as much as she didn't want to think about potential dangers, she would rather think about that than about the fact that Damon left for the Dark Howlers pack without knowing who she was.

Talia cursed herself. If she didn't mark Damon, none of this would happen. She caused such a commotion, yet here was Axel, sitting by her side and being supportive. She was not used to people being kind to her (other than Damon, of course).

"Thank you for doing this, Axel.", Talia said. "I know it must be hard to turn your back on people who raised you."

Axel's chest tightened. He wanted to remind her that those are her parents also, but he knew she saw them as strangers, and probably bad ones because they abandoned her, and he couldn't blame her for it.

"I don't see this as turning my back on them.", Axel said. "They were so focused on the safety of our pack members, that they couldn't see how they were the ones oppressing their own people. What they did to Alpha Damon is inexcusable and I hope that one day they realize that."

At the mention of Damon, Talia pressed her lips into a line. There was a question she feared to hear the answer to, but she couldn't ignore it. "How long will it take him to reach the Dark Howlers pack?"

"For a normal werewolf, two days. For him, a day probably."

Talia nodded. That would give her a month in here to figure stuff before he reaches home. She was grateful for this phenomenon. Looking at the flat rock, Talia wondered what was on the other side. "Is there a way to know if the time passes differently in the other realms?"

"There is, actually...", Axel said and fished a small device from his pocket.

It looked like a compass with two dials. The white dial was moving slowly while the golden one stood still.

"The white dial shows the passing of time here. The golden one is also moving, but at a rate thirty times slower than the white one and it shows time in the human realm, how we call it. My father gave me this when I went through the portal the first time, to remind me that every day I spend outside is a month for them and that I shouldn't stay longer than absolutely necessary."

Talia observed the device curiously. "How will this help when we pass through the portal?"

Axel smirked. "If you pay attention to the white dial, you will see that it's actually two of them, there is a blue one. This button on the side will put them in the same position. The blue dial shows the time passing in this realm, and the white one shows the time for wherever you are. Right now they are moving at the same rate because we are here. When I pass through the portal to the human realm, the white dial moves at the same rate as the golden one."

Talia understood that once they pass through that portal, if the white dial moves slower compared to the golden one, she will be in a predicament. She is already pressed to get this resolved as soon as possible, and if the time with witches moves slower than in the human realm, in a matter of hours months could pass for Damon. Who knows what the situation will be when she returns?

Her anxiety was obvious.

"I know it's hard, but try to focus on things you can control, and allow others to happen. We will deal with them as they come.", Axel said.

Talia shook her head. "Sounds easy." But he was right. There was no point in dwelling on things that didn't happen yet. "What are we going to do if the people on the other side are hostile?"

Axel shot her a side glance. "We are not pushovers. I might not be able to take down Alpha Damon, but I am the best fighter in my pack, and you are amazing." He smiled a little. "I was worried before we came here but now, I think it will be alright. This portal was closed for a long time and I'm sure they don't have guards watching over it. The other side probably looks plain just like this rock here. Our biggest problem will be to find where witches are."

Talia hoped it will be that simple.

"What happened to your mind-link?", Axel asked. "I can't reach you. Did you shut it down somehow? It would be useful if we can communicate stealthily while in there."

'Liseli? What do you think?'

'It would be useful, but you will need to practice separating what you want to share. I can do an on-off switch. If I turn it on, all your thoughts will be available to Axel and any other member of the Midnight Guardians pack until you learn to control it.'

'Everyone?'

'There is a range limit, but you are a strong Alpha, so there is a chance that your range will cover this whole realm.'

Talia remembered members of the Midnight Guardians pack that gathered on the lawn earlier that day. They were now eating and drinking to celebrate Alpha Talia and Alpha Axel, with the belief that their new leaders left to further research that will allow everyone to leave this realm and find their mates. Well, in a way they were not wrong.

Talia thought how opening her mind to all of those people would be unsettling. She was looking forward to doing that with Damon. He said that he will teach her about everything.

Talia put her hands over her face while trying not to think about Damon, but the more she tried, the more his face appeared in front of her closed eyes. His smile that made her stomach flip every time... serious expression while focusing on the documents in front of him... anxiousness when he thought that something was wrong... his heated gaze that made her feel naked no matter how much clothes she had on...

"Talia?"

Axel's voice got her attention.

"I'm sorry, Axel. I am not ready to open up in such a way." If Axel gets a hint of what was on her mind, she wouldn't be able to face him. "Give me time, please."

"It's OK.", Axel said while lifting his arms in the air. "We will make it work. I was just asking. No pressure."

Talia smiled a bit at Axel's flustered response. What was that about?

Chapter 473 Opening the portal

"I believe we are ready!", Cassandra exclaimed.

Axel and Talia stood up and joined Cassandra next to the rock.

"Is the portal working now?", Talia asked while eyeing the massive rock that was twice her height and as wide as three people standing side-by-side.

Talia imagined that there should be some buzzing and sparks or something like that, magical, but it didn't look different than just a regular, big, smooth rock.

"There is this last piece", Cassandra said and held a palm-size triangle-shaped rock in her hand.

"When I put it in here", Cassandra gestured toward the triangle-shaped groove on the side of the massive rock, "that will be the last piece, and the portal will be functional. Assuming that the other side is not dismantled as well."

Talia didn't consider this option before Cassandra mentioned it. "If the other side is not working, then what? Will we get lost in a void? Or sucked into some random dimension? What if we end up crushed into pulp?"

Cassandra waved her hand at Talia, indicating to her to calm down. "No, no. If the other side is not working, the connection won't be established."

Well, that was better than getting lost or smashed, but... "If the other side is not working, how can we get there?"

Cassandra shrugged. "There was a time when Gods walked the Earth. They could split and merge continents with a wave of their hands, and create other dimensions with a thought while moving across space and time at will. They created these portals for mortals. However..." She looked at Talia

meaningfully. "Even if the portal is not working, you should be able to open it. The Moon Goddess is with you."

Talia smiled awkwardly. After telling her some nonsense about Gods splitting Earth, Cassandra had a lot of faith in Talia's non-existent abilities.

Cassandra's eyes moved from Talia to Axel, and she spoke, "Once the portal is open, we might not be able to shut it down. These pieces will become part of the portal and I don't know how easy it will be to take them out. We don't know what's out there. It could be a broken space or a swarm of monsters. Are you sure we are doing this?"

"Do it.", Axel said with finality. "We are already here and we are not going back empty-handed. If the other side has trouble, we will deal with it as it comes."

Talia balled her hands into fists, hoping this will work and it was not another mistake.

Axel's warm hand wrapped around Talia's right fist, making it appear so small and delicate like he could crush her without even trying, and she turned to see him smiling at her.

"It will be alright.", he said, and she felt his encouragement enveloping her, just as his hand wrapped around her fist protectively.

"I won't allow anything to happen to you, Talia.", Axel said with all the seriousness in the world. "We will get your mate back and we will make sure that other members of our pack find their mates as well. Believe in that. Believe in me."

Talia envied his confidence. "How can you be so sure?"

Axel chuckled. "I am an Alpha. My duty is to take care of my people. I can't do that if I doubt myself the moment I face an unknown challenge. It is wise to be cautious, but I won't allow fear to guide me and neither should you."

Talia felt her chest swelling with pride. That was her brother.

She turned toward the portal and looked at it with renewed determination. "Let's do this."

After saying a silent prayer, Cassandra slid the triangle-shaped rock into the opening and took a step back.

One second, two, three... there was nothing.

Talia was not sure how the working portal looks, but the sour expressions of Cassandra and Axel confirmed that this was not the expected outcome.

Cassandra tapped her chin while thinking. "Maybe it needs a jumpstart."

"A what?", Axel asked.

"A jumpstart.", Cassandra responded. "All spells and magical devices need something to get them running. It could be a chant or energy of some sort. Think of it like a spark that will start a fire. We have everything in place but need to figure out how to start it." Cassandra ended with a mumble and moved to look into scribbles she jotted down while Alpha Sophia and Alpha Isaac were talking about portals.

The spark and fire made sense, but how does one jumpstart a rock?

Talia and Axel exchanged glances and then they waited for Cassandra to finish whatever she was doing with the hope that her idea will work.

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"The energy of the Moon grants entry to the passage!", Cassandra exclaimed.

"So, we need to wait for the night?", Talia asked dejectedly. That was hours away!

Cassandra nodded in confirmation. "The full moon would be the best."

Axel frowned. "That will take days. Is there another way?"

Cassandra turned to Talia.

Talia didn't get it. "Why are you looking at me like I know the answer?"

"I am looking at you because you are the answer, Alpha Talia.", Cassandra said. "I saw all kinds of abilities, but I never saw anyone light up completely. The power of the Moon Goddess is within you. Use it to open the portal."

'Does this make sense to you?', Talia asked Liseli.

'No. But it can't hurt to try.'

Talia shrugged and got closer to the portal. 'Do your thing, Liseli.'

Talia extended her arms toward the rock so that her palms were facing it.

Her hands shimmered in silver and the energy transferred onto the rock. For a few seconds, nothing unusual happened, but then a faint ripple appeared around the area where light from Talia's hands hit the rock.

"That's it! The portal is reacting which means this is working, and the other side is functional!", Cassandra exclaimed. "We need more power."

Axel stood behind Talia and looked at the rock with curiosity, getting more anxious by the second. It was happening.

Axel wanted to help, but he didn't have any power. Unfortunately, neither did Cassandra so the most they could do was to cheer for Talia to keep going.

Liseli increased the output, and silvery light expanded up Talia's arms, all the way to her elbows and then it slowly spread to reach her shoulders.

Now the whole rock was rippling, every wave bigger than the previous one, like a surface of a lake that was being disturbed at the spot of Talia's energy drilling through it.

"More. We need more...", Cassandra said under her breath.

"She can't do more!", Axel hissed.

He never saw so much power from anyone. Goosebumps rose on his skin everywhere. Talia was impressive and scary at the same time.

"Yes, she can.", Cassandra said with confidence. She clearly remembered when Talia transformed into a silvery Goddess with her hair fluttering without any wind.

Axel gaped as the silvery light spread through Talia's body, turning her hair white with silver streaks in it.

If anyone asked him what the Moon Goddess looked like, this would be it.

Talia's vision was blurring.

'We should stop!', Liseli spoke into her mind.

'No. Keep going. It's almost open. I can feel it.'

'You are running out of energy without the moon rays to replenish you.', Liseli pleaded.

'Give it a few more seconds. This will work.' It has to.

She didn't want to wait a minute longer than necessary.

'Help me Liseli!', Talia demanded. 'This is for Damon. This is for Sapa. We can't give up.'

Liseli agreed. They can't give up.

Talia's senses were getting duller, but her whole body was buzzing like it was turning ethereal. It came with a feeling of being weightless and her instincts told her that she could see the world with a thought.

Talia wished to see Damon, and she saw a big black wolf running through the forest at such a speed that he looked like a blur to normal people, but Talia could see him clearly.

"Damon...", she called, and the wolf stopped in his tracks, looking around while trying to identify from where the sound came.

Talia wanted to tell him that she loves him and that she was doing all she could do to help him remember and that he should wait for her, but the darkness consumed her.

Chapter 474 Finding witches

Talia inhaled sharply.

"Easy... easy...", Axel's voice came from the side. "I'm here. We are safe."

Talia blinked to see a starry sky above her and the moon bathing her in its light.

She craned her neck to see smooth tall rocks arranged in a U-shaped formation, surrounding them from three sides, and an opening to a sparse forest on the fourth side. She was lying on the unkempt grass, and the air was fresh with the night breeze.

Cassandra was standing with her hands connecting behind her back and staring into the open space, and Axel was squatting next to Talia and observing her with a small frown on his face.

"What happened?", Talia asked Axel.

"You opened the portal.", Axel said. "We passed through."

It took her a few seconds to react. "We are in the realm of witches? Why is it night? How long was I out?"

"Slow down.", Axel said while pressing Talia's shoulder gently to keep her down.

"We went through the portal because we were not sure how long it will stay open. We need to confirm where we are. You passed out from exhaustion, so we didn't go to investigate the surroundings. It was not wise for one of us to roam alone, and we didn't want to leave you behind either. As for how long you were out..." Axel pursed his lips while thinking. "A few hours. It was sunset when we arrived here."

Talia felt panic swelling inside her. "Time. Check the flow of time."

Axel pulled out his gadget and pushed the button to put all three dials in the same location.

Talia stared at the dials without blinking.

"Have some water.", Axel said while pushing the bottle into her hands. "Give it a minute so we are certain."

Talia took a few sips before asking, "Where is the portal?"

Axel gestured toward an opening between two flat tall rocks. "We came out from there."

Talia thought how it was unfortunate that twice she passed through a portal, yet she couldn't remember the experiences. But there were more important things. "We should get moving and find the witches."

"Take a minute to ensure you are fine.", Axel said. "It won't help us if you faint again. I could carry you, but what if we end up in some trouble? We need all of us in top shape. Witches might live out of sight or far away..."

"I understand.", Talia interrupted him. She was touched by his concern. "Show me the thingy for the time."

By now, it was distinct that the white and blue dials were moving together.

"What does this mean?", Talia asked.

"Time here passes in the same way as in our territory."

Talia understood that "our territory" was the realm of the Midnight Guardians pack. But there was one more possibility, "Or the portal didn't take us to another realm."

"Oh, we are in another realm, alright.", Cassandra said in a singing voice, and she moved to Talia with her hand extended to show her a flower. "We don't have these at home."

This was promising and Talia relaxed a bit. "OK. Let's go and find those witches."

"Or dragons. Or ogres.", Cassandra said.

Talia's face fell. She didn't really think about those options. Are those creatures real? "Let's stick to witches..."

"No need to rush, Talia.", Axel really wanted her to rest a bit more. He was super-anxious when she collapsed and stayed unresponsive for hours. Only when the moonlight touched her, she stirred.

"I don't have time to rest, Axel.", Talia said sternly.

"I know what you are thinking. But Damon will need at least one day to reach the Dark Howlers pack. That gives us a month here."

Talia grimaced. "You forgot that once I get out of the portal, I will need to reach the Dark Howlers pack also. Or will your father give me a lift? I know that the time difference gives me an advantage right now, but Damon is out there without me. Every second counts."

Axel knew that she was right, but... "If you are not well, we are not going anywhere. Straining yourself will only cause you to collapse again. How will that help?"

Talia's face fell and Axel gave her hand a squeeze.

"Give yourself a break, Talia. I know Damon from before you appeared. He was different and a bit scary, but... He prioritized his pack first. Trust in his Betas and other people that surround him. I am confident that Damon won't jeopardize his pack, and your friends won't allow him to jeopardize your relationship."

Talia hoped that he was right. She truly did.

After assuring Axel that she was fine, they started moving.

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The moonlight illuminated their way through the low shrubbery and occasional tree.

Talia hear rustling low in the bushes that was probably a rabbit or some other small critter, but other than that, the whole area seemed deserted.

"Do you have an idea where we are going, or did you pick a direction randomly?", Talia asked Axel after some time.

As far as her sight could reach, other than bushes and sparse trees, there was nothing else.

"Not randomly. I used my senses to feel the surroundings before you woke up. In the direction we are going, the trees thicken and there is a river. I believe we will have better chances of finding someone there. In the back are just bare rocks and mountains."

"You can feel the surroundings? How does that work? Can you teach me?", Talia asked, genuinely curious. Until recently she was no more than a human, so all these abilities and powers were new to her.

Axel was pleased that he got a chance to teach Talia something. If they grew up together, he would teach her many things.

He stopped walking and turned to face Talia.

"Close your eyes and relax.", he said. "Allow your mind to travel down to your feet and let it spread in all directions. Feel the energies and shapes. Don't fight it..."

Talia didn't get it at first, but little by little, outlines started appearing in her mind. She could see Axel one step in front of her, and Cassandra a bit further on the right, and bushes, rocks, an anthill that was blurry from the movement of ants in it... trees, an owl...

It was like a mental map with Talia in the middle.

Her jaw fell slack as she could see the U-shaped formation where she woke up, and she clearly felt the opening that looked like it was made of water. The portal.

It was fantastic!

In the direction they were walking, the forest was getting denser and there was a river, and a small waterfall... Talia gasped.

"What?", Axel asked.

"I think there are people. That way.", she pointed into the darkness.

Axel was impressed. He was checking in that direction, but he didn't find anything. It seemed that Talia's abilities extend beyond his.

"Excellent. Let's go that way.", Axel said.

Chapter 475 Cornelia

Singing and chants filled the space, accompanied by soft jingling sounds.

The bonfire created shadows that flickered to create the illusion of trees moving and colorful smoke spreading in the area came with the sweet scent of herbs.

Cassandra, Talia, and Axel approached the small clearing carefully and squatted behind a waist-tall bush to see what was going on there.

To their relief, there were no dragons or ogres, but women. More than a dozen women, all looking to be in their twenties or thirties. They sang and danced in a circle around the fire, their bodies swaying gracefully in the same rhythm, each with her own moves.

Bells around their ankles jingled softly, and as much as it seemed random, every few seconds the women would stomp in unison, causing bells to burst melodiously.

Talia's eyes widened when she realized how much flesh was exposed. Each woman had a loose string around her waist and two small patches of cloth dangling from there, barely enough to cover the buttocks and the intimate bush in front. Their breasts were bare, bouncing and swaying as the women danced.

Axel released a slow groan, and Talia glanced at him apprehensively. Was he having a seizure? He was blinking rapidly, and his face was so red that it looked like he will explode or pass out.

It took her a moment to realize that his senses were overstimulated with the allure of those women.

"I thought that as a werewolf, you saw plenty of naked people.", Talia said in a whisper.

Axel cleared his throat. "Yes, before and after the shift and not like this. Besides, I'm celibate not a eunuch!"

Talia stifled a giggle. Everything since Talia and Damon marked each other was gut-wrenching and Axel's comical predicament made Talia's tense nerves snap.

"You think it's funny?", he sneered, and he might look intimidating if not for the redness of his face.

Talia's shoulders shook from suppressed laughter.

"Shh!", Cassandra shushed them. If they were spotted like this, they will be seen as peepers, and that can't be a good thing.

"Who are you?", a stern voice came from behind, and Talia, Axel, and Cassandra froze.

The trio whipped their heads that way to see a slender woman with chocolate-colored skin. She had golden markings on her arms and face, and a golden cloth over her precious parts below the waistline.

Talia noticed that the woman didn't have bells around her ankles, and the scent of herbs from the fire masked her scent. With all the singing, they didn't hear her approach. They were careless.

The woman crossed her arms under her bare breasts, giving them a lift and Axel swallowed audibly.

Talia stood up first and greeted the scarcely dressed woman. "My name is Talia. These are Axel and Cassandra. I apologize. Our intention was not to sneak up on you. We wanted to ensure there are no dangers before we approach you."

Talia stopped talking when she realized that there was no more singing and jingling around the bonfire, and she could feel many eyes on her back.

"Continue", the woman demanded.

Axel cleared his throat and put his hand on Talia's shoulder, silently telling her that he will take over. "I am Alpha Axel, from the Midnight Guardians pack. We are seeking witches. Are you one of them?"

The woman cocked an eyebrow. "Witches?"

Axel nodded while struggling mightily to maintain eye contact and not look at her two peaks that rose and fell with her breathing.

"Our friend was influenced by black runes, and we hope to find a way to dispel it.", Axel said and turned to Cassandra. 'Show her the parchment with runes', he said through the mind-link.

Cassandra shuffled to get the parchment from her backpack.

The woman's brows furrowed when she saw the writings.

"You are not from here.", she said flatly.

"No. We came from far away." Axel didn't want to mention the portal. He was still not sure if those were witches or just girls frolicking in the forest. And the fact that she didn't give them her name, or any other

relevant information was rubbing him the wrong way. "Do you know of witches? If yes, can you point us in the right direction so we can be on our way?"

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The woman ignored Axel's questions. She turned to look at the parchment that was in Cassandra's hand. "Where did you get that?"

"It was passed onto me from my teacher.", Cassandra responded.

"You do dark magic?", the woman asked stiffly.

Cassandra opened her mouth to respond and then closed it. She had a feeling that just responding 'yes' was not a wise move.

"I am the Oracle in the Midnight Guardians pack. I perform ceremonies and cast spells when needed."

"Dark magic?"

Cassandra swallowed hard. "We don't look at it as dark or white. It's just magic."

The woman turned to Talia. "And you? Are you also doing magic?"

Talia shook her head. "I don't know how to do magic. That's why we are here. The man who got affected by black runes is my lover. He was unconscious for three days and when he woke up, he was not himself. I need to find witches so I can get him back."

"Who cast dark magic on your lover?"

Talia gestured toward Cassandra and the woman's eyebrows shot up.

"And you are traveling together?"

"She is here to explain what she did. She is harmless.", Talia said.

"She uses black runes, and you call her harmless?"

"Her spells require preparations, and we are keeping an eye on her.", Talia responded.

"And she took away my powers.", Cassandra blurted out.

Talia gritted her teeth. Why was Cassandra talking?

The woman eyed Talia suspiciously. "You took away her powers? Didn't you say you don't do magic?"

"It's not the same. I don't need to draw diagrams or chant."

"Show me."

'Liseli', Talia called. 'We need something impressive and non-intimidating.'

'I'm on it', Liseli responded. 'Lift your hand.'

Talia's hand started glowing in silvery light and the woman looked at it with curiosity. Slowly, very slowly, the woman reached for Talia's hand and audible gasps came from behind but Talia didn't dare to

turn and see what was going on there. She guessed that all women who were dancing gathered and were observing this interaction.

The woman's fingers touched the silvery light and her eyebrows shot up in surprise.

She flattened her palm and placed it in front of Talia's with only an inch between them, and the light flickered between their palms.

After a few long seconds, the woman lowered her hand. "Your power is pure."

Her lips lifted into a smile. "I am Cornelia, the priestess of the Silver Flame coven."

Talia relaxed a bit. Cornelia definitely approved, and she said that she belongs to a coven! "You are a witch?"

Cornelia nodded and gestured behind Talia, Axel, and Cassandra. "We all are. We will take you to the high priestess and she will decide what to do with you."

Talia turned to see more than a dozen women standing on the other side of the bush and observing them. Talia smiled and nodded in greeting, hoping that their curiosity was a sign they will be friendly.

Cassandra was reserved because her instincts told her they don't like her much due to the black runes business.

As for Axel, he was staring at his shoes like they were the most interesting thing he has ever seen.

Chapter 476 A deal with witches (1)

A walk through the forest was accompanied by soft jingling from the bells that witches had around their ankles.

The witches were observing newcomers and spoke in whispers.

Talia was looking around while trying to figure out where they were going. There were no houses or anything that could be called a dwelling.

They stopped at the bottom of a precipice whose top disappeared into the darkness.

"This way...", Cornelia called, and she stepped straight into a rock that shimmered as Cornelia's form disappeared.

Talia reluctantly extended her hand to see her fingers sinking into a rock like it was not there. It was an illusion. She wondered if her senses would be fooled by this, but she didn't have time to stop and focus.

Talia was first to get in, with Alex behind her and Cassandra trailing behind.

All three of them paused at the intricate carvings in the hallway that was bathed in the warm yellow light of an unknown source. It was like the whole ceiling was glowing. It was fantastic.

After several twists and turns, the left side of the hallway opened up with archways to reveal a colorful garden that looked mystical under the shadows the moonlight created.

They passed by several small groups of scarcely dressed women lingering in the hallways, making Axel lower his gaze and Talia wondered where the men were. She didn't see a single one.

Eventually, they stopped in front of a door.

"The High Priestess is expecting you.", Cornelia said and pushed the door open.

Talia entered gingerly and observed a big room with stone walls that looked like a study. There were freestanding bookshelves filled with books, a few figurines, and tapestry hung on walls. The ceiling glowed in the same warm yellow light as hallways, but it was brighter in here.

In the middle of the room were three chairs facing a big desk made of dark wood, and a small woman with blonde hair behind it.

The woman appeared to be in her late forties, but the sharpness in her light blue eyes hinted at wisdom worth centuries. Her body was slender and delicate, just like those women they saw dancing around the bonfire in the forest.

Axel exhaled in relief when he saw that the woman was wearing a white tunic. It will be easier to look at her without her body being exposed.

"I am Evanora, the High Priestess of the Silver Flame Coven. I hear you are looking for me.", she said with a smile that was more predatory than warm.

"Yes, we need your help, and we appreciate your willingness to see us on such short notice.", Talia responded. "My name is Talia, and these are Axel and Cassandra."

The woman spread her hands, gesturing to three chairs that were facing her desk.

"Tell me about it."

"My lover was influenced by dark magic. Black runes, to be precise. Somehow, it impacted his memory, and he doesn't feel the mate bond..."

"Mate bond?", Evanora's question interrupted Talia. "You are a werewolf?"

Talia confirmed. "We all are."

Evanora took a deep breath. "You don't smell like it."

Talia remembered that they all took herbs. "We usually bathe in herbs that temporarily diminish our scents." A small lie, but Talia thought it was fine.

Evanora's eyes darted from Talia to Axel and then to Cassandra, examining their features cautiously like she was not sure if they are really werewolves. After some time, she said, "You came through the portal."

That was not a question.

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Talia could feel the air in the room stiffening, as Evanora's hostility rose and she wondered if she made a mistake. Was she not supposed to reveal who they are and from where they came? But, Evanora would figure it out eventually and then they would be caught in a lie and things would escalate. The only thing Talia could do was tell the truth.

"We came through the portal.", Talia confirmed and when Evanora frowned, Talia decided to give background as well. "We don't know why our ancestors closed off the portal. Actually, until recently, we were not aware that portals exist. After I found out that my mate is influenced by black runes, I came to Cassandra to search for answers. She didn't know much about runes, but she remembered legends about you and that lead us to find out about the portals", Talia said in one breath.

"I see.", Evanora said stiffly. "Is the portal still open?"

Talia glanced at Axel. She felt the energy fluctuations while scanning the surroundings with her senses, but she didn't know if it was wise to confirm that the portal was open. What if witches decide to sneak attack the Midnight Guardians pack?

But then... witches can go to the portal and check for themselves.

Talia's anxiety swelled.

Kai, Meg, and Tyler knew where Talia and Axel went, and they arranged for patrols to be in that area, just in case, but still... no one would expect an attack.

Axel responded, "I believe it is open. But no one will come through. You can rest at ease. After our business here is done, I hope we can keep the portal open and discuss further collaborations that will benefit both sides."

"Until the portal closes again.", Evanora spat, obviously displeased by this possibility, and Talia wondered about the circumstances behind closing the portal in the first place.

"No. It won't close.", Axel said with finality. "But both sides need to agree on keeping it open."

"How can you guarantee that your Alpha won't close the portal?"

Talia opened her mouth. "That's because..."

Talia stopped talking when Axel squeezed her hand.

Axel stood up and bowed a little. "I apologize for not introducing myself properly. I am Alpha Axel, Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack. Talia is my sister and that is Cassandra, the pack Oracle."

Evanora nodded, but the lack of reaction told them that she already knew this information.

Axel sat back on his chair. "I hope that we can keep the portal business for later and focus on resolving the problem of black runes. Cassandra is the one who cast the spell and she can tell you exactly what she did. We hope you can tell us how to reverse it."

Evanora smiled a little. "Of course. I can look into it, but first, we should discuss payment."

"Whatever you want, as long as it's in my power, I will agree.", Talia said quickly.

"That's a generous promise.", Evanora responded. "But it's not whatever I want. We work on an equal exchange. In order to get something, you need to give something of equal value. That's how we ensure that the balance is maintained."

Talia blinked. "Equal value? What is equal to black runes?"

Evanora cocked an eyebrow. "Is that what you came here to ask for? Black runes? I thought you want to save your mate."

Talia bit her lower lip. Does Evanora want something of equal value to Damon? But there was nothing more valuable than Damon. Even if Talia gave them all the things she had, it wouldn't match the value of Damon's pinky finger.

"I don't understand.", Talia said.

"I do.", Axel chimed in. "Equal value. A mate for a mate. Right?"

Evanora's smile widened. "You are a smart Alpha."

Axel steeled his resolve. "I will pay for her."

Chapter 477 A deal with witches (2)

"What? No!", Talia exclaimed. "What do you mean, a mate for a mate? You can't do that, Axel. You didn't even meet your mate!"

"Let me do this, Talia.", Axel said. "I owe you a lifetime of lost childhood."

"It was not your fault!"

"Maybe it's not my fault, but I feel guilty. You grew up alone, surrounded by strangers, while I enjoyed the perks of being part of an Alpha family. I was raised to be an Alpha. Alpha takes care of his people, and you ARE my people, Talia. By telling me not to do this, you are telling me not to be an Alpha." He

turned to Evanora. "You agree, right? Talia is just a girl, and I am an Alpha. It is more beneficial for you to make a deal with me than with her. I agree to pay in her stead."

Evanora eyed him suspiciously and Axel hoped that she won't figure out that Talia is an Alpha also. They didn't mention that to anyone since they passed through the portal, and if witches couldn't detect they are werewolves, then they couldn't determine the strengths of their wolves either. At least that's what Axel hoped for.

Evanora extended her hand and before Talia could react, Axel put his hand into Evanora's, and a white light flashed upon contact.

"It's done.", Evanora said.

"No...", Talia said shakily. "You can't, Axel."

"It's OK, Talia. I said I will help you get your mate back, and I will do that." He cupped her cheeks to make her look at him. "Our parents made the mistake of worrying about the future so much that they neglected to see the present. I won't repeat their mistakes. Our priority is to get Damon back and we will worry about everything else later. The time is running out. Trust in the Moon Goddess. There is a reason we are here and I'm confident the reason is not that we return home empty-handed."

Talia was never so conflicted in her life. She didn't want Axel to give up on his mate, but then... was that the deal? What would the witches do? Come and take Axel's mate away? Or his firstborn child? Talia didn't understand, but she knew that Axel was right about one thing: the time was running out.

Cassandra observed all this without making a sound, and when she saw that everyone turned to look at her, she scrambled to get her stuff out of the backpack she was carrying.

Step by step, Cassandra explained how she cast a spell on Damon.

Evanora listened to all this with interest, asked questions, and took notes occasionally.

When Cassandra was done, Evanora turned to Talia. "You said that he is under the effect of black runes? How do you know that?"

"He couldn't remember me, and he didn't feel our bond.", Talia responded.

"How do you know it's the runes? The spell Cassandra described works on a person who is in the circle. The moment he stepped out, the effect would wear off."

Talia shook her head. "I saw runes flickering on his skin. And when I entered the circle, I was not impacted."

Evanora blinked. "You entered this circle, and the runes didn't impact you?"

Talia confirmed.

"She is blessed by the Moon Goddess.", Cassandra said. "The runes had no effect on her."

Talia gritted her teeth. This was the second time for Cassandra to blabber in the same evening. What's her problem? She was the one who hurt Damon, but then she was super-helpful, so Talia lowered her guard, but now it looked like Cassandra was setting her up.

Evanora narrowed her eyes at Cassandra. "Excuse me if I find that difficult to believe. What does this blessing mean?"

Talia realized that Evanora wanted proof, but Talia didn't trust her and she needed to respond quickly before Cassandra says more things that might get her into trouble.

"I have more power than an average member of our pack, and it happened under the moonlight, so Cassandra thinks there is more to it. However, I stepped on a rune and ruined it while walking toward him, and I believe I broke the spell or at least weakened it."

There were a few seconds of stiffening silence before Evanora nodded. "True. Removing a rune will break the spell. But runes can't be removed while the spell is in progress without a price to pay." After a brief pause, Evanora continued, "We will get back to it later. You said that he had runes on his body. Do you remember which ones?"

Talia looked at runes drawn on the parchment and pointed. "This one and this one."

At first, Talia thought it was random, but during her three days-long stay in a cave, while tending to Damon, she confirmed there were two runes.

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After looking at the runes Talia pointed at, Evanora said, "You should be happy."

Talia didn't get it. "I should?"

Evanora nodded. "This spell is designed to block the energy of the person affected, shut down his senses and his emotions, making him an empty shell. This rune will seal his spiritual energy. And this one will remove the thing he loves the most. The fact that he didn't remember you should tell you how much you mean to him."

'Seal spiritual energy!', Liseli shouted in Talia's head. 'That's why I couldn't reach Sapa!'

Talia smiled sadly. She should be happy that Damon loves her above everything else, but what's the point of it if he can't remember her?

"Is there a way to reverse it?", Talia asked.

"Yes. But it won't be simple."

Talia steeled her resolve. "Tell me what needs to be done."

Evanora stood up and pulled a string that hung on the wall. A few seconds later, Cornelia entered the room with her breasts bouncing with every step she took and Axel was back to staring at his shoes. He thought that women in the forest were (nearly) naked because they were dancing, but Cornelia still had only one flimsy garment to cover her crotch area.

"We need to create a spell that will remove black runes.", Evanora said. "Summon other priestesses."

Axel whimpered. Can he be excused from this if more naked women come in? At this rate, he will pass out from a prolonged erection and a serious case of blue balls.

Cassandra perked up. She will get to watch witches at work!

Cornelia scurried out to execute orders that Evanora gave, and Talia asked, "Can you tell me more about the deal you made? What are you expecting from Axel in return for helping me?"

Evanora looked at Talia seriously. "Your brother showed bravery and care by stepping in to pay in your place. You should respect that and not question it."

"I respect him, but I want to know how much it will cost."

"Why?", Evanora challenged her. "If it's too much, will you give up on your mate?"

Talia pressed her lips into a line. What kind of a question was that?

Chapter 478 A deal with witches (3)

"I appreciate your concern, Talia.", Axel said. "But Evanora said it will be of equal value and I am ready for it. As an Alpha, you learn that sometimes you need to make tough decisions, but this was not one of those."

Talia's chin shivered. "Oh, Axel..." She choked a sob. "It's not fair that I got a brother, and you already need to give up things for me. How will I ever repay you?"

Axel chuckled. "No wonder Damon clung to you like that. He knew you will be an amazing Luna. Always thinking about others first." He took her hand into his and gave her a squeeze. "Fight for what's yours and be happy, Talia. That's how you will repay me. And when the time comes for me to pay the fee, if you don't agree, fight for me as well."

Evanora cackled. "That's not how it works."

Axel lifted his chin defiantly. "But that's exactly how it works. The deal is that I will pay you equal value, and I will. There is nothing I can do if my sister comes to take that back."

Evanora blinked and regarded Axel seriously. "You are a smart man, but don't think I will make it easy for you."

"I'm sure that my awesome sister will find a way. She won't allow me to suffer."

Talia was touched. "Thank you for believing in me."

Evanora snorted. "How touching. But we should leave sentimental stuff for later. We have work to do, and I believe you mentioned you are in a hurry..."

The priestesses trickled in one by one making the large office space appear cramped.

To Axel's horror, they were all topless and close. Too close. He was sweating. What the heck was this place? His personal hell?

"Do you mind if I sit on the side?", Axel asked. He didn't want to leave Talia unprotected, but the only one in danger was him because this was too much. Without waiting for a response, he took his chair and sat in the far corner.

"I believe that most of us are here.", Cornelia said while looking at the women present. "A few sisters just woke up, and they will come a bit later."

"Alright. We can start.", Evanora announced. "Here is what we are facing..."

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Talia and Cassandra both listened carefully to Evanora explaining the situation to the women in the room. She used some unknown words and Cassandra was writing down things like she knew what Evanora was talking about.

After Evanora was done, the women quickly divided tasks with Cornelia taking the lead. They needed to make potions and create chants, and they also discussed how and where to perform the spell.

"It will be the best if you do it.", Evanora said to Talia.

Talia was sure that Evanora was talking to someone else. But everyone was looking at her, so she had to ask, "Me?"

Evanora confirmed. "The spell removed you from his mind and heart. It's best if you are the one to remove black magic." Seeing that Talia didn't respond, Evanora continued, "The effect will be strongest under the light that dispels the darkness. Full Moon."

Talia's brows came together. If her calculations were right, the full moon in the human realm was still several days away, and here, that would be several months! Can she stay that long without Damon?

The idea of Damon spending a few days out there with Marcy while not remembering Talia was making her heart tighten.

"Do I need to wait until then?", Talia pleaded.

"If you do it earlier, the chance of failure will increase.", Evanora said.

Cornelia got an idea. "We can make a suppressing potion. Its effect is temporary, but it will negate the runes."

The other priestesses murmured in agreement.

Evanora's lips lifted into a smile, and she looked at Talia. "That will cost you extra."

"I will pay for it!", Cassandra exclaimed, surprising everyone. She cleared her throat and stepped in front of Evanora. "Allow me to participate in making the potion. Or at least to watch, and I will pay."

Cassandra was not stupid. She knew that this might be a double-edged sword, but her desire to learn magic was overwhelming. She was prideful because she was the only Oracle in the pack, the only one with knowledge of this ancient magic while others could either serve as assistants or watch. How wonderful it will be if she can learn from the witches!

"Are you asking to pay the fee, or to be taken in as an apprentice?", Evanora asked dryly.

"I know what I did was wrong.", Cassandra said. "My ignorance is not an excuse. However, now that I've met you, I realized that I barely scratched the surface. In my desire for magic, I took shortcuts while disregarding consequences, and I hope that you can show me the way. I promise to follow your orders. I will pay the fee for the potion and stay here to clean or assist with whatever you need until you tell me that it's enough. You won't regret it."

Seeing that Evanora didn't react to Cassandra's speech, Cornelia stepped forward. "We never refuse a child who wants to learn. I will be in charge of the potion, so I will make the deal with you."

Cornelia extended her hand, and Cassandra quickly clasped it. White light flashed when their hands connected and Cornelia said, "It's done."

Cornelia's lips lifted in a wicked smile. "I hope you won't regret this."

Cassandra's hair stood on ends and she wondered if she made a mistake.

Talia had no idea how to react to this second deal and even though she knew that Cassandra did it for selfish reasons, Talia was grateful.

The door opened silently, and Talia glanced to see a young woman slipping through the crack. She had shoulder-length blonde hair and light blue eyes that sparkled. A silky white fabric covered her crotch area, and otherwise, her slender body was revealed, matching the appearance of other priestesses.

"Yasmin", Evanora called. "How nice of you to join us."

Yasmin stopped in her tracks. "I apologize, mother, for running late. I was sleeping when Cornelia called and I had difficulty waking up."

"Well, you are awake now when the work is done.", Evanora said with disapproval in her voice and mumbled under her breath, "When will you learn responsibility?"

Talia suppressed a smile. Evanora was respected and powerful, yet this little woman was pushing her buttons. It was evident that Yasmin being late was not the first time.

Talia glanced at Yasmin and her eyebrows shot up when she saw the girl looking intently toward the corner.

Talia turned in slow motion to see Axel standing there and staring at Yasmin like she was the only woman in the room.

It took Talia one long second to recognize that look. Mates.

Yasmin moved toward Axel, and Axel moved toward her, and the priestesses moved so that the newly mated couple can meet in the middle of the room.

By now, all women were looking at them, and Evanora frowned while trying to figure out what was going on.

"I'm Axel...", he said, and she responded with a dreamy smile, "Yasmin."

Axel reached for Yasmin's hand and they both jerked upon contact.

"No!", Evanora exclaimed, and Talia got a start, unsure why Evanora would react this way.

Chapter 479 Yasmin

Cornelia put her hand over her wide-open mouth. "Yasmin found her soulmate." The voice was not loud, but the room was silent, so everyone heard it.

Evanora looked like she was about to pass out, so Talia moved closer to Cornelia to ask, "Witches also have mates?"

"Every creature has a soulmate. No one was made to walk alone.", Cornelia responded. "We are children of nature, and we are in tune with the energies so when we meet our other half, we know he is the one. However, Yasmin can feel it more than most of us because she has the blood of a werewolf..."

"Cornelia!", Evanora hissed a warning for the priestess to stop talking and Cornelia closed her mouth so quickly that her teeth chattered.

It took Talia a moment to process this information. Everyone called Evanora by her title, but Yasmin addressed her as 'mother'. Was Evanora Yasmin's biological mother? And if Yasmin has a blood of a werewolf, does that mean her father was a werewolf? Evanora and a werewolf!?

But... everyone they met so far was female. Was it possible that Evanora's lover was a werewolf and they separated when the portal was closed? That would explain Evanora's bitterness at the mentioning of werewolves and the portal but... that happened ages ago. How old was Evanora? How old was Yasmin?

Or maybe there were more portals or Yasmin's father was nearby, and Talia allowed her imagination to see the clues when there were none.

Talia realized that she was looking at her sister-in-law. And then she remembered the deal Axel agreed to pay for in Talia's stead.

Will this impact the deal they made to dispel black runes from Damon?

A mate for a mate. What could that mean? Talia couldn't believe that Axel just jumped into that without clarifying it. It was vague and open to interpretation.

Talia hoped that Evanora won't try to separate Axel from his mate because that would hurt Yasmin also, and it was obvious that Evanora was fond of the girl.

Talia was lost in her thoughts, and she looked up in time to see Yasmin grabbing Axel's hand and yanking him toward the door. He followed as possessed.

"You are NOT allowed to couple!", Evanora shouted after them. "Did you hear me!?"

Priestesses giggled as Yasmin completely ignored her. Oh, they were going to do the naughty, definitely.

"If you bite her, I will break you!", Evanora exclaimed and cursed under her breath when the door closed behind Axel.

Talia was glad that Evanora didn't do anything extreme to prevent Axel to be with his mate, even though the High Priestess was visibly upset.

"He will not mistreat her.", Talia said to Axel's defense. "Axel is a good man. He kept himself pure for his mate."

Evanora cringed at this last part. Did Talia need to mention purity?

"It will be alright. Soulmates are made for each other. He is exactly what Yasmin needs, and she is what he was looking for.", Cornelia said while putting her arms around Evanora who was still glaring at the closed door, but her expression softened after Cornelia's words.

Seeing that Evanora calmed down a bit, Cornelia turned to the other priestesses in the room. "Yasmin was blessed to find her other half and we should celebrate. This is the first time in more than a century that our sister found a soulmate!"

Priestesses exploded in cheers and high-pitched noises.

Talia blinked. Did Cornelia say, more than a century? She took a mental note to stop guessing people's age based on appearances.

One priestess sneaked close to Talia to ask, "Are there more males from where you came from?"

Talia nodded. "Yes. I will bring more next time if Evanora allows it. Or you can go back with me and try your luck in finding a mate."

"Stop tempting them!", Evanora hissed, and turned to priestesses who were looking at Talia with sparkles in their eyes, "We have work to do. Cornelia, divide work between potions and spells."

"What about the celebration?", a voice was heard from the back.

Evanora looked at eager faces directed her way, and she gave in. "We will have a fest tomorrow at sunset."

Talia smiled a little as this was a sign that Evanora might give Axel some hard time, but she won't stand between Axel and his mate.

It was a reason to celebrate.

Talia remembered Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia. Would they be upset that they will miss this occasion? Probably. But then... that duo did so much wrong, maybe this will be their punishment or at least part of it.

She saw that priestesses were leaving the study, and Cassandra was sticking close to Cornelia while ignoring Talia's presence.

Talia turned to ask Evanora, "Can I help somehow?"

"Not at this point.", Evanora said. "I'm sure you are tired. Someone will escort you to a room and we will send you food. Take a few hours to rest."

"Thank you.", Talia responded. She was not tired nor hungry. She really wanted to keep busy knowing that the moment she finds solitude, Damon will come to her mind, but she didn't want to be in the way either.

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Axel had no idea how he found himself in the room that was filled with a sensually sweet feminine scent with nutmeg undertones. Jasmine.

He remembered that he was trying to hide his presence in the corner. The study was full of nearly naked females that were shuffling and sometimes coming dangerously close to him with their scents mixing and muddling his mind.

But then he heard a melodious voice a second before the exotic scent of Jasmine reached him, gentle yet overpowering everything else.

The world faded, leaving only him and the blue-eyed beauty in front of him, and then he heard a voice in his head, "Mate".

Axel couldn't believe that was happening. He was familiar with every unmated female in the Midnight Guardians pack, and he traveled far and wide with the hope to meet his mate, and he never imagined that she would be in a different realm, a place he didn't know about until one day ago.

When their hands touched, an electric current zapped through his arm, catching him by surprise, and confirming that this was real. He found his mate, and she was stunning.

Blonde hair ending at her shoulders framed her exquisite face and even though she was nearly naked, he ended up staring into her light blue eyes that were curious and emotional, and there was an animalistic element he couldn't put his finger on. Perfect.

Did she say her name was Yasmin?

Such an appropriate name for a girl that smells of Jasmine and looks like a delicate white flower. His flower.

She grabbed his hand and he followed obediently, not caring where she was leading him because even if she was going to a raging volcano, he would accompany her willingly.

And here they were. Not in a volcano, but in a room. Just the two of them.

Yasmin was standing half a step from him and observing his expression with sparkles in her eyes and... that was it.

Was he supposed to do something now? Axel was not sure.

He decided to look around.

There was a sitting area in the corner with two chairs on each side of a low table, a desk with another chair, and then there was a bed. He swallowed hard.

Axel knew how this should go. They should get to know each other over dinner and a movie before they progress to kissing and other stuff, but there was no restaurant and definitely no movie theatre and the fact that she was technically naked was not helping him think.

Chapter 480 An Alpha and a witch (1)

Unsure about what to do next, Axel thought it would be good to talk a bit, to break the ice.

"Yasmin...", he called, and her smile widened. "Tell me something about yourself."

Yasmin blinked. "Do you really want to talk?"

Axel cleared his throat. "Is there something else you want to do?"

"Ugh!", a strained groan formed in his throat when she cupped his family jewels without any warning and her cheeks warmed when she felt him hard under her touch.

"We are soulmates.", she said. "Don't you feel the attraction?"

Axel nodded. Of course, he felt the attraction. More than attraction, he felt her hand down there, touching his precious parts!

Yasmin's little tongue darted to moisten her lips. "Don't you feel the need to copulate and claim me as yours?"

Axel nodded again and his eyes flashed in shock when her thumb stroked his throbbing cock. The touch was gentle, yet firm, and he thought that he will explode right then and there.

Axel whimpered. Why did she look at him like she will eat him alive? Shouldn't he be the one to do the eating? But she was so beautiful, with smooth skin and perfect features and he feared that he will spoil something if he touches her.

She glanced at him from top to bottom, observing that he had clothes on. Too many clothes. "Are you ashamed of your body?"

Axel was not sure why she asked him that. "What? No."

"So, then... Is it me? Do you not like what you see?"

"What?"

Yasmin's smile fell, and her brows came together. "Are you not willing? Am I not to your liking?"

She started moving her hand away from his crotch, and he quickly grabbed her wrist to press her hand back there.

"Don't you feel this?", he spoke in a strained voice. "It means you are to my liking." Actually, he never saw a woman more beautiful than Yasmin. She even smelled great. Everything about her was perfect, for him.

"Then? What's the problem?"

Axel's face exploded in blush. It was difficult to focus on the conversation when she was almost naked, and the fact that she was touching him was not helping.

"I never did anything like this. I don't want to do something you won't like."

Yasmin's eyebrows shot up in realization. "You never touched a woman?"

Axel lowered his head in embarrassment. He knew that he shouldn't be ashamed that he was never intimate with a woman, but the fact that he didn't know what to do while Yasmin looked confident was eating him alive.

She took his free hand that was resting by his side and raised it higher.

Axel swallowed hard at the sensation of the soft flesh in his palm and the electric charges that shot from there to his shoulder. His stomach flipped at the realization that he was holding her left breast with her hand on top of his, but he didn't miss that her cheeks were crimson, and her breathing became heavy.

"You can feel our bond?", Axel asked, when he remembered how she said they are soulmates. He heard that humans don't feel the bond, and since he didn't smell a wolf in her, he assumed she will be the same.

Yasmin nodded. "Wherever you touch me, it's electric." Her cheeks heated more. "You are the first man to put hands on me."

"Oh...", a silly sound escaped Axel's lips and he watched as Yasmin guided his other hand around her while stepping toward him.

Her arms snaked around his neck, and she got on her toes to speak into his lips. "You are my soulmate. We are meant to be together, and I love the fact that I am your first because you will be my first also."

Before Axel could process this information, her lips landed on his, and his brain short-circuited.

For a few long seconds, they just stood like that, with their lips pressing on each other without moving a muscle.

Axel could feel his wolf stirring, urging him to pounce on the woman in front of him and claim her as his, but Axel suppressed his urges. Yasmin was fair and delicate, and he didn't want to act like a savage.

They didn't know which one of them moved first, but little by little their lips started gliding against each other, and Axel released Yasmin's soft peak to circle her with both of his arms and pull her close to him.

She was so small and fragile compared to him, and he wanted to envelop her in his presence and protect her forever.

Yasmin arched into Axel and pulled him closer, and a small sigh escaped her lips, stirring him to kiss her more.

"By the Moon Goddess, you taste amazing...", he mumbled into her lips and then he kissed her again even though she giggled at his words.

His kisses turned hungry and sloppy, and she was lost in his presence.

It was the first time for Yasmin to feel such a firm body against hers and it sent tingles to her brain. She wished that he wore fewer clothes and she started tugging his shirt out of his pants.

Axel had no idea if she used her hands or magic to undress him, but in less than a minute he was naked and on the bed with Yasmin.

He thought that this will be challenging, yet somehow... he knew exactly which areas of Yasmin's body to kiss and which ones to caress to ignite the fire within her. Was it because of the mate bond? Or was he a natural? It didn't matter.

The scent of her arousal hit him hard and when his hand ventured between her legs, both of them shuddered as his finger sank between her drenched folds.

Axel never felt anything so warm and soft, and the way her body arched spurred him to touch her more down there.

He quickly found a small peak that was like a button for him to caress and make her moan. He loved the way she gripped his back and kissed him fervently, but the best were moments when she lost control and gasped into his mouth.

"Yasmin... Yasmin...", he chanted while kissing her lips and neck and wherever he could reach, his fingers moving faster with each stroke.

Her hips moved unexpectedly, and his finger slid inside her.

They both froze.

"Are you alright?", Axel asked in a strained voice.

"Please...", she breathed, her eyes wide open due to sudden intrusion down there, but she didn't dislike it. "Don't stop."

His lips lifted into a smug smile when he realized that she wanted more, and he slowly pushed his finger deeper inside her, making her squirm under his ministrations.

Yasmin felt his hot cock grinding on her side, and her hand moved from his back toward the front. She really wanted to feel him out.

Axel shuddered when she caressed his hard cock that was aching to explore her depths and he hoped that she won't stroke him much because he didn't want to come before they started the real thing. He could describe her touch as magical.