

Alphas Bride 51

Chapter 51 - Clothes Make A Woman

Damon arranged the underwear in the drawer and turned to his right.

He blinked a few times at the sight of Talia who was wrapped in a towel, staring at him without moving a muscle.

The white fluffy towel with yellow designs at its edges was wide enough to cover Talia from her chest to just below her private areas, like a super-short mini dress.

Talia gripped the towel with both hands until her knuckles turned white, unknowingly pushing her breasts higher and making her cleavage stand out more, and Damon was not sure where to look first.

He really wanted to yank that towel out of the way.

Damon smirked and spoke in a deep voice, "Talia, are you here to seduce me?"

Talia's face exploded in blush and Damon's sly smile increased when he saw that even her ears were red.

Will she pass out? He would give her mouth-to-mouth anytime.

Talia clutched the towel tighter. "Clothes... I didn't get... I need... clothes...", she struggled to speak coherently. Alpha Damon was too much. What seducing? Who would seduce the Devil? And how can he think about those things when he already has so many women around him?

Talia saw clearly what Marcy did while kneeling between Alpha Damon's legs only a few days ago, and Talia was confident that Cassie is here for a similar reason. But that was not Talia's business. She came to the closet with the intention to get clothes, but now she felt like crying.

Damon wanted to tease Talia a bit more, but seeing that she was nearly hyperventilating, he decided to stop.

"Do you know what you want to wear?"

Talia shook her head in response. She really didn't think about it. Actually, other than taking a quick glance at the bags and boxes, she didn't look at the contents.

Damon reached for one knee-length dress, but he paused at the thought about how it will reveal Talia's legs. Legs that are only for him to see.

He looked at Talia's legs which were on full display because the towel reached just below her private parts.

They were long and lean, and he already imagined them around his waist and the pressure in his crotch area increased. Fuck! She is perfect.

Talia stood at the door of the closet and squirmed under his scorching gaze. She didn't have the courage to get in the closet, but running away didn't seem wise either, so she stood in the spot.

Damon reached into the drawer and got panties and a matching bra, and then one light blue jeans and a white top.

"Wear these..."

Without looking, Talia grabbed clothes, mumbled 'thank you', and swiftly disappeared into the bathroom.

Damon shook his head helplessly. He reached for his crotch area, adjusted himself, and then continued arranging clothes in the closet.

He was not sure what was stranger, the fact that he is so easily aroused around Talia, the part where he is not acting on it, or the reality where he is not finding any other woman attractive.

There was nothing wrong with his eyes. He could see that other women have curves and appeal, but he had no urge to be with them, almost like all of them are lower class... lower class compared to Talia.

He let out a long breath.

Damon brought Talia here with the hope that the crazed craving for the sweet citrusy scent of freesia will subside or maybe he gets used to this madness brought to him by the addictive sparks, but so far, it was only increasing. At this rate, Talia will be the end of him.

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Talia dressed up in the bathroom, fixed her hair, and finished breakfast in record time, grateful that Alpha Damon didn't come out of the closet.

When she was ready, Talia peeked into the closet as Damon finished sorting the last few pieces of clothing.

His back was facing her, and Talia took a moment to observe in his V-shaped torso that was clearly visible because his shirt was tucked into his pants. Jeans that Alpha Damon wore were tight in the hip area, as if designed to emphasize the toned muscles of his buttocks.

Talia silently acknowledged that Damon's physique is impressive.

Damon is not too muscular, like some warriors she saw in the Red Moon pack. Damon's body is well proportioned with just the right amount of muscles, and she remembered the sensation when she slept next to Alpha Damon, with her head on his shoulder and her arm over his abs.

Every part of his body was hard. Well, maybe not his raven black hair. That looked silky.

The image of the black wolf from her dream popped into her mind. He had black fur that was very soft, and his eyes were icy-blue, just like Damon's. That was a very vivid dream and Talia remembered it clearly, even the scent of the forest and dark chocolate, almost like it was not a dream.

"I bought you these clothes and I want you to wear them.", Damon said without turning to look at her and Talia hoped that he didn't notice her gawking at him. "No more rainbows, kittens, and unicorns. You are not a child."

"OK.", she responded sheepishly. "You said that we are in a hurry, and I'm ready, so...", her voice trailed.

Damon turned to face Talia and cocked his eyebrow in approval.

Jeans were fitting her well, and the white short-sleeved shirt hugged her breasts and fell loosely, reaching almost to her hips.

"Turn around, let me see you.", he demanded, but it was more of a plea than an order.

Talia turned slowly and when she completed the rotation, Talia gasped when she realized that Damon crossed the distance between them.

He was only half a step away from her, and his scent made her dizzy. Too close.

"It suits you well.", Damon said in a low voice and reached for the bottom hem of her shirt, feeling the silky fabric.

Talia was visibly flustered. She was not used to people being that close or complimenting her, and Alpha Damon made her nervous.

"Thank you.", she said in a shaky voice and inched away from him. "Are we going now, or...?"

Damon hummed ambiguously before confirming. "We are going."

Talia turned on her heel and headed for the door.

"Talia!"

She froze when Damon called her name.

"Yes?", Talia asked while turning toward him in slow motion and she was confused to see him smirking at her.

"Don't you need shoes?"

Talia wanted to disappear. She was in such a hurry to leave that she forgot she was barefoot.

And where would she leave? Alpha Damon already said that he will take her for an appointment, so it's not like she can escape from him.

Damon watched Talia as she was looking at which shoes to wear and he contacted Maya and Caden through the mind link, 'Where is Cassie?'

'In the garden', Maya responded.

'OK. I'm coming down with Talia in a minute.'

'Do you want me to distract Cassie?', Maya asked.

Damon thought for a moment. He didn't want Cassie to be aware of Talia's presence, but Cassie already saw Talia and the more he hides Talia, the more suspicious it will be. If Cassie thinks of Talia as any other she-wolf, Cassie will not make a fuss.

'No need. As long as Cassie doesn't know that Talia is staying on my floor, it's fine.' And even if she finds out, Damon would come up with some explanation.

Damon and Talia exited the main door when Cassie's voice reached them.

"Alpha Damon! Alpha Damon!"

Cassie stopped in her tracks at the sight of Damon who was holding the door of his black armored Lexus SUV for Talia to enter. He even gave Talia his hand to help her get in!

"Are you going somewhere?", Cassie asked.

"Human town.", Damon responded.

Cassie was irked to see a girl sitting in the front passenger's seat of Damon's car.

With Talia's bruises fading and good clothes, Cassie didn't recognize Talia as the girl from the kitchen that Cassie accused of stealing food.

"Can I join you?"

Damon turned to face Cassie. "I'm taking her for an appointment."

Cassie's eyes darted from Talia to Damon. "Personally? Can't you get someone else to take her?"

"I also have some business in the human town, so it's on the way. Is there anything else I need to report to you, Miss Cassie, or am I allowed to leave?", Damon asked sarcastically, and his face darkened in a second. "What gives you the right to question me?"

Cassie shrunk. "I was only curious. I apologize, Alpha Damon."

"Curiosity killed the cat, Miss Cassie.", Damon said grimly. "It's your luck that you are not a feline. Be careful, Miss Cassie, there is a limit to my patience just how there is a limit of how much your father's identity can protect you."

Cassie jolted when Damon closed the door on the passenger's side, and she watched him as he went on the driver's side of the car.

She couldn't believe this!

He just left with some no-name girl.

Cassie stomped back into the mansion, and she found Maya. "Who is that girl?"

"What girl?"

"The one that Alpha Damon took to human town."

"Why are you asking me? Was I outside? How am I supposed to know which girl went with him? If you didn't realize, I am a busy Beta and I don't have time to waste on idle gossip.", Maya said with a smirk and sashayed away from Cassie.

Cassie felt rage bubbling inside her, but there was nothing she could do.

Besides, if Damon didn't introduce the girl, she was not important. Cassie knows everyone who is important in the Dark Howlers pack, and that girl can't be more than an Omega.

But... would Omega have such good clothes?

What if it's a girl from another pack who came to seduce Damon?

Is that girl the reason why Alpha Damon is always busy? Is he taking her places while Cassie is stuck in the packhouse waiting?

But who is that girl? Cassie is friendly with many misses who have Alphas and Betas for parents and she attends various events. Cassie was quite confident that she never saw Talia.

As a fashionista, Cassie noticed that Talia wore jeans and a silky white short-sleeved shirt, and just by one glance Cassie could estimate that those are not cheap clothes. She even spotted fine lacy details at the edge of the...

Cassie's eyes widened when she remembered that this was not the first time she saw such white fabric with lacy details.

Is it possible that Damon's shopping for clothes from yesterday was for that girl? And Maya and Stephanie took it to the third floor!

Chapter 52 - [Bonus]The Drive To The Human Town

Talia observed the scene between Damon and Cassie, and she was not sure what to think. Why did Alpha Damon treat Cassie coldly? Did they have an argument? Or maybe Cassie offended him somehow.

Just based on the last minute, if Talia didn't witness the scene in the kitchen of Cassie clinging to Damon's arm, Talia would think that Damon doesn't like Cassie. But if he doesn't like her, why would he allow her to stay in the packhouse and call herself his Luna? And the way Cassie looked at Damon definitely insinuated intimacy that goes beyond holding his hand.

It didn't make sense.

This solidified Talia's opinion that Alpha Damon is extremely unstable.

In a way, it made Talia feel better because now Talia knew that she was not the only one to be treated inconsistently by Alpha Damon.

If Talia was not so terrified of him, she would recommend him to see a psychiatrist because his behavior can't be normal.

Everyone around Alpha Damon is on pins and needles while guessing what his mood will be. That's not healthy.

The moment the car started moving and pop music from the radio filled the space, Talia forgot about Cassie and all the drama from the packhouse. She even forgot that she was sitting in the car next to a scary Alpha.

Talia sank in her seat and observed the changing scenery outside. She always loved the outdoors. Since she was mostly stuck in the attic, being outside came with a sense of freedom.

The road snaked through the dense forest that allowed morning sun rays to peek through occasionally, creating a light show that Talia enjoyed even though sudden bursts of light blinded her for a moment.

Just like Talia, Damon also forgot about Cassie the moment he started the car.

The whole cabin of his black armored Lexus SUV was filled with the sweet citrusy scent of freesia and his world was at peace. The only thing that could make it better would be if he and Talia held hands or if she leaned on him, but he didn't have a good excuse for that to happen, so he gripped the steering wheel tightly.

Damon was stealing glances of Talia, and he was happy to see that she relaxed. He took a double-take at the small smile that appeared at the corner of her lips. She was enchanting.

The streets of Darkbourne were not very busy, but the cobblestoned town square with the clocktower in the middle was buzzing with activity.

Damon noticed that Talia straightened up to see better what's going on there.

"They are getting ready for the fair.", Damon said, and Talia nodded without looking at him.

She remembered that Maya told her how there will be a fair happening soon.

"What kind of a fair is it?", Talia asked.

"It's a celebration, but Maya is mostly interested in the fair part which is happening on this square and that's why she described it as such.", Damon responded before giving a lengthy explanation.

"Summer solstice is the day when we celebrate life and new beginnings. It starts in the morning. The whole town participates, and only a handful of stores is open in the morning, while all are closed in the afternoon. People compete in various sports, and there is a parade. Kids make their own floats, and the best ones get rewards in various categories. In the afternoon, vendors open their stalls with games and food in the town square. In the evening, there is music, drinks, and dancing around the bonfire, and it all ends with fireworks."

Damon was talking about normal things, but his deep magnetic voice turned it into the most fascinating story ever and Talia hoped that he will continue talking.

Damon saw that Talia was listening intently, so he added a few more details, "Unmated she-wolves dance barefoot around the bonfire, for Moon Goddess to see and to send them their mate. Girls also make garlands of flowers and give them to their loved ones, with the hope that their affection will be returned."

He really didn't know much more because as a kid, he would usually disappear and do some mischief, and since he became the Alpha, Damon's attendance consisted of watching competitions, giving away prizes, and when the official part is over, he would scoop one or two ladies that will keep him company for the night, and that's it for him. But there was no way he will say that to Talia.

For Talia, Damon's story about the celebration sounded fantastic, and she was confident that Damon gets the most garlands every year.

Damon saw the excitement in her expression. "It's a fun day. You will see."

Talia understood that his explanation was over.

She returned her gaze to the window on her side in time to see the last few houses of Darkbourne before the road took them through the forest again.

She wondered what kind of performances will be included. Will there be a circus? Olivia told her that in the circus, people do all kinds of moves and they walk on a rope that is super-high, and there are animals and magic... and clowns. She really wanted to see that.

Talia never danced or drank alcohol, so she was not sure what to think about the evening activities around the bonfire.

As for the stalls, Talia was excited, but she was sure that playing games and eating food will cost money, and she is broke, so her mood dropped a bit.

She decided to talk to Damon about getting a job, or maybe she should ask him to see the doctor, and then Travis can convince Alpha Damon to allow Talia to work. Damon said that she can work as soon as Travis says that it's OK and convincing the good doctor to give her a pass sounded much easier than negotiating with an unstable Alpha.

After an unknown measure of time, they emerged from the forest and took the three-lane-wide highway. Talia observed that there were many other cars. She wondered if they are out of the Dark Howlers territory.

It didn't take long before Damon took an exit and they ended up on a smaller road that led into a town.

The town was larger than Darkbourne, but there were no skyscrapers, and the tallest building Talia saw was six stories high.

As they approached the city center, the number of people on the streets increased and there were many stores and restaurants.

Talia's face was nearly glued to the tinted glass as she took in the sight in front of her.

She was disappointed when after a right turn they ended up in a side street and she took a note that he parked into the VIP spot of the hospital.

"Do you come here often?", Talia asked, and Damon understood that she was asking because of the parking spot.

"My parents donated to build this place, and I give occasional donations which grants me preferential treatment.", Damon explained before adding, "Travis completed his medical residency here and he arranges appointments for us when needed, which is not very often. They think of us as humans."

Talia understood that there should be no werewolf talks.

The automatic double door opened so that Talia and Damon can step inside.

The entry hall was spacious with sitting arrangements and Talia's attention was drawn to the big screens that were hanging on the wall, displaying information about doctors, nurses, and current wait times.

Both nurses at the registering station had foolish smiles and hearts in their eyes at the sight of Damon. The blonde even nudged the brunette with her elbow. Shameless.

Talia was sure that they didn't notice her at all.

"How can I help you?", one of the nurses asked in a singing voice without removing her amorous gaze from Damon.

"Talia Blake has an appointment.", Damon responded, and Talia blinked when she realized that he was talking about her.

Blake? Where did that come from?

The truth is that Talia didn't know her last name. Since she knows about herself, she was Talia. Just Talia.

'Talia Blake. Talia Blake.', Talia repeated a few times in her mind and concluded that it doesn't sound bad. Actually, she liked it.

The nurse was checking something on her computer before pointing to the left. "Take the second elevator to the third floor and from there follow arrows to the wellness center."

On the third floor, they found a small lounge with dozen of chairs and two benches where a few people were sitting in silence, obviously waiting for their turn.

Damon and Talia took their seats on black metal chairs that had leather upholstery.

Talia observed gray carpet and off-white walls that had abstract paintings to bring a splash of color into the space.

Floor-to-ceiling windows provided ample daylight and a view to the street below, and Talia was itching to go closer and check it out, but she held back that urge because she is not a kid, and she should sit obediently like everyone else. What if Alpha Damon scolds her? The best thing is to not attract attention.

They waited for less than a minute when one middle-aged man exited the door on the right, and his eyes scanned the people in the lounge expectantly.

His face lit up when he saw Damon.

"Mr. Blake...", the man called with a smile.

Chapter 53 - Mrs. Blake

Damon glanced at Talia to confirm that she didn't react when the man called him 'Mr. Blake', and Damon took that as her approval. Yup, she definitely didn't mind using his last name.

There was a time when werewolves didn't have last names. Even in modern times, they identify themselves by the first name, pack they belong to, and their position.

However, since they are coexisting with humans, each werewolf family has a surname. It helps them blend in.

Of course, prominent werewolf families are an exception, because their last name also signifies status, and the surname Blake is like royalty in the society of werewolves from the time before Damon's grandfather.

When Travis was setting up Talia's appointment with the nutritionist, he asked Damon what surname to use because Talia told him that she doesn't have one when he was writing down her personal information. Actually, the lack of Talia's background went beyond just her last name and it told Travis how neglected she was.

"Talia Blake", Damon responded to Travis after a second of silence. It sounded right.

"Blake? Are you sure?", Travis asked, knowing that no one would dare to use Alpha's last name lightly.

"Is that a problem?"

"No, no. Not a problem...", Travis was quick to deny it. Who is he to question his Alpha?

Back to the present...

"It's nice to see you here, but I hope it's nothing serious.", the man spoke excitedly while extending his hand toward Damon for a handshake, and the friendly smile told Talia that the man knows Damon from before. "Dr. Jones is expecting you."

Damon stood up and shook hands with the man before turning to check on Talia who gingerly stood behind him.

"Mr. Mendez, this is Talia. The appointment is for her. I wonder it won't be a problem if I come in with her."

"Not a problem, Mr. Blake. Please, come this way..."

Talia walked after Damon as they made their way through the hallway, and she thought how it's strange that these people call him 'Mr. Blake'. So far, everyone has called him Alpha or Alpha Damon, but humans don't know about the werewolf hierarchy and how scary Alpha Damon can be.

Talia didn't think that 'Blake' fits him. It was too ordinary, and she also heard it not long ago.

'Mr. Blake... Blake...', Talia repeated silently while jogging her memory and her face fell when she realized that only a few minutes ago she heard that last name, but it was tied to her.

Why did Damon say that her name is Talia Blake? Is that his way of joking?

Talia had so many questions, but she knew that this was not the right place or time to voice them, so she kept quiet. Actually, there is no good time to ask those questions. Period.

Somehow, 'Talia Blake' didn't sound so good anymore because even as a fake name, it carried the weight of problems like Cassie and Marcy and who knows how many other women.

Sure, Talia can say that she is Alpha Damon's sister or a cousin, but she feared that those she-wolves who are buzzing around Damon will start imagining.

Marcy gave Talia a beating for seeing something she shouldn't see, and if the rumors spread that Talia and Alpha Damon are more than acquaintances, Talia was confident that Marcy and Marcy-alike women will come for her throat! Or will they try to befriend her in order to get to Damon? Talia was not sure which one is worse.

The best thing is not to have any connection with Alpha Damon. The further she stays from him, the better.

She already had so many things to deal with and people misunderstanding her relationship with Alpha Damon shouldn't be added to that pile.

Talia told herself not to panic. Talia Blake is just a temporary thing in order for her to have this appointment in the human hospital, and she will never-ever-ever-EVER use it again.

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A short curvaceous nurse with a red pixie cut and big green eyes made Talia stand on the scale and she took her height and weight before giving questionnaires for Talia to fill and telling them to sit and wait for the doctor to come.

Talia noticed that this nurse was also stealing glances at Damon.

By now, Talia confirmed that Damon is a magnet for women, and she wondered if all that attention is bothering him. It didn't look like it.

Damon's incomprehensible gaze was glued to Talia, and she wished that he looks away before people start getting funny ideas.

Dr. Jones is a middle-aged woman whose brown hair was lifted into a loose bun, and her age didn't stop her from eyeing Damon in a way no doctor should look at a patient. Actually, Damon was not a patient, but he was accompanying one and Dr. Jones's behavior was not professional.

Damon and Talia were sitting on chairs, and a desk separated them from Dr. Jones.

The woman was asking questions, and Talia responded, but Talia doubted that the woman listened to a word Talia said because her eyes didn't leave Damon.

After some time, Dr. Jones pushed into Talia's hands brochures about balanced meals that included examples of portions for grains, proteins, vegetables, fruits, oils, and also recommendations for water intake.

With just one glance, Talia confirmed that this was generic information she could get online.

Since Maya gave her the tablet, Talia spent a lot of time on the internet and she looked up malnutrition and balanced meals that Travis mentioned, and nothing that Dr. Jones said was new.

Talia was exasperated. Why did she even come here? She could have stayed in her room and sleep instead of waking up and getting ready while experiencing stress due to Alpha Damon's presence.

And she was also concerned that Alpha Damon will accuse her of wasting his time.

Wait! Didn't he say to Cassie that he has something to do in the town? But then... why did he come with her to this appointment?

Talia glanced at Alpha Damon and met his gaze directed at her.

"Do you have any questions for Dr. Jones?", Damon asked Talia.

Yes! Is this how she treats all her patients? How can she be a doctor when she is shamelessly ogling at you instead of focusing on the reason I'm here?

Dr. Jones didn't ask any questions; she was just talking like she has all the answers.

Talia's experience with doctors is that they are warm and kind and attentive, and Dr. Jones was none of that.

But Talia knew that Damon brought her here and that he is a donor and that she should be grateful for everything instead of complaining.

"No.", Talia responded in a small voice.

Of course, Damon knew she was lying.

Damon spent the last decade in various meetings and situations where he needed to read people and he was quite good at it. He didn't miss Dr. Jones's flirty behavior and as much as he wished that Talia was jealous, he could see that's not the case.

Talia's defeated expression gave him heartache and he had an urge to fix it.

Damon's icy-blue eyes bore into her honeyed ones, and she feared that he can read her mind, so she lowered her head.

A second later, Damon touched her chin and made her look at him.

A small smile appeared at the corner of his lips as delightful sparks prickled his fingers, and he spoke to Dr. Jones without diverting his gaze from Talia.

"Dr. Jones, it seems that my wife is not happy with the level of service you provided."

Talia's eyes widened. What the heck? Did he say, wife? WIFE!?

But it's just a show, for the human hospital, right? RIGHT!?

Damon enjoyed Talia's reaction. He leaned close to her and spoke only for Talia to hear, "Play with me here, doll."

Without waiting for Talia to respond, Damon's arm moved behind Talia and his hand landed on her shoulder.

"Excuse me...", Dr. Jones said in a shaky voice. "Did I do something to displease you?"

"You know very well what you did and what you didn't do, Dr. Jones." Damon narrowed his eyes at the doctor. "Are you aware of the donations my Blake family contributed to this hospital?"

The middle-aged woman was visibly flustered while her eyes nervously moved from Talia to Damon.

She wondered if she read the situation wrongly.

Dr. Jones didn't know what's the relationship between Damon and Talia, but that doesn't mean anything.

She smiled at Damon, and he smiled back, and it took from there. He paid attention to what she said and responded favorably to her nonverbal clues, so she assumed that she has a chance.

He is handsome and rich, and on top of that, he is a donor to this hospital. She would be a fool not to try to get into Damon's good books.

Everyone thinks that she is well-to-do because people call her 'Dr. Jones', but she got the job as a nutritionist based on her father knowing one of the big-shots in the hospital and her degree which she earned after a six months-long course.

The truth is that regular nurses are earning more than her, and that 'Dr.' is only a title she has because she works in the hospital.

But why was he so upset? Other than flirty glances and smiles, nothing else happened.

Dr. Jones thought that things are going well, but now Damon looked at her darkly and asked her if she is aware that he is a donor.

"Yes, yes. Of course, I know, Mr. Blake."

Chapter 54 - Mrs. Blake (cont.)

Damon spoke coldly to the doctor across the table. "Because of our relationship with this hospital, we came here first. To say that I'm disappointed is an understatement. When we return home, my dear wife and I will reconsider our future donations."

"That... That...", Dr. Jones felt that her soul might leave her body. "Please, reconsider, Mr. Blake. This was just the first appointment for us to get comfortable with each other." She saw that Damon's expression turned icy and she quickly corrected herself, "I mean... for me and Mrs. Blake to get to know each other. The next appointment will be more specific and tailored to her needs."

Ignoring Dr. Jones's excuses, Damon took Talia's hand in his and closed his eyes while savoring the delightful sparks he craved for.

His thumb caressed Talia's knuckles once, twice, and then he lifted her hand and kissed the back of her palm.

Talia was still recuperating from the shock of Damon labeling her as his wife, and then he called her a 'doll', and she held her breath while staring at Damon and wondering when he will let go of her hand.

Was there a need for him to kiss her?

His lips lingered on her skin much longer than necessary and Talia silently confirmed that she identified one part of Damon that is soft (other than his hair).

A few unruly black strands fell over Damon's forehead and Talia had an urge to push them back and verify how soft his hair is, but she held back.

Damon opened his eyes and looked up at Talia while his breath fanned the place he kissed just a second ago.

The invisible sparks still danced on Damon's lips, and he wondered how intense it will be if he goes for the real kiss because just a peck on the hand was not enough.

He really wanted to kiss her thoroughly.

For Talia, all this was unexpected, and she couldn't look away from his icy-blue eyes that were anything other than icy. There was endless heat and desire, and his brows furrowed a bit, making Talia guess that he was thinking about something unpleasant.

If she knew that Damon was suppressing his urge to kiss her on the lips, Talia would probably run for the door. Assuming that her legs would listen.

Dr. Jones was saying something but neither Damon nor Talia heard her as they were lost in their own world of mixed signals and complex emotions.

After an unknown measure of time, Damon pulled himself out of the depths of Talia's honeyed eyes and he turned to the doctor without letting let go of Talia's hand.

"Dr. Jones, there will be no next appointment. We will be in touch with your director.", Damon's voice was distant like he was the king addressing someone way below him.

Damon stood up and Talia followed without the need for him to pull her up.

Talia walked next to Damon, and she stared at his hand that held hers. When did their fingers interlace?

His hold was solid and warm and even though it didn't hurt, she was aware that she wouldn't be able to pull her hand out unless he allows it.

Talia knew that she should disperse her unreasonable thoughts before they fully form. Damon is way above her and unless she lets go, the only outcome is heartbreak. Damon is the Alpha of the largest pack in North America, and she is nobody.

However, after Damon gave a lesson to Dr. Jones, Talia didn't mind holding his hand just for a bit longer. Just for a bit.

His hand holding hers came with a dose of security and she acknowledged that this Damon makes her feel safe, like anything is possible.

"Mr. Blake! Mr. Blake!", a breathy male voice was heard when Damon and Talia stepped out from the automatic double door on the main floor.

It was Mr. Mendez, the man who welcomed them in the wellness center.

When he caught up with Damon and Talia, Mr. Mendez patted his chest and took a few deep breaths to stabilize his mood and then he spoke quickly, "Mr. Blake, I'm not sure what happened, but Dr. Jones said that she apologizes for her indiscretion. She didn't mean to offend you."

"Mr. Mendez, you shouldn't be talking to me. Dr. Jones offended my wife."

Mr. Mendez's eyes flashed in surprise and Talia's knees shook.

She couldn't believe that Alpha Damon addressed her as his wife again. How can he lie like that? And it's in the open! What if someone overhears!? She will need to sleep with her eyes open so that one of those crazy women doesn't slit her throat!

Talia looked at Damon who gave her his signature half-smile that could put in a daze almost any woman... but not Talia. Talia saw it as a precursor of a calamity.

How can he be so calm?

Talia understood that Alpha Damon probably did this play many times before. These people are not shocked that he addressed her as his wife, they are probably surprised because the last time he came here, his wife was someone else.

It made sense. After all, Alpha Damon has many women who want to be his Luna, and Talia was confident that this is a game Damon enjoys.

She told herself not to overthink it because by tomorrow, if not earlier, some other girl will hold Damon's hand and Talia will be lucky if she is not accused again of stealing food.

"Mrs. Blake, please, accept our apology." Mr. Mendez's words pulled Talia out of her thoughts.

She looked at Damon, silently asking for guidance on how to handle this, but Damon shrugged and gave her hand a squeeze, which she understood as a sign that she can handle it any way she wants.

How should she handle it? Talia took a deep breath and imagined herself as someone who has a solid backing, someone like Damon's Luna, Mrs. Blake, because right now, that's who she was.

"Mr. Mendez", Talia called. "It's not on you to apologize for someone else's fault, and in this case, an apology won't solve anything. Dr. Jones's behavior was unprofessional. I came to her because I need help, but she acted like my condition is not important. I wonder if I'm an isolated case, or if other patients have similar experiences. I hope that you can conduct an investigation and take measures as needed. Show us that you will be unbiased and put your patients first. Our donations are for the benefit of patients, and not for the staff to act haughtily."

Damon forgot how to breathe while feeling the royal aura around Talia. If he was not holding her hand, he would think that he imagined it. Or maybe he did imagine it because Talia was like a queen with an ancient Alpha bloodline that could suppress everyone; him included. But the air around her was not oppressive, it was strong and gentle at the same time, the one that makes others want to please her.

Mr. Mendez pulled a white handkerchief from his pocket and dabbed beads of sweat that formed on his forehead.

He looked at Talia apologetically and bowed a little before responding, "Yes, Mrs. Blake. We will conduct the investigation and let you know about the outcome."

Talia nodded curtly and turned to Damon. "Can we leave now?"

Damon hummed in agreement and led the way toward the car.

He was impressed with how Talia handled herself.

She didn't raise a fuss based on the identity his wife has, but she pointed out that patients come first. Talia made sure that Mr. Mendez knows she was displeased, yet she didn't sever their ties, giving him hope that he can salvage the situation by handling the case himself.

Talia was not arrogant, and she didn't allow them to step over her while fighting for the others.

Selfless.

She used her authority and power to benefit less privileged ones.

Talia acted like a real Luna and Damon could feel his wolf's tail wagging in approval.

Damon and Talia got into the car and seconds passed in silence that stretched thin and pressed on Talia's delicate nerves, turning them into strings that might snap anytime.

"Did I do something wrong?", Talia asked, unable to conceal her insecurity.

Damon realized that he was staring. "No. You were brilliant." Dazzling, amazing, fantastic, perfect to the point of making him question if he was worthy to have her as his mate.

He was mind blown because Talia didn't have any training nor did she follow anyone's example, Talia did what she thought was right and it left him speechless.

To say that Damon met hundreds of Luna candidates is probably not an exaggeration. Those women flaunted their background, status, power, wealth, appearance, yet not a single one showed care for the little guys. And here was Talia, a seemingly simple girl who used the identity Damon gave her to fight for people she never met.

Any pack would be blessed to have Talia as their Luna. And this girl in front of him was his.

"Uhm...", Talia cleared her throat awkwardly and glanced down. "Can you let go of my hand?"

Damon cocked his handsome eyebrow. "No."

He really didn't want to let go.

"Mr. Mendez left, and no one can see us. There is no need for us to pretend to be... married.", Talia said this last word with difficulty.

Damon hummed ambiguously. "Who said that you are my wife only for this hospital visit?"

Talia's brain stuttered, refusing to process Damon's words. What does that even mean?

Talia opened her mouth to protest and then closed it when she realized that she has no idea what to say. Nothing made sense.

Damon chuckled and started the car.

Without letting go of her hand, Damon drove out of the parking lot and merged into the traffic of the human town.

Chapter 55 - Negotiating With Alpha Damon

Talia was sitting in a booth of a fancy steakhouse, next to Damon, and pinching herself secretly under the table, to confirm this was not a dream.

She would never imagine that she will find herself in a place like this, with Alpha Damon.

The steakhouse had dimmed lights and a wooden interior that gave a feel of a hunter's lodge. The walls were decorated with big photos of humans with guns and animals they hunted, and the chandeliers were made out of antlers.

The local radio station played country music and it all looked like a different dimension from the modern world outside which was made out of concrete and metal.

A waiter took their orders for drinks and left two menus on the table.

Talia was on the second page when her mind drifted to earlier that morning.

After the hospital, Talia thought that Damon will drive them back to the packhouse of the Dark Howlers pack, or maybe go to wherever Damon needs to go, but he parked the car in a public parking lot and the two of them spent the next two hours in the city park.

The pebbled path was bordered with pale pink bricks on each side, there were benches along the way, and the perfectly trimmed green lawn was livened up by an occasional patch of colorful flowers. Tall trees provided frequent shade for the visitors and there was a pond with ducks who were fighting over breadcrumbs that humans threw at them.

The well-maintained park was a serene oasis in the middle of the city, with only one noisy corner that vibrated with children's laughter and squeals as they enjoyed the play area.

Damon and Talia walked in pleasant silence, and he didn't let go of her hand when he bought blue-colored cotton candy from the vendor that had a stall next to the water fountain.

Talia never saw anything like it before. It was light and puffy like a cloud on a stick, sweeter than sugar while giving away a faint scent of blueberries.

"What about you?", Talia asked when she realized that Damon got only one.

Damon moved like a flash and pinched a piece of the cotton candy she was holding.

"This will do.", he said before giving her a wink and stuffing the treat into his mouth.

It was the first time for Talia to see the playful side of Damon, and his smile reached his eyes, making him approachable.

During that time, he was not Alpha Damon, but he was Damon. Just Damon.

"Do you know what you want for lunch?"

Damon's question pulled Talia into reality from her thoughts about their park visit.

It took her a moment to realize that a tall and slim man was standing next to their table with a notepad in his hand, obviously waiting for their order.

"Not really.", Talia responded honestly. "Everything looks delicious."

She didn't look much at the menu, but she saw that there are several pages that were filled to the brim. Names of dishes were listed, which didn't mean much to Talia, and the prices were not there.

Damon noticed that Talia was spacing out and he couldn't believe that she was doing that in his presence. All women (human and she-wolves) are always trying to get his attention, utilizing every second to impress him, yet here was Talia... sitting with him in one of the most expensive restaurants in town, just the two of them, and her mind was somewhere else. Unbelievable!

Again, Talia proved that she is different than any other woman Damon met.

Damon glanced at the waiter. "You heard my lady. Give us a sampler of everything."

Talia was flustered. What was that, 'MY lady'? And what did he mean by, 'sampler of everything'? The menu was huge!

But the waiter was gone already, and Talia could only helplessly look after the man.

Damon chuckled. "Don't make such a face. Two doctors said you are underweight. We will fix that."

At the mention of doctors, Damon's mood fell. "Don't think about Dr. Jones. I will ask Travis to find you another nutritionist."

"No need.", Talia said quickly earning her a raised eyebrow from Damon.

She fidgeted for a bit before explaining, "I looked it up on the internet. Balanced meals are not a big deal. As long as I follow basic guidelines and have vitamins that Doctor Travis prescribed for me, I will be fine."

She saw not only recommendations but also recipes and videos which showed how to make various dishes. It looked easy, as long as she had the ingredients and access to the kitchen.

Damon was not happy about this. "You should consult a professional."

"Can you give me four weeks? If I don't gain weight, I will see any doctor you pick."

Damon was surprised by this request. People either accept his demands or risk facing his wrath. That's how things go, but Talia was set on opposing him. Or was she testing his limits?

"Mrs. Blake, are you negotiating with me?"

Talia's face exploded in a blush. "Can you not call me like that? I know it's a joke, but you might slip when someone else is nearby and it will get me in trouble."

Damon nodded faintly while thinking that it's a joke, for now. "I called you Mrs. Blake because only Luna gets to talk back to the Alpha."

Talia was not sure if she should believe him. Surely, someone else will voice their thoughts if they disagree with him. Right?

She wondered if she should apologize.

"Two weeks.", Damon said, and it took Talia a moment to understand that he agreed to give her a chance to increase her weight on her own.

Talia was about to thank him, but then she remembered that there is one more thing.

"About that... Can you approve my request to help in the kitchen? My hands are not aching anymore and instead of me explaining to Stephanie or someone else what I should eat, I can make my own meals."

Damon poked his cheek with his tongue while scrutinizing Talia.

Her request made sense. Talia's bruises are barely visible, and she is not wrapping her wrist anymore, so there should be no problems in letting her work in the kitchen, but how can Damon miss the opportunity to get some benefits?

"Two conditions.", he said after some time, gaining Talia's full attention.

Damon raised his index finger. "I get to taste what you make. Whatever you make for yourself, you will make for me as well."

"Sure!", Talia agreed enthusiastically. "But I must warn you that I'm not good at cooking so it might taste horrible until I get the hang of it."

Damon stifled a laugh. So many women around him are trying to impress him by portraying themselves in perfect light, yet here is Talia, warning him that she was not good at cooking.

"I appreciate your honesty, Talia. In order to prepare myself for what's coming, I will ask Travis to prescribe me some digestion medicine."

Talia made a troubled expression. "I said that it might taste bad, not that I will poison you."

His sly smile told her that he was teasing her, and she asked quickly, "What's the second condition?"

Damon extended his hand toward her and put it on the table, palm up.

Talia glanced from his hand to his face, not sure what he wants.

"Your hand.", Damon said.

Talia didn't get it. "My hand?"

"I get to hold your hand whenever I want, and you will not complain or ask questions. Do we have a deal?"

Talia had a bad feeling about this, but she couldn't just refuse. After all, she was one step from getting the approval from the scary Alpha that she can work in the kitchen. She will cook and learn and eventually make scrumptious meals, just like the ones she saw in magazines.

"You won't embarrass me?", Talia asked reluctantly.

"Did I ever embarrass you, when someone else was around?"

Talia was about to say that he did, plenty of times, but that second clause made her pause.

It was true. Damon didn't embarrass Talia when someone was around. He would either treat her well or ignore her, and neither of those two counts as embarrassments.

Talia thought how it's not a big deal. It's just holding hands, and if anyone would be embarrassed to see them like that, it should be Damon because Talia is a nobody.

"Deal.", she responded.

Damon's eyebrows shoot up and he glanced at his empty palm that was on the table. "Well?"

Talia realized that he wanted to hold her hand. Like, right now.

She didn't understand what's the big deal with holding hands, but she obeyed.

The moment their hands touched, Damon's fingers moved between Talia's, and his wicked smile told her that she agreed to this rashly.

"Why did you ask to hold my hand?"

"It feels good.", Damon responded without missing a beat. "Does it feel good for you?"

Talia looked at their connected hands and she had to admit that it feels good. Is it because his hand is so big, or strong, or warm, or because it's his? Would it feel this good if someone else was holding her hand? Talia was not sure because no one ever held her hand like that.

"It's OK.", she responded in a small voice.

"Just OK?", he asked, and his thumb moved slowly over her thumb, that gentle touch made her hairs stand on ends.

"I'm not sure what are you expecting me to say.", Talia said weakly.

"The truth, Talia. That's the only thing I expect from you."

There was something in his tone and the whole situation that made her heart skip a beat.

"It feels good.", she whispered while hoping that the dim lighting in the restaurant was concealing her definitely red cheeks.

Chapter 56 - The Magic Was Over

Talia released the breath she was holding when the food arrived. It was a much-needed distraction because, for some unknown reason, she was flustered like never before even though Damon released her hand in order to hold utensils.

A massive plate of food was placed in the middle of the table and Talia was not sure where to look first.

There were different cuts of steaks, grilled chicken, fish, shrimp, and there was some salad also (mostly as a bed for all the meaty delicacies).

"I recommend that you start with this one.", Damon said while placing on her plate a piece of roasted meat that was wrapped in bacon. "It's tender and juicy."

Damon cut the bite-sized piece before offering it to Talia on a fork. He fed her previously, so she didn't think much before accepting it.

"Mmm...", she hummed in satisfaction as the flavors exploded on her tongue. "It's more than just tender and juicy. It's the best thing I ever tasted."

Damon's gaze was stuck on Talia's lips that were lifted into a smile and moved as she chewed, and there was a small stream of grease on the left side that escaped her mouth when she spoke.

He reached with his thumb and wiped it off and Talia stared as Damon put that thumb into his mouth and licking it clean.

"You are right. It is delicious.", he said, and the way he looked at her made Talia wonder if he was talking about the grease or about her.

"Eat, my dear wife", Damon said with amusement in his voice. "There is a lot of food and it's not good when it gets cold. Remember what you like so that you make them for me at home."

Talia's stomach flipped when he addressed her as his dear wife, but she refused to let it show, confident that he was teasing her. She focused on what he said after that. "Shouldn't I make you things that you like?"

Damon shot her a side-glance. Should he tell her that he will eat anything as long as he can lick it from her, just like that bit of mess he collected from the edge of her lips?

A crazy image appeared in his mind: Talia lying on the table, with food arranged over her naked body. He would use his tongue and lick her clean.

Damn! He was getting hard again.

...

~ The Dark Howlers pack ~

The black armored Lexus SUV stopped in front of the packhouse and Damon turned off the engine.

Damon increased his hold on Talia's hand, and he had an urge to start the car again and drive away to a place where he and Talia can be on their own. Just the two of them.

The big mansion in front of the car is his home since he became aware of his existence, yet now he saw it as a place where he couldn't be openly close to Talia because others might see them.

Damon had his duties and things to do, and if he wanted Talia to tag along, people will notice.

Damon was not sure if anyone from his pack would dare to act against Talia, but the news that Alpha Damon found a girl who is more than just a hookup will spread and eventually reach the ears of the people who will want to use Talia against Damon; people who will want to harm her in order to harm him.

Talia noticed the change in Damon's mood, and she understood that the fun time is over.

A knot formed in Talia's chest and she wondered if that's how Cinderella felt when the clock struck midnight and she had to leave the ball because the magic was over.

Damon's carefree expression was gone, telling Talia that the spell wore off and she was back to reality where she is Talia. No one.

Talia didn't dare to harbor romantic thoughts toward Alpha Damon, but her mind drifted in the direction where he was someone who treated her well, a protector, a friend... maybe someone she could rely on. And now that his lips were pressed into a line while he looked toward the packhouse with his brows slightly furrowed, Talia understood that whatever happened earlier that morning, it will stay there. Should she thank him for the few hours he gave her?

Talia was not sure what that morning was for Damon. Was that his normal routine? Was he playing a game? Or just taking care of a poor girl that he brought home?

No matter what it was for Damon or if it held any significance, for Talia, that morning was special, and she was confident that she will cherish it as a wonderful memory for years to come.

It was the first time that someone treated her so kindly.

They went to the hospital, and Damon didn't only teach the rude doctor a lesson, but he also allowed Talia to vent her frustration. And then they walked in the park, and she got to taste blue cotton candy and to see Damon smiling face, not a smile that's intense or mischievous, but it was a warm and honest smile that made Talia hold her breath and wish for the power to stop time. And then they went to a restaurant, and she got to eat all kinds of tasty food and Damon said that she can work in the kitchen.

Truly, a morning worth remembering.

Damon was nice and caring and protective without being overbearing and she liked it very much.

Talia told herself not to be greedy because she already got so much from him, but a part of her wished that the morning doesn't end.

Damon looked at Talia's lips that were pressed into a line. He wanted her to smile again, just how she did in the park and in the restaurant, but just telling her to smile without giving a reason wouldn't make sense. Is it possible that Talia was happy because she was away from the pack? He pushed down the anxiety that was forming at the thought of Talia leaving the pack... and him.

"What will you do now?", Damon asked Talia.

His question dispelled her unreasonable thoughts about not leaving the car.

Yes, the caring and playful Damon was gone, and she shouldn't think about him again because she was facing Alpha Damon, the man who helped her out of the Red Moon pack, and his unstable mood was a reminder that the only one she can truly rely on is herself.

"I want to find Stephanie and figure out the schedule for the kitchen."

Damon didn't want Talia to work. He wanted her to relax and enjoy pampering the whole day, but he saw sparkles of excitement in her eyes when he told her that she can work in the kitchen, and he couldn't deny her this.

'Steph, where are you?', Damon asked through the mind link, and he got a response a second later.

"She is restocking the pantry.", Damon told Talia which earned him a smile.

Reluctantly, Damon let go of Talia's hand. The loss of sparks tugged on his heart, but it was time to leave the car.

"Damon", Talia called, and his mood improved because she didn't use his title.

"Thank you."

"For?", he asked.

"For everything. I had fun.", she said honestly, her smile put him in a daze.

She had fun? Damon wondered which part for her was the most fun one. Was it the drive, the hospital, the park, or the lunch? For him, each moment was precious, and he wouldn't mind being stuck in a loop where he gets to repeat them over and over again.

Talia reached for the door, to open it, and Damon placed his hand on her shoulder.

"Wait. I will get the door for you."

Talia observed Damon as he walked around the front of the car, his gaze didn't leave hers and it all appeared like it was happening in slow motion.

Somehow, Talia found herself lost in the moment of Damon opening the door for her and giving her his hand to hold. The touch of his palm on hers felt natural, and she wondered how could she get used to it so quickly.

Talia took a deep breath to compose herself when she realized that she missed his warmth the moment he let go of her hand, reminding her that the magic was gone.

She chided herself internally. 'What was I thinking? That we will walk inside holding hands? And then what? Don't be stupid and focus on the reality.'

They entered the mansion and Damon noticed that Talia took the hallway to the left that's leading to the kitchen.

Damon wanted to go with Talia, but if he did that, people would notice that he was sticking to her.

He could hear Talia's voice, "Hi Stephanie, Alpha Damon said that I can work in the kitchen, so I came here to talk to you and see when can I start."

"Oh, that's nice, dear!", Stephanie responded enthusiastically. "I just finished cleaning up after lunch, so there is nothing to do now, but you can help with dinner. We will start around five o'clock. How does that sound?"

Damon took a note that Talia addressed him as 'Alpha Damon' while talking to Stephanie. He would prefer that Talia drops the title when she is addressing him, but he knew that this was better. If people think that she is just an Omega, that would be the best.

Talia calls him by his name in private, and that should be enough.

Damon was contemplating if he should wait for Talia and go upstairs with her, but then he saw Cassie approaching him and his mood dropped.

As long as Cassie was not in his face, it was easy to forget that Cassie was still lingering around.

"Alpha Damon", Cassie called sweetly. "You seem to be awfully busy these days..."

Chapter 57 - The Road Of Becoming Self-sufficient

Cassie saw Damon standing in the hallway and she wondered, where did the girl from that morning go? Did Damon send her home?

Cassie knew that after the cold treatment Damon gave her, this was not the time to ask such questions and she needed to show that she will not be in his way.

"Alpha Damon, I see that something is weighing on your mind. I don't want to appear nosy, but I hope you are aware that I will help you in any way I can. I can ask my father to assist you, if necessary."

Damon didn't want to talk to Cassie, but he knew that she is not going to leave easily, and he was aware that Talia will come out of the kitchen at any moment and head up to her room. If Cassie notices that Talia is heading to the third floor, Cassie might suspect something.

He wanted Cassie to leave the packhouse as soon as possible, but for that, he needed a reason to send her away or he will risk angering her father and causing problems for his pack.

At moments like these, Damon hated that he was the Alpha. If he was just a warrior, he would be able to do whatever he wants and the consequences of his actions would be only his to bear and not reflect on thousand of others.

Hearing that Talia was saying goodbyes to Stephanie, Damon put his hand on Cassie's back and pushed her toward the direction she came from.

"How about we continue this talk in the living room?"

Cassie's face lit up. Ah, he wants to talk to her!

Talia was in a good mood. The day started with a dose of stress when Alpha Damon woke her up, but the rest of the day was wonderful, and it was getting better because in only a few hours she will join Stephanie in the kitchen and start her epic journey that will make her a culinary master!

Talia held onto the handrail of the staircases and her eyes fell on two figures a moment before they disappeared in the living room.

It was just for a moment, but she definitely recognized them as Alpha Damon and Cassie. His hand was on her back, and she saw Cassie's profile as she gazed at Alpha Damon with hearts in her eyes.

The mood seemed harmonious and it confirmed that whatever issue they had that morning, it was not an issue anymore.

Talia felt numbness overcome her senses as she made her way upstairs, down the hallway... and she was not sure how she found herself on the bed.

Talia chanted silently that whatever she was feeling, it was not allowed, and she should stop it because it will lead to heartbreak.

It was only one morning of kindness, and to Damon, it didn't mean anything... just how she doesn't mean anything, and she should not deceive herself that it was important.

Alpha Damon took her with him from the Red Moon pack on a whim because he felt pity for her, and maybe there was a dose of responsibility since Talia got two beatings from Marcy because of him.

She should not delude herself that it was anything like friendship because Damon was only making sure that her health is fine and that she has basic needs covered and everything else was just kindness so that his conscience is clean.

Talia remembered how heartbroken she was when Olivia left. It was because no one else cared about Talia and she ended up latching onto the person who treated her as human.

She won't allow the same thing to repeat.

As soon as Doctor Travis says that Talia is fine, she will move out of the packhouse and get accommodation and duties like other Omegas and leave all this behind her.

Will she ever get to see Alpha Damon again? Probably during events that he will attend, from the distance.

Alpha Damon belongs to a different world. The one where other Alphas respect him and women like Cassie and Marcy get to swoon over him, and Talia is a nobody.

That's the truth and she should not deceive herself that it's anything else.

Alpha Damon gave her a morning full of wonderful surprises and that's enough. It has to be.

Maybe one day she finds a man who will treat her well all the time, even when others are present. That man will hold her hand in front of others and tell with pride that she is his, and no one will dare to accuse her of stealing or beat her for things she didn't do.

...

It was close to five o'clock in the afternoon when Talia dressed in a pink t-shirt with purple kittens on it, and blue leggings.

Yes, Alpha Damon told her to wear clothes that he bought for her, but she knew that kitchen can be messy, and she didn't want to ruin good clothes. And besides, considering his mood swings, he probably changed his mind and won't even look at her.

Talia shook her head and told herself not to be silly. She will not see him. Damon is a busy Alpha, and he has no time to linger in the kitchen.

If he has any free time, he will probably fill it with Cassie or with some other she-wolf who fits the image to be his Luna.

What happened that morning will not happen again, and she should not delude herself.

Talia looked at herself in the mirror and gave herself a stern look while pulling her hair into a ponytail.

"Snap out of it!", Talia spoke to her reflection. "Instead of daydreaming, focus on things that WILL happen and make the best out of it!"

Talia didn't have an easy life and she was determined to use this opportunity to her advantage. She already left the Red Moon pack, and even though things here were not perfect, it was much better because she got access to things that will allow her to become self-sufficient.

Talia was aware that she can't be disobedient if she is dependent on others.

Yes, she can leave, but where would she go?

Talia doesn't have a wolf, or speed, or strength, or anything else that comes with it. Technically, she is human, an unskilled one. Considering all that, she can't join another pack. Who will accept her?

On the other side, living with humans means that she will be on her own. How would she pay for things?

Unless she gets a job as a restroom cleaner, she will end up on the street, and that was not something she wanted.

Talia was not sure if she wants to stay in the Dark Howlers pack, and she was grateful that Alpha Damon didn't bring up the point that she needs to officially join his pack. Her plan was to postpone that ceremony as much as possible because if she forms the mind-link with the pack, it will be much more difficult to leave stealthily.

No matter what, Talia didn't want to attract attention because her experience so far showed that attention means trouble.

At this point, other than a few people in the packhouse, no one was aware of her presence, and she will do her best to keep it that way.

Talia was determined to use this time to learn skills that will help her if she ever finds herself on her own... and she will start with cooking.

Helping in the kitchen sounded like a much better job than cleaning restrooms and as a kitchen helper in a restaurant she might get leftovers, which is an added bonus.

For now, Talia decided not to ask for any special dishes from Stephanie. She will include food groups that are lacking as snacks, or maybe make something on her own when the kitchen is free. With this approach, she will not stand out and she will maximize the hands-on learning that she gets from Stephanie.

Talia grabbed the tablet with an intention to take notes and maybe look up recipes, and she made her way downstairs with renewed vigor.

"Hello, dear!", Stephanie greeted Talia enthusiastically. "You are on time."

"Of course. It's my first day at work, how can I be late? What are we making today?"

Stephanie loved Talia's energy.

"Ah, I wish that my Lisa has your passion for cooking."

Talia heard several stories about Lisa from Stephanie, so she knew that Lisa is her daughter.

"Not everyone is into cooking."

Stephanie shook her head helplessly. "We spoiled her. While she was here, Lisa was young and we had many Omegas in the packhouse, so other than washing vegetables occasionally, she didn't do much. My sister doesn't have children and she treats Lisa like a princess. I have no idea what that child will do when she starts her own family."

Talia knew that she and Lisa are about the same age. "Lisa is still young and there is time to learn. Look at me."

Stephanie showed a warm smile. She really liked Talia's attitude.

Stephanie knew that Lisa is beyond redemption in the kitchen, however, she didn't want to talk about it with Talia.

It was not about time to learn, but about will which Lisa didn't have. Stephanie's comment about how Lisa received the princess' treatment was not an exaggeration.

"You said that there used to be many Omegas in the packhouse, but I barely saw a few so far.", Talia said, and Stephanie understood that Talia wanted to know why the situation changed.

"When Damon took over the position as the Alpha of our pack, there were several attempts on his life, and he decided to reduce the number of people who have free access to the packhouse." Stephanie gestured toward the pantry. "If you get two large yellow onions, we will start on the marinade, and I can tell you more..."

Chapter 58 - Another Accusation

"This is the last one!", Talia announced victoriously as she peeled the last potato.

"Good, you can take a break now.", Stephanie responded.

Marinated steaks were roasting in the oven, and Stephanie put potatoes that Talia peeled into boiling water. Those will become garlic mashed potatoes.

A batch of spiced-up peppers, asparagus, and zucchinis was waiting for the right time to enter the oven.

The gravy was done. Vegetables for the salad were washed and chopped, and they will put the rosemary-infused dressing over the salad before serving.

For dessert, they had store-bought Tiramisu cake which was chilling in the fridge.

It was a full dinner and Talia felt quite accomplished.

The fun part was that while they prepared food, Stephanie was telling all kinds of stories about the Dark Howlers pack and about Alpha Damon.

She told stories about Damon as a mischievous child who would sneak out to play with his friends and avoid practice and homework.

"Damon was a cheeky boy who was good in combat and in academics, but if he invested in those half of the effort he spent in dilly-dallying, everyone would put him in the genius category. Alpha Jacob would punish him for avoiding responsibilities, and Luna Violet always came to calm him down saying how Damon is still a child. And on few occasions when Luna Violet wanted to scold Damon, Alpha Jacob came to the boy's rescue..."

Talia understood that Damon grew up with a loving family and his life turned from a carefree childhood into a dangerous reality overnight when his parents perished and the heavy responsibility of leading the pack fell on his shoulders. And it was not just Damon, the whole pack faced dramatic changes when they lost experienced leaders who could keep enemies at bay.

The Dark Howlers pack was never in an open war, but that was thanks to the diplomatic capabilities of Alpha Jacob and Luna Violet. The facts are that werewolves are creatures attracted to power, and it's in their nature to crave for more. More territory, more pack members, more resources... it's never enough. And when Alpha Jacob and Luna Violet perished, Damon became an Alpha of a pack who had a lot of assets, but Damon was not even eighteen years old, so other Alphas saw him as an easy target.

Stephanie told Talia about attacks from the rogues and other packs who pretended to be rogues, but the Dark Howlers pack stood united, and they came out of that period stronger than ever.

Now, open attacks are rare, but the calm is deceitful because many are working in the shadows, trying to sway Damon on their side, to use him, trick him, force him to obey, and they are not picky about the methods to accomplish their goals.

Talia couldn't help but feel sorry for Damon. In a way, he was being bullied just how she was while staying in the attic. Actually, she thought that bullying she had was mild compared to what he is going through.

Stephanie saw that Talia's expression became solemn, so she shifted the conversation toward food and cooking.

Since they needed to wait for potatoes to boil, Talia started cleaning the kitchen island.

"Dr. Travis wants to talk to you.", Stephanie said suddenly.

Talia paused. "How do you know?"

"He mind-linked me. Actually, Travis mind-linked Alpha Damon and Alpha Damon mind-linked me."

"Oh..." Talia didn't want to bring up the obvious point that she doesn't have the mind-link, fearing that Stephanie might remind Alpha Damon of that detail. "How can I reach him?"

"Use my phone...", Stephanie said and got a cellphone from her back pocket. "Here. Since it's a talk with a doctor, go and find yourself an empty room."

Talia looked at the phone with a complex expression. She knew what a cellphone is, but werewolves are not really cellphone friendly because they have mind-link, and most of them don't venture outside the pack. So, unless one has important connections with other packs or humans, they don't have personal phones. There is a number of landlines available for everyone to use.

Stephanie has her phone because that's how she communicates with her sister and Lisa.

"How do I use this?"

Talia's embarrassment disappeared quickly because Stephanie explained to Talia how to make a call without making it sound awkward.

Talia went into the hallway, and she didn't need to search far to find an empty room. It seemed that other than her and Stephanie, no one else was in the packhouse.

Taking the first room on the right, Talia found herself in the living room. She sat on the sofa and made the call.

"Hi, Talia!", Travis greeted her as soon as he picked up the call, and based on his tone, Talia knew that Stephanie told Travis through the mind-link to expect this call.

"Hi, Doctor. You wanted to talk to me?"

"I told you to call me Travis.", he said sternly before continuing in a softer tone, "I want to hear how your appointment with the nutritionist went."

Talia took a moment to pick her words. "The information Dr. Jones provided was generic and I decided to look up relevant information online and try it out on my own. Alpha Damon approved."

"I see...", Travis said thoughtfully. "I would like to be part of that process, if you don't mind."

Talia had no objections. Travis left a good impression on her, and she wanted to find an excuse to get in touch with him and maybe find the right timing to ask him about working in the pack hospital, just in case if she decides to stay in the Dark Howlers pack.

"I would like that."

"Great!", Travis exclaimed. "I want to hear your plan and give you some inputs. I'm confident that the information you find will be good for humans, but werewolves need more meat in our diet. How about you come to the pack hospital tomorrow morning...", he paused while looking at his schedule. "Ten o'clock?"

"I can do that."

"OK. I got you in for an appointment. We can also do a round of bloodwork and take your weight. After that, we can meet weekly to track your progress. Are you taking the vitamins?", he had to ask.

Werewolves are known as stubborn creatures, and they don't take medicines or see a doctor unless they are at the death's door.

Talia was touched by the care Travis showed. "Yes."

"Good, good. If you are skipping on the vitamins, the results of the blood test will expose you. So, I will see you tomorrow. Don't forget and don't try to wiggle out of it."

Talia stifled a laugh. "I won't forget, Travis. I will see you at ten o'clock."

"I would never guess that an Omega would relax in the living room and set up a date."

Cassie's voice from the door made Talia freeze and she cursed her luck.

Cassie was passing by, and she heard Talia speak in a cheery voice, "Sounds good... I can do that... Yes... I won't forget, Travis. I will see you at ten o'clock."

Of course, Cassie assumed that Talia was talking with her lover. Is that any of Cassie's business? No. But the fact that a scrawny girl in shabby clothes was relaxing on the sofa and acting like she owns the place, rubbed Cassie the wrong way.

"Why are you still sitting there? Don't you know about hierarchy and manners? Get up!", Cassie hissed, and Talia stood up in slow motion.

Talia hated the way Cassie treated her, but she was Damon's important guest, and Talia didn't want to cause trouble.

If she talks back to Cassie, there is a high chance that things will escalate, and Talia was confident that there was no way for her to come unscathed out of that conflict.

The best thing to do was leave because it's useless to try reasoning with crazy people.

Talia lowered her head, hoping that Cassie won't recognize her from their previous confrontation in the kitchen, or as the one who was in the car with Damon that morning. Luckily, at that time, Cassie paid more attention to Talia's clothing than to Talia.

"I apologize if I offended you. If you excuse me, I need to help with dinner."

At the mentioning of dinner, Cassie narrowed her eyes. "You are the Omega who I caught stealing food."

Talia gritted her teeth. Why didn't she come up with some other excuse? And she was NOT stealing food, but talking to Cassie seemed like talking to a wall.

Talia ignored Cassie's comment and moved toward the door, but Cassie was quick to block Talia's exit path.

"Why are you eager to leave? Did you steal something else?", Cassie's eyes fell on the cell phone in Talia's hand and Talia swiftly hid it behind her back.

Talia noticed Cassie's expression changing when she saw Stephanie's phone, and Talia panicked. What if Cassie takes it or damages it? How will Talia explain that to Stephanie?

Cassie interpreted Talia's silence as admittance and she extended her hand, palm up.

"Give me that phone.", Cassie demanded.

Talia was not willing. "I didn't steal it."

Cassie sneered. "I see you can talk back. Is it because Alpha Damon is not here to see who you truly are? You pretend to be obedient and play victim so that Beta can save your sorry ass. Well, I won't fall for your tricks, and no one will save you now. You stole it and now you are lying. How could a lowly Omega have a phone like that? That's an expensive model. Give it to me now and I will tell Alpha Damon to lower your punishment."

Talia couldn't believe this. Punishment? Why did Cassie say that with a smile, like she is doing a favor for Talia?

Chapter 59 - [Bonus]A Jinx

Talia was confident that something was really wrong with Cassie's head. Within a few seconds, Talia ended up as a thief and a liar, and Cassie didn't have a single proof for any of that.

She wants to be Damon's Luna? Will Damon allow Cassie to be in a position to impact the lives of his pack members?

Stephanie told Talia several stories about Damon since he took over the pack as the Alpha, and Talia thought that he really cares about his pack. However, if he makes Cassie his Luna, that will change the dynamics for the worse, not only in the packhouse but in the pack overall.

'I need to leave this place as soon as possible.', Talia told herself. 'Living on the street and sleeping under a bridge can't be worse than this.'

Who cares about a cozy room if she can't leave it without fear that she will be bullied? And what if bullies come into the room? How will that be different compared to the attic where she used to live?

Without the authority to talk back to Cassie, Talia felt the urgency to leave, starting with this room.

Talia walked past Cassie, but how can Cassie allow Talia to walk out?

Cassie grabbed Talia's arm and applied pressure.

"Where do you think you are going? Did I allow you to leave?"

Cassie's wolf is weak on a werewolf-strength scale, but she is still stronger than a human, and since Talia doesn't have her wolf, she was unable to shake Cassie off. Actually, the grip was so painful that Talia winced.

Talia gritted her teeth. "Let go."

"Not before you give me that phone."

Talia was dejected. Why can't this woman leave her alone? But she saw that things were escalating and that Cassie will not let her go.

Talia's options were to fight back or to admit to theft she didn't do.

Talia was never in a fight, so that didn't cross her mind, but she couldn't stay silent and allow this to continue either.

Talia remembered what Maya said to Cassie, and she thought it will be safe to play that card.

"You are a guest in this pack, and I suggest you act like one. This is not your phone. Why would I give it to you?"

"Who are you to tell me how I should act?"

Talia paused. Who is she? No one. But that doesn't mean that Cassie can accuse her of things she didn't do.

At the thought of the injustice thrown at her, rage swelled inside Talia.

"And who do YOU think you are?", Talia hissed. "You want to be the Luna of this pack? Luna shouldn't be a bully, and she shouldn't assume the worst about people without evidence. Alpha Damon is a fool if he makes you his Luna because you will ruin the pack he worked hard to protect."

Cassie's eyes flashed in outrage.

'PAK!'

Talia saw stars when a hard slap landed on her cheek, and she stumbled backward.

'BAM!'

Something heavy slammed against the wall and a second later, Talia heard an angry roar, "HOW DARE YOU!?"

Talia blinked to focus and through her haze she saw Damon holding Cassie by her neck, pinning her against the wall.

Cassie's stared at Damon in horror while struggling to breathe, but Talia's eyes moved over Damon's impressive wet body that was covered only with shorts. The glistening landscape of his back demanded attention no matter how much her cheek stung.

Damon was training with warriors when he got the message from Travis through the mind-link of how he wanted to talk to Talia. Damon told Stephanie that Talia should call Travis, and Damon took that as a cue to return to the packhouse.

His plan was to shower and then find out what Talia made for dinner, but he ended up overhearing Cassie preventing Talia from leaving the living room.

Damon approved when Talia stood up for herself and when she said how Cassie is not a Luna material, and Talia even said some good things about Damon as the Alpha. Damon wished that he was one second faster, because he reached the living room just in time to witness the slap.

Every muscle in his body ached to choke the life out of Cassie, and just his glare was enough for Cassie to freeze and she didn't try to get herself free from his grip, even though she had difficulty breathing.

Stephanie showed up at the door of the living room in a hurry.

"Oh, dear...", Stephanie gasped as she approached Talia who was holding onto her cheek. "Let's put some ice on it."

Talia followed obediently, unsure if Damon mind-linked Stephanie or if Stephanie heard the commotion. It didn't matter.

'She hurt our mate!', Damon's wolf shouted in his head. 'Kill her or give me the control and I will do it!'

'I want nothing less', Damon responded. 'But that might start a war, and she can't know that Talia is our mate.'

'Are you giving her a pass?'

'Of course, not!', Damon growled at his wolf.

Damon glared at Cassie. "Who gave you the right to raise your hand on my pack member?"

"She stole the phone and refused to admit.", Cassie squeaked.

'Our mate would never steal!', Damon's wolf raged, and Damon wished for a mute button because his wolf's fury was amplifying Damon's.

Damon exhaled sharply and released Cassie.

Cassie rubbed her aching neck and froze when Damon spoke.

"You have half an hour to pack your stuff, Cassie. My warriors will escort you outside of my territory. You are not welcome here."

"You are kicking me out over a random Omega?"

"Yes, I am kicking you out.", Damon said sternly. "She is not a random Omega. She is one of MY people, and I will not allow you to terrorize her or anyone else under my roof."

"But she is a thief! How can you side with a nobody over me? I have Alpha blood in my veins!", Cassie protested.

Damon shook his head. "You never learn so there is no point in talking to you. I will explain to your father."

Cassie frowned and her displeasure turned into panic when she saw two female warriors at the door. It was obvious that they came to escort her.

"You can't be serious. Are you discarding me? Did you find someone else? Who is she?"

Damon gestured at the wall clock. "In twenty-nine minutes, they will take you outside my territory. I suggest you start packing." He looked at two female warriors and gestured for them to wait.

Cassie gaped at Damon who reached for the phone that was on the side table.

After a few seconds of silence, Damon spoke, "Alpha Richard? I'm calling to let you know that Cassie is on her way home."

"Did something happen?", Alpha Richard asked anxiously.

He is aware that Cassie has a temper she can't control. When they talk nicely, Cassie understands things, but she gets fired up easily, and all his teachings go out the window.

"Cassie is causing disruption in my packhouse. I tolerated her unruly behavior because it was contained to spiteful choice of words, but this time I'm drawing the line because she physically assaulted one of my people. Alpha Richard, due to our relationship, I will not punish Cassie and my warriors will escort her unharmed. But from today onwards, Cassie is not welcome in my territory, and if she appears without authorization, she will be treated with hostility. Make sure she understands that because I don't want to carry consequences for her irresponsible behavior."

Alpha Richard let out a long breath. "I understand."

Damon ended the call and looked at Cassie. "Twenty-seven minutes left, Cassie."

Cassie turned toward the door and her mood dropped even lower when she saw Maya leaning on the doorframe with a smug smirk.

"Make sure she leaves with all of her things.", Damon said while leaving the room.

"I'm on it, Alpha.", Maya confirmed and turned to Cassie. "Will you pack your things, or do you want us to do it for you? I heard you have Louis Vuitton suitcases, don't blame us if we damage your precious luggage."

Cassie couldn't believe this! But the clock was ticking, and it seemed that she really needs to pack and leave, and she will think about other things later.

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Damon was furious and guilt-ridden.

If he chased Cassie away earlier, this wouldn't happen.

If he didn't allow Cassie to come whenever she wants, this wouldn't happen. Sure, he never invited her, but he didn't tell her to leave either.

Was Talia OK? That was quite a slap, and Damon doesn't have experience with non-werewolves, but he could imagine another bruise forming. Damn it!

Damon made his way into the kitchen, and he panicked when he saw that it was empty. Didn't Stephanie take Talia to get an icepack?

'Steph? Where are you?', Damon asked through the mind-link.

'I'm with Talia, in her room.'

Damon dashed up as fast as he could, and he paused at the door without opening it.

"Don't pay attention to her, sweetie." Damon heard Stephanie say. "Alpha Damon sent her packing. She won't bother you anymore."

There was no response and Damon leaned his ear on the door to hear better.

Stephanie continued talking.

"I know it's not much consolation, but Cassie was going on all our nerves. No one will miss her here."

"Alpha Damon will.", Talia said. "He might be angry now, but tomorrow he will change his mind."

"Is that what you think of him?", Stephanie asked.

Talia opened her mouth and then closed it, deciding not to share her thoughts about Alpha Damon, because parts about him being weird and mentally unstable could probably put her in a dungeon. But Stephanie was expecting an answer from Talia, so she had to say something.

"I know that you have a good opinion of Alpha Damon, Stephanie. You watched him grow up and I won't deny that he is a good Alpha for his pack. Alpha Damon helped me out of my predicament, and I am very grateful for everything he did. I mean no disrespect, but my experience is telling me that misfortune comes when he is nearby..."

In the hallway, Damon frowned and stuck closer to the door. Did Talia call him a jinx?

Chapter 60 - Dinner And Bossy Attitude

Stephanie saw that Talia's mood was not good and she understood that after the incident with Cassie, Talia has every right to be upset.

Maya told Stephanie about Cassie accusing Talia of stealing food previously, so she knew that this was not the first time for Cassie to bully Talia. Stephanie also knew about the point that Damon was just standing there and didn't do anything while Cassie was doing her Luna-act, and Stephanie couldn't imagine how painful that would be for Talia. Damon is the one who brought her here with a promise for a better life, yet when it counted he stood on the side.

Stephanie's heart ached and she wanted to comfort Talia who was holding the ice pack on her face. "Let me see your cheek, dear..."

"Don't worry about me. I'm used to it.", Talia interrupted Stephanie. Compared to beatings she got at the Red Moon pack, this was nothing much. "Thank you for the ice pack. I know you have good intentions, but dinner will burn if no one takes care of it. I'm sorry, but I don't think I can help you in the kitchen. I'm tired and I would like to rest."

In the hallway, Damon stepped away from the door of Talia's room when Stephanie opened it. He didn't care if Stephanie caught him eavesdropping.

Before Stephanie could say anything, Damon gestured for her to move away from the door, so that Talia doesn't overhear them.

"How is she doing?", Damon asked Stephanie.

"Hurt. Humiliated.", Stephanie said and narrowed her eyes at Damon.

"I know.", Damon said before Stephanie could say anything.

He knew that look. Stephanie was telling him that it was his fault. No one liked Cassie, and Stephanie told him a million times that Cassie is not a good girl, yet he allowed her to come to the packhouse repeatedly and linger while making everyone around her uncomfortable, and Damon didn't say anything when Cassie was shouting how she will be the future Luna or when she snapped at Omegas because she was an easy lay.

And now Talia got hurt.

"I'm sorry.", Damon said.

Stephanie shook her head. "I'm not the one who needs to hear that."

Stephanie took a deep breath before asking, "Alpha Damon, can I talk to you honestly?"

Damon gave a small nod, and Stephanie spoke, "I don't think that Talia should stay here. Don't get me wrong, Talia is a wonderful soul and I love having her around, but she suffered a lot and we should not add to it. Today was Cassie, tomorrow it will be someone else. As long as Talia is here, entitled people will cross paths with her and she doesn't deserve that. If you care about her even a little bit, you should consider letting her stay in one of the common buildings."

Before Damon could respond, Stephanie said, "I'm going to check dinner. Cassie already spoiled the mood, I will not allow her to spoil food as well." And with that, Stephanie left.

Damon looked at Talia's door with a complex expression.

He knew that this wouldn't happen if Talia was not in the packhouse. And he heard Talia say how she ends up in trouble because of him, and now Stephanie said that Talia would be better off somewhere else, but... can he stay away from Talia?

After some hesitation, Damon turned to the right and went to his room. He needed a shower and to clear his head.

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When Stephanie summoned them for dinner, Damon was about to enter Talia's room, but then he heard voices.

Maya was with Talia and Damon didn't want to interrupt, so he went to the dining room.

Actually, he wanted to eavesdrop, but he didn't want to risk hearing again from Talia how he brings misfortune.

That was not his intention. He wanted Talia close so that he can protect her and provide for her, yet he failed miserably.

When Damon got into the dining room, the table was already set with dishes, but out of the people, only Caden was there, waiting with the report on how Cassie was successfully escorted off their territory.

"Good. Make sure everyone knows that she is not welcome here.", Damon said and started putting food on the plate that was on his left. That was Talia's place when she joined them for a meal.

When he filled Talia's plate, Damon put food in his.

He was wondering if he should cut the meat now or wait for Talia to come. He decided to wait.

Damon was fiddling with his fork and pushing the food on his plate when Maya appeared.

"Where is Talia?", Damon asked.

Maya shook her head. "She doesn't want to come."

Damon frowned. "She knows that Cassie is not here. Right?"

"She does.", Maya confirmed. "Talia said that she is not hungry, and I didn't want to force her."

Damon pinched the roof of his nose. How can she skip a meal? Didn't they talk about her cooking and eating and increasing her weight?

But he knew that this was not about the food. It was about people. Talia didn't want to come down because she was used to suffering in silence, alone. His heart ached. It was his fault.

Is Talia blaming him? Is that why she didn't come? Is she avoiding him?

"What did you talk about?", Damon asked Maya.

"Talía was asking about other accommodations. I told her that single pack members who are of age and unmated prefer to stay in apartments and some are open to having roommates..."

Damon didn't hear the rest because his head was buzzing.

Talía wanted to leave the packhouse?

Will she live on her own?

Away from him?

What if she gets a roommate?

When will he see her?

Without someone keeping an eye on her, Talía can leave, and no one will notice.

'If mate leaves, I will not forgive you!', Damon's wolf shouted in his head.

Anxiety swelled within Damon. Will Talía really leave? What if she is packing? What if she was gone already?

Talía escaped him twice, right under his nose, and he was unable to track her. Last time, she nearly left his territory, and even scouts and warriors couldn't sense her presence!

Damon grabbed his and Talía's plates and headed upstairs with urgency.

...

"You don't need to do this", Talia said to Damon who was standing at the door of her room with two plates of food in his hands. Each had a big piece of meat, and there were garlic mashed potatoes and gravy and roasted vegetables.

Damon felt immense relief knowing that Talia was right there, in front of him, only one step away.

Damon observed Talia's face and he was pleased that her cheek was only slightly red. He guessed that the bruise didn't form because of the ice pack. He wanted to ask her if it's aching, but he knew that she will probably say that it's fine and he won't believe her.

"I know I don't need to. I want to.", Damon said matter-of-factly. "Will you let me in, or are we going to eat in the hallway?"

Talia moved and let out a long breath.

Why is he making things difficult? She decided to distance herself from him and to embark on her journey of being self-sufficient, and here he is, with food and his bossy attitude.

Talia didn't blame Damon for what happened. Actually, he came to her rescue and punished Cassie. But she was embarrassed that Damon got to see her being bullied.

If she was stronger and more courageous, Talia wouldn't end up in such a situation, to begin with.

How Talia saw this, as long as she depends on him, or anyone else, she won't become stronger. It was overdue for her to take her life into her own hands because she didn't want others to tell her what to do or how to feel or if she is worthy of something.

Talia took the first step toward controlling her fate by leaving the Red Moon pack, and it would be foolish to stop now and not take advantage of the opportunities she has here.

Talia closed the door, but she didn't move from that spot.

She observed Damon who was sitting on the sofa and cutting the meat.

When Damon finished cutting meat on both plates, he looked at Talia. "Did you give up on your idea of gaining weight in two weeks? If you did, I can find you a nutritionist right away, and if you didn't... come and eat." He patted a spot on the sofa next to him.

At a snail pace, Talia approached him and took a seat as far from Damon as the sofa allowed it.

They ate in silence and Talia was grateful that Damon didn't say anything.

Damon finished his food and left the room without a word.

She thought that they are done for the evening, but in less than a minute Damon was back.

"I was not sure which one you want, so I got options...", Damon said while placing three bottles in front of Talia. Soda, apple juice, and water.

Talia took a sip of apple juice before continuing with her meal.

'Crack-Psssh!'

Damon opened a can of beer. He leaned back into the sofa and sipped beer while his eyes didn't leave Talia.

He watched her eat and she hoped that he will leave when she finishes.

Part of Talia wanted to look at Damon and have a conversation, but another part told her to stay away from him because the more they talk, the more attached she gets to him, and attachment to Alpha Damon won't bring anything good.