

Alphas Bride 521

Chapter 521 James' realization (3)

After what seemed like an eternity, James came up with something that seemed acceptable to say for Cornelia to hear. "How about we start with spending the day together and see where it goes?"

Cornelia's heart skipped a beat. Not because of what he said, but how he said it. She could feel that he meant it. He really wanted to be with her, and that made her happy.

"Don't you have things to do with Alpha Damon?"

James was pleasantly surprised by Cornelia's question. The fact that she knew this, meant she was paying attention to him.

"I do. I should be done in about an hour. Will you wait with me?"

"WITH you?"

James confirmed. "My sister will make a public statement, and after that I'm free. Will you wait with me? When that's over, we can go wherever you want."

'Wherever she wants?', Cornelia wondered. She had no idea other than... "Can we go to the aquarium?"

James frowned a bit. He didn't want to admit it, but he couldn't lie, "That's in the human city and I don't have a driver's license."

"You don't have a license?", Cornelia repeated thoughtfully. She was not familiar with that concept. "How would you go with your friends to the human city?"

James felt heat creeping up his neck from embarrassment, but he pushed through it to answer, "Zack and Erik are older than I am, and they have licenses. I will have mine in about one month, and I don't want to ask anyone to give us a ride." He really wanted to be with Cornelia, just the two of them. "We can do whatever you want, as long it's something nearby."

Cornelia asked because she didn't know, and now she realized that his age was a tricky topic. Was it because he was too young to feel the bond?

Her heart was racing as the pull toward James intensified with every breath she took, and he was right there, holding her hand, and wanting to be with her.

Cornelia scrambled her mind to come up with something they could do but the truth was that she didn't know what humans or werewolves do to pass time, and she was not sure if activities from her realm would be appropriate.

Cornelia remembered her last night's outing and where she saw people having fun. "There is a sweet shop in the town square with colorful cookies, and there is a restaurant, or maybe we can go swimming in the lake?"

James was not sure about swimming because that meant everyone will get to see Cornelia's gorgeous body no matter how much her swimsuit covered, but maybe he could ask Alpha Damon about some private swimming spots. The rest was totally acceptable.

James' lips lifted into a smile. "It seems we have a plan."

His insides jolted when he felt a slight movement of Cornelia's fingers as they tightened around the edge of his hand. She was not just allowing him to hold her hand, but she was holding him back! Somehow, that was better than any intimacy he experienced so far.

James pushed those thoughts away because he didn't want to dirty this moment with his chocolate-colored beauty. He was a bundle of nerves, and he feared that he will make an ass of himself.

"Is this where we will wait until your sister makes her statement?", Cornelia asked.

James realized that sitting in a car probably won't do. "Do you want us to go for a walk, or garden, or..." He swallowed hard. "My room?"

Cornelia was not sure, but she didn't want to be confined in a room, or in a garden where they could have an audience, so... "A walk sounds nice."

Reluctantly, James let go of Cornelia's hand, and he was quick to exit the car and circle it to open the door for Cornelia.

He offered her his hand, palm up, the same one that was aching to feel hers again, and when she put her hand into his, James gave it a squeeze and didn't let go. Somehow, her hand in his felt right.

"Which way?", James asked, and Cornelia gestured randomly toward the forest. She really wanted to remove her shoes and walk barefoot.

"Does this mean our plans for the day are off?", Petra's voice sounded from the door of the packhouse.

James froze like a child caught doing mischief and he turned toward Petra in slow motion. Why were Zack and Erik there also?

"Yes. Sorry. Please, go on without me."

"No need to apologize.", Petra responded.

"Keep your phone on!", Maya shouted from the window on the second floor. "We will message you when it's time to come back."

James looked up to see that Maya was there with Caden, Talia, and Damon now, and at the stairs leading to the main entrance of the packhouse were not only Petra, Erik, and Zack, but also Mindy, Gideon, Theo, and Mike, all of them looking at James and Cornelia with knowing smiles.

It took James a second to realize that they set him up. Damn! He walked right into it! But he was not angry. Somehow, for the first time in his life, James felt that there are people interested in his well-being, not as the future Alpha, but as James, a kid who was about to make a mistake. Can he dare to think of them as his friends?

"Thank you.", James said sincerely, and he hoped they will know that his thanks was for much more than just Maya's promised reminder.

James tugged Cornelia's hand so that they start walking.

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On the second floor of the packhouse...

"What did we miss?", Talia asked while craning her neck to see James and Cornelia disappearing behind bushes.

Talia and Damon came out of the study in time to hear Maya shouting that she will give a call to someone, so they came to investigate.

Maya turned to Talia and looked at her with sparkles in her eyes.

"Talia's Cupid services!", Maya exclaimed.

Talia didn't get it. "What?"

"You don't like it?" Maya pursed her lips and her eyes lit up with another idea. "Malia. It's a play on mate and Talia to make Malia or Melia. Which one do you like better? I prefer Malia."

Talia really didn't know what to think of this. "Slow down and tell me what's going on first."

"Another mated couple!", Maya said victoriously and tilted her head toward the window.

"You mean... Cornelia and James?", Talia asked with surprise evident in her voice. She saw them holding hands, but mates? "How is that possible? He is underage."

Maya bobbed her head. "Everything is possible with Malia. Satisfaction is guaranteed within forty-eight hours or your money back. Malia delivers."

Caden stifled a laugh. "That's pretty good. You should write it down."

"You think so?", Maya asked enthusiastically. "I will get more ideas from Mindy and Kalina and we should create a logo and slogan and trademark it and..."

Talia turned to look at Damon helplessly while ignoring Maya's chatter.

"You are amazing.", Damon said dotingly.

Talia blinked. "You don't believe that nonsense how I can bring mates together. Or do you?"

Damon laughed and gave Talia a smacking kiss on the lips before scooping her in his arms and carrying her upstairs.

Talia didn't resist. She wrapped her arms around Damon's neck and leaned on him to enjoy the carrying service he provided.

They had more than half an hour until they needed to get back to work mode, and both Damon and Talia wanted to cuddle.

Caden frowned and he was about to call after Damon to come back, but Maya grabbed his arm and gave him a squeeze with, "Let them go. We have so many things going on, that it's rare to see the two of them relaxed and just happy."

Caden snorted, but he knew that Maya was right.

Since Talia came to the packhouse it was one thing after another, and Damon and Talia went to a secluded cabin to enjoy three days only to end up with dark magic possessing Damon and a boatload of unknowns. But they knew that Marcy will make her public statement in less than an hour and that Alpha Edward will retaliate.

"Let's do our part.", Caden said. "We need to reinforce patrols at borders and to contact our spies and informants to keep their eyes and ears open for any signs of trouble."

Chapter 522 James' realization (4)

James and Cornelia returned to the packhouse, and they could hear the commotion from the living room where cameras were being set up and there were several people checking the lights and making sure that the background for Marcy's upcoming public statement was perfect.

James looked at his hand that held Cornelia's and he didn't want to let go, but he knew that it could be troublesome if Marcy sees them like that. In just a bit, Marcy will be harmless, but until then, they all needed to stay vigilant.

The last hour passed like a flash. James and Cornelia walked in silence through the forest until they found a fluffy patch of grass and they decided to sit there.

James asked Cornelia to tell him something about herself, and he was surprised to hear that she came from a different realm and that she is a witch.

"Is that why you can feel the bond?", he asked.

"We feel the energies and use them for our benefit. Your kind calls that magic, but we call it living as one with nature. If you pay attention, you will feel it. It's all around us, and trying to communicate."

He smiled a little. "What do those magical energies tell you about me?"

Cornelia felt her cheeks heating. "To get closer."

Her breath caught in her throat when his hand that was holding hers moved and their fingers interlaced. It was just holding hands, such a simple gesture, but his fingers reached all the way to the point where hers connected, and that small movement of his thumb at the back of her palm was so intimate that she felt more exposed than if she was completely naked.

"Is this enough, or do you want us closer?", he asked.

She had a feeling that he knew the answer, but she didn't want to say it. "This is fine." For now.

"Tell me about your realm.", James demanded. He was genuinely curious.

"What do you want to know?"

"Everything. I want to know where you lived so far and how you normally spend your days." He swallowed hard, and forced himself to ask, "Do you have a man there?"

Cornelia shook her head. "There are no men."

He noticed she used the plural. "Not even one?"

"No. In my realm, after the portal was sealed, only females remained, if you don't count the animals."

James was elated to find out that it's not that Cornelia didn't have a guy there, but there were no men at all! Her response also contained other intriguing information. "If the portal was sealed, how did you get here?"

"Alpha Talia opened it.", Cornelia responded, and she wondered if Talia opening the portal was a secret. Why was she blabbering whatever came to her mind? But talking to James felt natural and she had difficulty keeping her guard up, so she warned him, "You can keep that as a secret, right?"

"Of course", James assured her, but more than opening the portal stuff, he picked up another interesting bit. "Alpha Talia?"

"Is it wrong to call her like that? Others are doing it."

"Who are others?"

"People in the Midnight Guardians pack."

James wondered if he misunderstood. "Are you saying that Talia is the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack?"

"Axel is acting as an Alpha when she is not there, but...", her voice trailed when she realized that James's mouth was half-open in surprise. "I guess I should stop talking now." She didn't know that was a big deal. Was that another secret? But everyone was talking about it openly there, and Cornelia didn't think it was a big deal.

James needed a few long seconds to process this information. He knew that the timid girl by Alpha Damon's side was more than it meets the eyes, but he would never dream that she was the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack! What happened with Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia? Even if they were unable to lead, or thought of retiring, Axel should take over, but now Cornelia told him that Axel was only Talia's proxy. How did Talia manage to become an Alpha?

James wanted to ask more questions, but he noticed Cornelia's troubled expression and he cursed internally. Why did he allow his greed for information to take over?

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James touched Cornelia's chin, to make her look at him. "Cora, don't ever stop talking. I want to hear whatever you are willing to say and don't worry that you said too much. Your secrets are safe with me."



Her lips lifted into a dazzling smile in slow motion and then she told him about her Coven and how they are living there, and time passed like someone put it on fast forward, and then he got a call from Maya and here they were, in the packhouse, and James didn't want to let go of Cornelia's hand.

James glanced toward the living room. "My sister will be there any minute, and I need to get to work. It shouldn't take more than a few minutes. Ten, at most."

He lifted his hand that was holding Cornelia's and planted a kiss on the back of her palm.

His lips rested there as he closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Now that her knuckles were touching his nose, he could clearly pick up her sweet and mysterious scent, like sensual wild berries and his wolf stirred again. When they were in the forest, it was faint and it mixed with other scents of the forest and wildflowers, but now he sensed it clearly.

James' eyes snapped open to meet Cornelia's that were staring at him. He knew that she was not breathing, and he held his breath as well because more than just attraction and accepting their closeness as something natural, that specific scent confirmed his suspicion (or maybe his hope) that Cornelia was his mate.

What will he do with that information? Can he take her home and risk her being bullied or mistreated because she doesn't have a wolf? Forget about not having a wolf, his father will go ballistic!

Alpha Edward didn't try to matchmake James so far, but James knew that his father had plans, and if James brings Cornelia home, she will be either treated like a not-important girlfriend or chased away because Alpha Edward won't allow James to be in a serious relationship with a female who won't bring them benefits.

And what will happen if people find out that Cornelia is a witch? Even James was not sure what it meant.

But... could James return to the Red Moon pack and leave Cornelia behind?

James decided to push those thoughts for later. First, he needed to deal with Marcy and then he will spend the day with Cornelia, and everything else will come later because he needed time to think things through and figure out something that will work, for both of them.

"Wait for me, Cora.", he spoke against her skin, and then he kissed her there again.

Chapter 523 Marcy's farewell (1)

Marcy was sitting on the sofa and facing the camera while delivering the speech that James prepared for her. She knew it was streamed live, and that thousands of people were watching her. Marcy could ignore that online audience; however, she was painfully aware of the people in the room.

On the other side of the camera were Damon, Talia, James, Maya, Caden, Dawn, and George.

Another person sitting there was Calvin, a reporter from WW Magazine who lives in Darkbourne. Maya called him that same morning, and he couldn't believe that he got this opportunity. Maya told him that the princess of the Red Moon pack will make a public statement, and when she was done, he will get a chance to ask questions.

Calvin was confident that this will be Marcy's announcement of becoming the Luna of the Dark Howlers pack and he wondered why they didn't make a bigger deal out of it, but it was not his place to be nitpicky about it. Considering that he was the only journalist present, Calvin was confident that this story will earn him a promotion.

What Calvin didn't expect was that Marcy will talk about following her parents' wishes to come to the Dark Howlers pack, and how she realized that as much as this was a fantastic place, her heart was in Europe, and she craved to explore the world. She didn't mention becoming Damon's Luna or her companions who came with her.

Marcy ended with a tearful, "I apologize if my selfish decision hurt anyone, but I believe that it's better to do this now than to endure and end up causing more harm in the long run. I am grateful for the patience and understanding Alpha Damon showed, and I hope that my parents will forgive me. Thank you."

Calvin gaped at Marcy. This was totally unexpected. Only when Maya's voice sounded in Calvin's head, he snapped out of his daze and cleared his throat to speak, "Miss Redmayne, may I ask you a few questions?"

Marcy wiped the corners of her eyes with her fingers. "Go ahead."

Calvin moved to sit next to Marcy, and into the view of the camera before introducing himself, "I am Calvin, a reporter for WW Magazine. I am delighted to get a chance to talk to Miss Redmayne in front of everyone while this is still fresh, and you can read about this and much more in the next edition of WW Magazine." He turned to Marcy, "You said that you hope your parents will forgive you. Does that mean they don't approve of your decision to travel?"

Marcy smiled sadly. "I know that they want what's best for me, and they believe I will be happy in the Dark Howlers pack. I wanted to give it a shot, but after spending a few days here, I confirmed that my heart is elsewhere."

Calvin nodded in understanding. She didn't say, yes, but her words definitely confirmed that her parents won't approve.

"What does Alpha Damon say about this?"

Marcy gestured toward Damon who was standing on the other side of the camera with his hands in his pant pockets. "You can ask him. But I will tell you that he surprised me with how considerate he was. He is an amazing Alpha who puts his people first, and even though I am not a member of his pack, he was magnanimous to provide his support. For that, I will be forever grateful."

Calvin licked his lips before asking, "I am sure you are aware of the rumors that you were set to become the Luna of the Dark Howlers pack. Can you comment on that?"

"Those are just rumors.", Marcy said. "Since I came from Europe two months ago, I was in contact with Alpha Damon. I got to know the man beyond that handsome visual, and I can tell you that I am impressed. However, my admiration for him is as an Alpha and I appreciate him as my friend. There is nothing more between us."

Calvin's eyebrow rose in obvious disbelief. He would rather believe that stories like Snowwhite and Cinderella are real compared to Alpha Damon being just a friend with an attractive woman. But Alpha Damon was right there, and Calvin didn't dare to point out that absurdity, confident that everyone who heard anything about Alpha Damon knew better.

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"So, what are your plans now?", Calvin asked Marcy.

"Alpha Damon is generous, but I have a feeling that I overstayed my welcome. I will leave Darkbourne shortly. My flight is tonight." She turned to look at the camera. "Again, I apologize if I disappointed anyone, but I have only one life and I choose to do what feels right."

"Thank you, Miss Redmayne.", Calvin said. "Will you be available to answer a few more questions offline?"

"Of course."

Calvin turned toward the camera, "The next edition of WW Magazine will feature an exclusive interview with Miss Marcy Redmayne." Calvin didn't check with his editor, but he was confident that it will happen because this was huge!

With that, the live feed ended.

"That was great!", Maya said and gave Marcy a thumbs up before turning to Calvin. "You can ask your questions now, but try to keep it short. Miss Redmayne needs to pack."

Calvin looked around. "Future Alpha James, will you be willing to answer a few questions after I talk to Miss Redmayne?"

"Sure.", James responded stiffly and glanced at the time, silently telling the reporter to hurry up. Cornelia was waiting for him, and he promised that it won't be more than ten minutes!

Calvin didn't know that this was a setup. Per James' instructions, the fewer people knew what actually happened here, the better.

Caden was checking trending topics online, and he could see that chatter about Marcy's statement was climbing to the top as netizens were buzzing with gossip related to Marcy being removed from the list of candidates to be Damon's future Luna. It all went as expected.

The next step was dealing with Alpha Edward. James and George were ready to answer their phones, as Marcy's phone was unreachable.

Damon's expression was stern, but Talia could feel that his emotions were unstable.

Other than anticipating the aftermath of Marcy's statement, there was the lingering fear of the black runes flaring again and Damon forgetting about Talia, and maybe he forgets about some other things also. Damon didn't want to go back to that person who didn't care about his mate, he didn't want to risk hurting Talia again. Yes, she knew that he couldn't remember, but Damon didn't see that as a valid excuse. Wouldn't that justify the drunkard's rampage just because he was under the influence of alcohol?

The uncertainty impacted both Talia and Damon, making them extra clingy.

Talia wanted to give him a hug, but James warned them to refrain from physical intimacy until Calvin leaves. This was staged so that it looks like Marcy's idea, and if outsiders see that Damon was cozy with another woman while Marcy was giving her farewell speech, it might appear that Marcy was forced. Of course, in a matter of days, everyone will know that Damon found his Luna and it was not Marcy, but this show should be enough to sway people so that Alpha Edward doesn't get support in attacking Damon.

'Are you OK?', Talia asked Damon through their private mind-link.

Damon pinched the roof of his nose. 'I want to be done with this.'

'Let's go on a vacation when this is over.'

Damon turned to look at Talia and he smiled. 'That sounds great, but if I pass out again, don't call Axel.' He regretted that they couldn't go away right that instant, but for now, he wanted to hold Talia. 'Let's go to the study.' Damon didn't want to linger and risk Calvin requesting an interview. Marcy and James knew what to say, and Damon could watch all that through the security video feed.

Chapter 524 Marcy's farewell (2)

Marcy answered Calvin's question and she hoped he won't notice that her insides were churning.

Would she be in this position if she had a choice? Absolutely not!

If things didn't take the wrong turn, Marcy would be giving this interview with Damon by her side. She would be holding onto his firm arm and proudly talking about her future as the Luna of the Dark Howlers pack. But things didn't work out as expected and she was lying about how she was not attracted to Damon, the position of his Luna, or Damon's riches, because she preferred traveling. What a joke!

Marcy was glad that this was not recorded, and on a few occasions when her expression cracked, Marcy covered it up as emotional instability because she feared how her parents will react to this.

As soon as Calvin's attention moved to James, Marcy headed to the study to meet with Damon. All this was humiliating, and she wanted to be done with it.

Marcy entered the study, and her expression froze at the sight of Talia who was sitting on Damon's lap. Damon's lips were resting on Talia's forehead and other than Damon's hand slowly raking through Talia's hair, they didn't move. Did they need to be lovey-dovey?

A mental image flashed in Marcy's mind, showing George and Dawn holding hands and feeding each other, and Marcy wondered if George would hold her like that and feed her if she didn't reject him. A moment later, Marcy pushed that thought away. There was no point in crying over spilt milk.

Talia didn't look toward the door, but both Talia and Damon knew who was there.

'I should get up.', Talia spoke to Damon through their private mind-link. Before Marcy arrived, they were holding each other and watching the security feed that showed what was happening in the living room.

'No. Stay here.' Damon's left arm tightened around her.

He didn't say more, but Talia knew that with every passing minute Damon's anxiety about forgetting what was important was rising. If this was Cassandra, the potion would wear off hours ago, but here was Damon, remembering everything, and fearing that it might all be gone in a second. Talia had similar fears as well, so she didn't object, and she leaned on him in a gesture of assuring him that he was not alone in this.

Marcy took a moment to compose herself and move to sit on a chair opposite Damon.

"I did my part.", Marcy said while trying to ignore Talia's presence. "It's your turn."

Damon reached into the drawer of his desk and got a folder that he pushed toward Marcy. "Here are your new ID, birth certificate, and a high school diploma. You will also find some background information on your new identity, and a cell phone. My warriors will take you outside of the territory of the Dark Howlers pack. You can pick one of the three cities listed on the first page as your final destination. After that, you will be on your own. You should know that it's in everyone's interest that you stay under the radar. Keep an eye on the news about the Red Moon pack. When James takes over, you can return, but that's something you should discuss with your brother."

"I know, I know", Marcy mumbled while checking the contents of the folder. When she was done, she looked up at Damon. "Is this all?"

"Should there be something else?"

"I was expecting at least one credit card." And there was no cash in there either. Marcy already gave her wallet and cell phone to Maya which left her without access to money. Sure, Marcy had had her designer's clothes and jewelry, but she didn't want to part with those unless necessary. Besides, how much money can she get by selling them as second-hand items?

"I don't remember promising you any money.", Damon said flatly.

Marcy gaped at him. "What?"

"Our deal included a different identity. The cell phone is extra.", Damon said and gestured toward the folder Marcy was holding onto.

Marcy's lips twitched as images of her grim future flashed in her mind.

"You are kidding.", Marcy said. "Who cares about identity or a phone if I'm broke? How will I eat? Where will I live?"

"Those are not my problems, Miss Dorsey.", Damon said, and Marcy cringed at the sound of that unfamiliar last name that should be hers going forward. Kim Dorsey. Such a plain name, like someone mixed a donkey and a horse, Marcy thought.

Marcy's ears perked up when Damon continued, "You want money? That's possible under one condition."

Marcy had a bad feeling about this, but she still asked, "What condition?"

Damon glanced at Talia. "Talia is the lady of this house, and she manages finances. If you convince her to give you money, I won't object."

Marcy made a face like she ate a fly. Was she supposed to ask Talia for money?

Marcy hated that Talia was Damon's mate, and she hated that Talia will be Damon's Luna, and she hated the most that Talia was sitting on Damon's lap like it was a totally normal thing. Talia will get to enjoy Damon's care and protection, and even his money, while Marcy gets to leave as penniless Kim Dorsey.

But even with all that, Marcy swallowed her grievances and asked Talia, "What do I need to do in order to get money?"

"Nothing.", Talia responded.



Talia knew that this was Damon's way of allowing her to get revenge on Marcy, but Talia had no interest in that. Talia wanted Marcy out of their lives. Marcy was Talia's bully at the Red Moon pack, and Marcy continued the same when she came here to steal Damon. How Talia saw this, Marcy had taken their peace, and that was already too much.

"You came here with an intention to be Damon's Luna. I told you, more than once, that we are mates, but you acted like that was not important."

"Yeah, so?"

Talia couldn't believe that Marcy would act like that was not important. "A mate for our kind is the most important thing. There is a reason why Alphas wait for their fated mates."

Marcy rolled her eyes. "I'm sure you would think otherwise if your father was breathing down your neck."

Talia's brows came together in a frown. "That is your father. If he was forcing you to do something against your will, you should have retaliated, and if you can't do it yourself, seek help. By coming here and doing what you did, you messed up not only with my and Damon's lives but the whole Dark Howlers pack. Do you think that your happiness comes before everyone else's?"

"But my father..."

"Stop!", Talia snapped, and she scooted out of Damon's lap to stand and face Marcy. She had a serious point to make and sitting on his lap was not helping.

"Stop blaming others for your shortcomings, Marcy. You came here to be a Luna. Is this how a Luna acts in the face of a challenge? She shifts blame? Be responsible for what you did!"

Marcy threw her hands in the air. "Fine! Do you want me to beg? Kneel? A public apology? Tell me what you want, I will do it, you will give me the money, and we will be done with this."

Chapter 525 Marcy's farewell (3) [Bonus chapter]

Talia couldn't believe Marcy's laid-back attitude. "Do you think this is a game?"

Marcy shrugged, indicating that she doesn't care. "I lost everything. A bit of groveling won't make a difference."

"As long as you get what you want, right?"

"Right.", Marcy confirmed. "So, tell me what you want."

"I want you out of here."

"Not without my money."

Talia was shocked by how brazen Marcy was. "YOUR money? Why do you think that you are entitled to any money? You should be happy that we are letting you walk out of here unscathed. If Damon didn't make that deal with you, you would end up in a dungeon." With other women who were shamelessly going after him.

Marcy made a face. "It's easy for you to talk when Damon is backing you up."

Talia's anger surged. How dares Marcy bring up Damon casually without using his title? Did she forget that Talia could easily suppress her?

"It is ALPHA Damon to you!"

Marcy groaned as the air around her became heavy, pressing on her from all sides.

Talia moved around the table to stand in front of it so that there was nothing between her and Marcy. "Do you think I'm relying on Damon?"

Marcy's body was bent downwards, and if she was not sitting on a chair, she would definitely be on her knees.

Marcy lifted her head to see Talia standing with her arms crossed over her chest, with confidence that Marcy wished to erase. But the most shocking were Talia's eyes. They were glowing in a silvery light.

"You are a witch...", Marcy said in a strained voice.

Talia had a feeling that this was more than just an insult. The horror in Marcy's expression was real, like she knew something. Something important.

"What did you say?", it was Damon who asked.

Marcy clutched her chest and laughed like a crazy person. "Now I know why you chose her over me. All that talk about mates and doing the right thing, but you are no better than the others. It's all about power."

"What do you mean?", Talia asked.

Marcy looked at Talia smugly even though her whole body was in pain. "Why would I tell you anything?"

Talia's eyes flashed with irritation. "TELL ME!", Talia's Alpha command echoed in the study and Marcy's head fell down in submission.

"Your eyes are a sign of powers.", Marcy spoke against her will. "Your kind is used for breeding. Children with mixed blood have a chance to be born with a wolf and with the power of witches."

Talia's stomach sank. Breeding? Was that why the portal toward witches was closed? How many other people were involved in that sick scheme? Was that why the Midnight Guardians pack held their location a secret? Was that why she ended up in the Red Moon pack? Did they plan to use her for some twisted breeding in the hope to create powerful offspring? Was that why her parents gave her away?

Talia was nauseated and the whole room was spinning.

Talia turned back to seek Damon, but he was not in the chair anymore. A moment later, Talia felt his arm moving behind her, and his hand landed on her shoulder firmly, pulling her into him, and then she found herself in his firm embrace that anchored her so that her turbulent emotions don't take over.

"What else?", Damon asked Marcy. "Tell us everything!"

"That's all I know.", Marcy responded. "I was a child when my grandfather told me..." Her voice trailed when Damon's frown deepened. She swallowed hard and quickly added, "I thought those were just stories my grandfather made up to entertain me. Witches were wicked and evil, and they attacked our kind so we created artifacts that can suppress witches' powers in order to subdue them, and that's it. He kept notes, journals. Maybe there you can find more."

Damon narrowed his eyes at Marcy. "Where are those notes?"

"I don't know. My father never cared about legacy because he was too focused on creating his own. If they were not destroyed, they are in some box, forgotten."

'I don't trust her.', Talia spoke in Damon's mind.

'She can't lie under Alpha command.', Damon said.

'That doesn't mean she knows the truth. Alpha Edward might be part of that and who knows who else. We need to find those journals.'

Talia's mind was in turmoil. What if she was not the only one? What if there were more children or grownups used for those sick experiments? Is that why the Red Moon pack was taking in orphans in big numbers, to conceal what they were actually doing with people who had powers? And what if some of those orphans were not really orphans but were the results of those breeding experiments?

'We will do it together.', Damon responded and cursed under his breath. They had another problem. 'Marcy knows too much, we can't let her go.' Marcy was vindictive and dangerous, and she would sell them out in a heartbeat if she could get any benefits out of it.

Talia didn't want to be anywhere near Marcy but killing her didn't sound good either.

'The potion!', Liseli sounded in Talia's mind.

'What potion?', Talia asked.

'The one Axel gave you for Cassandra. It causes short-term memory loss.'

Talia's eyes lit up. "Keep an eye on her!", she told Damon and dashed out of the study. She still had that concoction and now it will come in handy.

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Talia injected Marcy with a greenish liquid, and told her, "You will go to the shelter in the Blue River pack and stay there until you become self-sufficient, or until your brother becomes the Alpha of the Red Moon pack. You need to hide from your father because you disobeyed him and if he finds out that you came to the Dark Howlers pack to be Damon's Luna with your mate by your side, your father won't show mercy. That is why Damon provided you with a fake identity."

Marcy nodded robotically and she stood up.

"Where are you going?", Talia asked.

"To pack my things. I need to go to the shelter before my father sends his men here to search for me.", Marcy responded and turned to Damon. "Thank you for the new identity."

And with that, Marcy was gone from the study.

"Will that be enough?", Damon asked. Talia told him through their mind-link what the potion will do.

Talia was not sure. "The potion will erase the last few minutes and make the last hour hazy. She probably won't remember all details from the online statement she made. By sending Marcy into a shelter, she won't be under our noses, and Max and Tanya can help us keep an eye on her. We will ask Marcy to get a haircut and maybe a different hair color on the way there."

Damon hugged Talia. "You were kind considering what she did to you in the Red Moon pack."

Talia let out a long breath. "I know that if I punished her without revealing my identity as the girl from the attic, it wouldn't have the desired effect. And if I told her, it would give me temporary relief, but it would expose me. It's not worth it. For a woman like Marcy, taking away the conveniences she had as the princess of the Red Moon pack is as bad as it gets."

Talia looked up at Damon pleadingly. "We need to find out what Marcy's grandfather was doing with witches. I need to know if I was there accidentally or if that was part of some larger plan. I need to know if there are others."

Damon couldn't deny her this, but... "If there are any records, they will be in the packhouse of the Red Moon pack, and right now I don't think Alpha Edward will be welcoming."

"We should ask George and James to help us", Talia said. "Now that Cornelia is James' mate, I don't think he will let this pass. And Dawn will not stay put if she finds out about this."

Damon felt pride swelling in his chest. His kitten already had a plan.

Chapter 526 Alpha Edward's rage (1)

~ the Red Moon pack ~

"What the hell is this!?", Alpha Edward raged at his Beta while gesturing at the screen of his computer.

Alpha Edward was busy with paperwork and thinking about what good news Marcy will give him later that day, confident that it will be related to her becoming the Luna of the Dark Howlers pack. Everything Marcy told him in the last few days was positive and the only thing pending was to pinpoint the date of her Luna ceremony. Alpha Edward wanted it to happen as soon as possible, but he also didn't want to rush it because it takes time to organize a grand event, and Marcy becoming Damon's Luna was a grand occasion.

Beta Raymond suddenly entered the study and interrupted Alpha Edward's pleasant thoughts by saying that there was something he needed to look at with urgency.

While Raymond navigated to a website, Alpha Edward assumed it was related to rogues, or maybe some of their spies got exposed, but this... just what was this? Did he just watch a clip of Marcy saying how she would rather travel the world than be the Luna of the largest pack in North America? What nonsense was that?

Alpha Edward called Marcy once, twice, but the damned automatic message told him that the phone was not in service. All his messages were stuck in the status 'pending', meaning that Marcy didn't receive them.

Alpha Edward couldn't believe this. They spoke two hours ago! Marcy told him that things were under control and going great, and how was this great!?

"This is a joke, right?", Alpha Edward asked his Beta.

"I don't think so.", Raymond responded. "Online forums are on fire. They are talking about how Marcy is not in competition to be the Luna of the Dark Howlers pack, and they are guessing who the next candidate with the highest chances is. Currently, it's a tie between Cassie from the Steelbite pack and Jade from..."

"ENOUGH!", Alpha Edward roared. "There will be no Cassie or Jade or any other. That position belongs to Marcy. This is a lie. Someone made it up. Videos can be fabricated. A hacker disconnected her phone! I will call James and he will confirm how all this is nonsense. We invested years and it can't be gone just like that. It can't be."

"James!", Alpha Edward exclaimed as soon as James picked up the call. "Did you see this fake video of Marcy saying how she doesn't want to be Damon's Luna?"

"Father", James called solemnly, and Alpha Edward felt his stomach tightening into one giant, excruciating knot.

"It's not fake."

Alpha Edward saw red. "WHAT!? YOU KNOW WHY YOU WENT THERE! HOW COULD YOU ALLOW IT TO HAPPEN!?"

"I didn't allow anything.", James was quick to say. "Do you think that Alpha Damon would sit and discuss this with me?"

"So, Alpha Damon knew? Is he behind this? Did he force her?", Alpha Edward squeezed through his teeth.

"Maybe. I mean... I'm not sure.", James said. "During breakfast, Marcy told us to postpone going to the training grounds because she had something to share with us. When we got to the living room, the reporter with a camera was already there. I don't know to what extent Alpha Damon was part of this, but how could a reporter get into the packhouse and live-stream a video without Alpha's approval? But at the same time, I can't see that Alpha Damon would allow all of us to stay in his packhouse and then pull the rug under Marcy's feet. That would be blatant disrespect and Alpha Damon wouldn't risk a war, not for a thing like this. If he wanted to get rid of Marcy, he would do it silently; strike a deal or something. Right?"

"Right.", Alpha Edward was a bit calmer now. "How did Alpha Damon react to all that?"

"His expression is always the same. I have no way of guessing what he was thinking."

Alpha Edward exhaled in frustration. "Tell me about the situation there."



"After her speech, Marcy gave an interview. I waited for that reporter to leave so I can talk to Marcy, but the reporter held me back and Marcy went to pack already. I think she is leaving for real."

"If she leaves, you will be punished."

James grit his teeth. "What can I do in a packhouse that is full of Alpha Damon's warriors? Do you want me to cause a scene and end up in a dungeon?"

"YOU CAN'T LET HER LEAVE!", Alpha Edward roared.

"And I can't force her to stay either.", James responded. "This is not our territory, and I don't want to risk things escalating. So far, Alpha Damon was accommodating, and I can assume that was the case because Marcy was set to be his Luna, but now that she broke up with him publicly, I don't want to test my luck by provoking him. The reporter just left, and I am heading to Marcy's room. I will see if I can talk some sense into her but don't hold your breath on it. If she has even a single functioning brain cell, she won't be coming home."

Alpha Edward didn't like this. "Give her your phone, so we can track her through GPS."

"What's wrong with her phone?"

"It's offline.", Alpha Edward responded irritably.

"If she turned off her phone, there is no way she will accept mine. And if Alpha Damon took it away, he will take mine as well. I will find out what her plans are and let you know as soon as I find out something useful. I suggest that you have our people ready to intercept her when she leaves the territory of the Dark Howlers pack. She was talking about Europe, so we should get someone to check if there is a plane ticket in her name and wait for her at the airport. There are two international airports nearby." James stopped talking and he wondered if his father's silence was a good thing or bad. "Can Beta Raymond work on suppressing the netizens? I saw that Marcy is trending online and..."

"I will get him to deal with that.", Alpha Edward said curtly.

Per Alpha Edward's opinion, James wouldn't dare to oppose him openly. Everything pointed to the possibility that Marcy was the one behind this. Why else would she be feeding him nonsense how everything was great, only to drop this bomb?

"Was Alpha Damon planning to make any announcements or events for today?"

"Not that I know of.", James responded. "He said that he will be training with us in the afternoon, and there was nothing special about dinner."

"That bitch lied!", Alpha Edward cursed under his breath. Marcy told him that the whole day will be filled with her and Alpha Damon preparing to make a grand announcement and she even hinted at some party, only to give him this blow. He was deceived by his own daughter.

Chapter 527 Alpha Edward's rage (2)

"Father...", James called cautiously. "Should we return home right away? Now that Marcy is leaving, Alpha Damon might turn hostile."

Alpha Edward thought for a moment before answering, "As long as Alpha Damon doesn't ask you to leave, stick to the current schedule. Stay there as long as circumstances allow, and keep me posted.", Alpha Edward ordered. "Do you understand?"

"Yes, father.", James responded. How could he not understand? His father wanted him to act as a spy. "What about Nora?"

Alpha Edward didn't want to think about her. "Alpha Damon will let her out eventually. Don't provoke him by asking about her."

With that, Alpha Edward ended the call and hissed, "Damn it! That boy is useless!"

"Maybe Commander George knows more.", Beta Raymond reminded Alpha Edward that someone else was there. "James is young, and they probably kept him out of the loop on purpose."

Alpha Edward thought how that made sense. He kept James on the side for many things partially because he was keeping secrets, and partially because James was still too young.

Alpha Edward called George next. To his irritation, George told him the same story as James which only reinforced Alpha Edward's opinion that Marcy tricked them all because James was too timid, and George was too loyal, so it must be Marcy.

Alpha Edward tried calling Alpha Damon, but the line was busy, and it went to voicemail. "That bastard is avoiding me!"

Nothing went his way, and his anger surged when he remembered that his wife went to meet with a tailor to make a dress for Marcy's Luna ceremony. "Layla! Get back home! We have an emergency!"

"You mean, Marcy's statement how she wants to travel?", Luna Layla asked lightly.

"So, you know. You are coming home, right?"

"I'm almost done with fitting.", she grumbled. "Besides, do you need me? Don't you always handle those things without my involvement? Make Marcy apologize. She can say that she was drunk or joking and things will be back on track."

Alpha Edward ended the call abruptly. Everyone was useless!

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While Alpha Edward was raging, Beta Raymond got hold of Caden. "Alpha Damon's Beta says that their lines are busy with calls from reporters and many others who wanted to get the insider's info. It might take days before Alpha Damon starts answering regular calls."

Alpha Edward cursed under his breath.

"When I get my hands on Marcy, I will make her wish she was never born!", Alpha Edward shouted while throwing the pencil holder, the phone, and a few other items across the study.

"Pardon me for speaking freely, Alpha. But I believe that Marcy is not smart to do this on her own.", Beta Raymond said solemnly.

Alpha Edward turned to look at him in slow motion. "Are you saying that James and George lied?" Everyone was a suspect. Ah, if Nora was not in the dungeon, he would get Nora's side of the story.

"I don't know about them, but that is the territory of the Dark Howlers pack. Someone from there knew what was going on, otherwise, the reporter wouldn't dare to be at the packhouse. We heard it from Marcy's speech, Alpha Damon was supportive, and she didn't seem to be forced to say those things. Marcy is timid and easily swayed, but she is not stupid."

Alpha Edward rubbed his face forcibly. "Speak, Ray. Don't make me guess what you are thinking."

"I believe that Alpha Damon gave Marcy something that was worth more than the position of his Luna."

Alpha Edward grit his teeth while thinking about Raymond's words. It made sense. He was so consumed in his rage, that he neglected the obvious.

"Alpha Damon didn't want to make Marcy his Luna when he was here, and he invited her there only so that he can continue the game on his own territory. He used something to persuade Marcy to cooperate, and they made a fool out of me.", Alpha Edward said solemnly before turning to his Beta. "I won't allow them to get away with this! Summon the Council of Alphas. I want a meeting as soon as possible. Tomorrow morning, at dawn."

Beta Raymond's eyes widened in shock. "The Council of Alphas? There was no meeting in more than a decade. That's only for emergencies." And not just any emergency, but the epic ones where the society of werewolves is at risk.

The glare Alpha Edward gave him made Raymond's knees shake and he quickly bowed his head. "I will start the process."

The Council of Alphas consists of all active Alphas in North America, and the last time they met was when the Dark Howlers pack lost their Alpha, Luna, and Beta on the same day, and they were left with an underage heir (aka Damon).

At that time, Alpha Edward and a few others wanted to vote on dividing the territory of the Dark Howlers pack so that they can assist Damon until he becomes of age and proves himself. Of course, he wouldn't get his power back, but the plan didn't work out when Alphas started bickering about who will get how much of Damon's current territory. In the end, Alphas voted that they won't interfere in Damon's ruling as the Alpha of the Dark Howlers pack. It appeared magnanimous, but the truth was that Alphas were confident that young Damon will mess up and they will get their chance to step in, believing it was easier to take a piece of land from an inexperienced youngster than from a seasoned Alpha. Damon proved them wrong.

However, Alpha Edward was confident that this time will be different.

Over the years, more and more Alphas were unsettled by the growth of the Dark Howlers pack. Damon's territory didn't expand much, but the numbers and strength did.

The Dark Howlers pack is the only pack that can operate independently from other packs; they have a strong military and economy, and they are also involved in many dealings with humans because Damon is sponsoring promising youngsters to attend human schools which allows them to establish connections that no other pack has. But what makes them the most dangerous is their unity.

When looking at Damon's reputation as a troublemaker, fighter, or a ladies' man, it's difficult to see him as a competent Alpha, but the truth is that members of the Dark Howlers pack believe in Alpha Damon and follow him willingly, and the good conditions his pack offers are making others migrate or seek refuge there.

Many other Alphas fear that it's only a matter of time before the Dark Howlers pack absorbs their members completely. No one can be an Alpha without a pack.

For this meeting with the Council of Alphas, Alpha Edward will make a case that Alpha Damon forced Marcy to leave, which is an abuse of his position and disrespect to the Red Moon pack, and he was confident he will have the necessary votes to sanction the Dark Howlers pack.

Alpha Edward didn't have a solid story yet, but by the time of the meeting, he will fine-tune it and make it sound believable enough so that others can vote in his favor without feeling guilty about it.

Chapter 528 Marcy's farewell (4)

~ the Dark Howlers pack ~

Marcy followed after a warrior absentmindedly while staring blankly at her suitcase that the warrior was pulling by his side.

Marcy's memories of the last few weeks were blurred, like she was drunk most of the time, and she had difficulty processing her current situation. Was she really going to a shelter with a fake identity? What did she do that she needed to hide like a criminal?

Talia injected Marcy with a concoction that should make Marcy forget the last few minutes, and turn hazy one hour before that, but that was the expected effect on werewolves. Since Marcy's wolf was gone, the effect of drugs was much stronger. Marcy's memory of the last few weeks was messed up, but she remembered clearly what Talia told her before Marcy left the study to pack.

Was she leaving the Dark Howlers pack just like that? Was her father after her? Did she make a public speech about how she wanted to travel the world instead of being Damon's Luna? Why would she do that? Why would she abandon the life filled with riches and comforts in order to live in some crappy shelter? And why would she defy her father when being with Damon worked in her favor?

Marcy's attention got caught by the movement on the side and she saw George with Dawn by his side.

Marcy blinked at the sight of George's imposing visual and his gentle smile that was directed at Dawn, and then Marcy remembered: George was her mate, and he was an Alpha. Surely, he could do something to help Marcy, so she doesn't go to a shelter. Only poor people without a place to stay go there. George wouldn't abandon his mate, even if he has a mistress on the side.

"George!", Marcy called and dashed toward the man. "You need to help me!"

George's steps halted to look at Marcy. "Excuse me?"

Marcy's eyes darted toward Dawn and then back to George. "Can we talk in private?" She didn't want his mistress (aka Dawn) to overhear them.

George refused. "I have no secrets in front of my mate."

For a brief moment, Marcy thought he was talking about her, but then she saw that George pulled Dawn closer to him and a mental image flashed in Marcy's mind of George and Dawn sitting at the dining table and feeding each other. Of course, Marcy rejected George and he accepted it and he got his second chance mate while she got a shelter. Why did it all look like a dream? What about them sharing passionate moments? Were those dreams also?

George shook his head at Marcy who stared at him blankly.

"Since you have nothing to say, we are leaving.", George said.

Marcy waved her hand to stop him from moving away. "Can you talk to my father and ask him not to punish me?"

"Miss Marcy", George called in an official tone. "After what you've done, I'm not sure I can guarantee my safety, and I definitely can't guarantee yours."

Marcy pressed her lips into a line. "So, you can enjoy with your mate, and I..." She couldn't say the word shelter aloud. "I know things. I know you are an Alpha...", Marcy stopped talking when George narrowed his eyes at her.

"And if anyone else finds out about it, there will be no place for you to hide.", George said grimly.

Marcy flinched but then she threw herself at George. "You can't abandon me like this!"

Before she could touch George, Dawn stepped between them and...

'SLAP!'

A harsh slap reinforced by the Alpha aura landed on Marcy's cheek, propelling her backward until she fell on her butt.

Marcy held her throbbing cheek and stared at Dawn in disbelief. Marcy knew that feeling; her father pressured her with his Alpha aura more than once, and she felt it from Talia as well but... Yes, Talia, the wretched assistant who pinned her to the sofa!

Marcy couldn't wrap her head around the fact that Dawn had the Alpha aura. Was it because George marked her? But Alpha Edward marked his mate, and Luna Layla's aura was comparable to a Beta's.

Did Dawn have the Alpha aura because George was stronger than Marcy's father, or was that related to being fated mates? Marcy's stomach sank. If she didn't reject George, she would have that aura now.

"Is the wolf-less runaway girl causing you trouble on her way out?", Mindy asked from the side mockingly and Marcy whipped her head that way to see Mindy and Gideon emerging from the connecting hallway.

Marcy frowned. How did Mindy know that she didn't have a wolf?

"She is not strong enough to cause anything.", Dawn said while wrapping her arms around George, and then she turned to Marcy. "You had your chance with George, and you blew it. He is my mate now and I won't allow you to touch him."

George tightened his hold on Dawn in approval. He loved that she was claiming him so fiercely. Dawn was perfect.

Mindy and Gideon paused next to George and Dawn, and Mindy said, "Everyone is in the study. Alpha Damon doesn't like to wait."



George glanced at Marcy who was still sitting on the floor, and he said, "Enjoy your travels. If you know what's good for you, we won't hear from you again."

Marcy blinked back tears that prickled her eyes. George didn't know she was going to a shelter, and Marcy thought how that was for the best. She will go there and think about things, and she will come up with something, anything... because just giving up and disappearing while everyone else gets to enjoy lavish lifestyles was not fair!

George really didn't know that Marcy was going to the shelter. James' plan was that Marcy will settle in one of the towns of her choice, and Damon will have people keep an eye on her. George didn't care where Marcy will stay, as long as she was far away from him.

Dawn turned in time to see Marcy disappearing through the door as she left the packhouse. She looked pitiful and all alone.

"Are you feeling sorry for her?", George asked.

"A little bit.", Dawn admitted. "I feel like I've stolen something that belongs to her." And that went beyond just George. Dawn got to enjoy the princess treatment and happiness she only dreamed about, and the Alpha aura and the smoking-hot mate were unexpected bonuses.

"You can't steal what's yours, Dawn.", George said. "As for me, I needed to bump into Marcy first so that I can appreciate you more." He took Dawn's hand and pressed it against his chest. "Make no mistake Dawn, this thing here beats only for you."

Dawn smiled dreamily and she got on her toes to give him a kiss on the lips.

George groaned as he wanted to devour his cinnamon-infused beauty right there in the hallway, but... "Let's see what Damon wants." And after that, they will return to their room.

George had no idea how long they will be able to stay in the Dark Howlers pack, but he knew that when they return to the Red Moon pack the honeymoon will be over. Dawn will accompany him, and they will need to be careful, or things could backfire big time.

## Chapter 529 Plans for integrating witches [Bonus chapter]

Damon and Talia summoned Maya, Caden, George, Dawn, Gideon, Mindy, James, and Cornelia into the study.

They all sat on the sofa and sofa chairs, making the whole meeting informal.

Damon was against having Gideon and Mindy there, but Talia wanted her friend present. Mindy was like a source of energy and unusual solutions to common problems. Also, Talia thought that it was time for Damon and Gideon to fix their relationship, and considering what Talia wanted to talk about, Gideon could be helpful.

Talia started with, "Marcy is gone." They saw her leaving in a car through the security video feed. "She is heading to the Blue River pack."

"What?", Mindy asked, visibly surprised by this development.

"Considering her situation, it's not safe for Marcy to be on her own, so we suggested her to go to a shelter."

Mindy needed a moment to process this information. She interacted with Marcy a few times, and she couldn't imagine that the prideful princess of the Red Moon pack would go to a shelter for abused and abandoned willingly. What if Alpha Edward finds out about this and attacks the Blue River pack? But then... Mindy was now with Gideon and with the Dark Howlers pack, and Maddox would help Damon anyway, so... "I will tell Max and our people to expect her, but what if she wants to leave? I'm confident that accommodations there won't compare to what she was used to so far."

Damon shrugged. "Marcy doesn't have a choice because she doesn't have money. She is going under the name Kim Dorsey, and if she knows what's good for her, she won't identify herself as Marcy Redmayne as long as her father is the Alpha. You can tell your people in the shelter to expect her, but don't give her any special treatment."

Mindy nodded in understanding. If Marcy didn't have money, then it was understandable why she agreed to a shelter.

Next, it was George's and James' turn to give updates and to say what's the status with Alpha Edward.

"He said that we can stay here as long as you don't kick us out.", James told Damon. "Of course, he expects us to report to him about your movements."

"Of course.", Damon said. He spread his arms toward George and James. "As a thank you for helping us calm this storm, you earned yourself a stay in our packhouse for as long as you want. Or if you would prefer bigger privacy, there are a few houses nearby you could use."

James' eyes lit up. Privacy with Cornelia. He liked that idea. Ever since the reporter left, James and Cornelia were together and holding hands, and he was happy even though he couldn't wait to get closer to her. He really wanted to kiss her and much more. But there was still work to do, so he couldn't give in to the lovey-dovey mood.

"Stay alert, Alpha Damon.", James warned. "My father won't give up easily."

"We doubled border patrols.", Caden said. "Since Alpha Edward won't make rash movements without support from others, we are keeping an eye on rogues."

James nodded in approval. "It would be good if that reporter comes again in the afternoon to take some shots of me and George training with your warriors. That will prevent my father from spinning our stay here as you keeping us against our will."

"Would he do that?", Maya asked with a frown.

James shrugged. "It's about appearances and gaining support, so yes, he would do that."

They all looked at James with admiration. Compared to everyone there, he was still a kid, yet he thought of everything.

James turned to Cornelia. "Will you come to watch me train?" He grinned when Cornelia responded with a nod. This was his chance to show off.

"I have something else I want to share.", Talia announced. "You already know that Cornelia is a witch and that her Coven is in a different realm, currently accessible through the territory of the Midnight Guardians pack. Cornelia came here to scout our realm and see if it's suitable for witches to integrate into our society. I would love it if we can create an environment where people who are different feel safe to move about. Based on what I've seen, we can count on cooperation from the Midnight Guardians pack and the Blue River pack. Once Tony takes over as the Alpha, the Lightclaw pack will probably join that group. In time, as we spread the awareness and mixed mates are formed, other packs might join as well."

Talia didn't want to bring up the Red Moon pack because that pack will require much more than just leadership change, and James knew that, so he kept quiet.

"Our short-term goal is to educate our pack members about people who are different. The long-term goal is that witches get accepted like equals and are able to move freely, like humans. As our relationships with witches grow, resistance will die on its own."

Gideon shook his head and Talia noticed so she asked, "You think it won't work?"

"Humans are weaker than us.", Gideon pointed out the fact. "Many of our kind think of them as lesser beings and put them in the same category as other animals, so they don't see them as a threat. Witches have powers and I foresee that our people will fear that witches might take over. I'm not saying it's impossible, but it will be a long path where we need to show that witches have no ill intentions."

Talia saw that as a valid point. And there was also the fact that unless they use powers, witches can't be distinguished from humans, so maybe the treatment of humans will deteriorate because werewolves will fear they are witches. It could all escalate into something bad, but Talia believed it will be good.

However, there was one grim thing she needed to share with everyone.

"We found out something disturbing..." And then Talia told them about Marcy disclosing how witches were used for breeding and that Alpha Howard (aka James' grandfather) had something to do with it.

Cornelia was visibly upset. She looked at James and wondered if he knew about it. Was he part of it? Is that why he was reluctant to accept her as his mate?

James didn't know about it. Before meeting Cornelia, James thought that witches were old women with hairy warts on their noses who live in secluded caves, or maybe in houses that were made from candy to lure children and eat them. But no matter what witches looked like, if there was a plot to gain more power, James believed that his family would be part of it.

Seeing that James was silent, Cornelia turned to Talia. "That can't be related to us. Our realm was sealed for centuries."

"Do you know why it was sealed?", Talia asked.

"No. But it was closed from the outside. We assume it was done to trap us."

"Or to protect you." It was James who said this.

Chapter 530 The talk about witches

While they were in the forest, earlier that morning, Cornelia had shown James a few tricks and he saw the silvery light coming out of her fingers that reminded him of stories about the members of the Midnight Guardians pack. He thought those were lies or gibberish from a drunk person, but after meeting Cornelia, James realized that those stories were probably true, even though they might be exaggerations.

"Marcy spoke of witches", James said. "However, what if it was not witches but people who have other abilities? We all heard rumors that members of the Midnight Guardians pack have mystical powers."

"Those are not rumors.", Talia said and lifted her arm in front of her.

They all ended up staring at her palm which was glowing in silvery light.

"I am from the Midnight Guardians pack.", Talia said, dispelling the last shred of doubts from people who gaped at her.

Maya and Caden were secretly happy because now they could ask Talia about that white and dark light they saw when Talia was holding onto unconscious Damon.

"Talía...", Damon called with worry obvious in his voice. He didn't want her to reveal her powers in front of so many people.

"It's OK.", Talía assured him. "We are all friends and if we are going to make the existence of witches public, this right here is a good place to start."

Talía trusted Maya and Caden, and she knew that Mindy and Dawn will support her. Gideon is a shaman, and no matter how much he and Damon bickered, Gideon never did anything against Damon which spoke about Gideon's integrity. As for James and George, Talía was confident that they won't have bad intentions considering who their mates were.

"I don't know much about witches and I don't believe I am one, but I can do this.", Talía said and closed her palm into a fist, making the silvery light flash before disappearing.

"The light in the lake when Tanya was stuck at the bottom and Max went to rescue her... that was you?", Mindy asked.

Talía confirmed with a nod and spoke to everyone before Mindy could ask more questions, "We will make this work only if we open up. Secrets won't help. I agree with James. Marcy spoke about witches, but what if the Silver Flame Coven is not the only one out there? Or what if that applied to the members of my pack?"

Damon flinched when Talía said 'my pack' for the Midnight Guardians pack, but he didn't want to fuss about it. Soon, Talía will become his Luna officially (actually, Alpha, when he figures out technicalities of two equals leading one pack), and the Midnight Guardians pack will fall into the background, as it should. At least that's what Damon thought.

"Are you saying that we are not safe in your realm?", Cornelia asked while shrinking in her seat. The idea of her being used for breeding was extremely unsettling.

"At this point, I'm not sure.", Talía responded honestly. "That's why we are here. I want to get to the bottom of this and I hope you will help me."

James noticed Cornelia's discomfort, and he was quick to put his arm around her shoulders and give her a gentle squeeze of reassurance. His heart soared when Cornelia leaned on him, it meant that she trusted him. James liked that.

"How can we help?"

Talia was glad that James volunteered. "First, we need to know if this is current, or it stopped with your grandfather. Only by understanding what we are dealing with, we can come up with a plan to end it. At this point, we have only one lead, your grandfather's journals that Marcy mentioned. Do you know where they could be?"

James shook his head. "I was four years old when grandfather died, and I don't remember him. But I can look in the storage and see if I can find anything."

"It won't be in plain sight.", Talia said. "Check the safe deposit behind the portrait in the main study of Alpha Edward, and a hidden compartment behind the North wall in the library... the secret passage in the double-door of the third bedroom on the second floor..."

James' eyes widened as Talia spoke. "How do you know about those?"

"I know your packhouse probably better than you do.", Talia said mysteriously. She spent years sneaking around there, and at night she was free to explore.

"Make sure Alpha Edward doesn't suspect you.", Damon said while trying to divert James' attention away from Talia.

"I know what to do.", James said with confidence. He perfected his act so that Alpha Edward believes he was ignorant and obedient, and probably stupid.

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"Will you go with James to the Red Moon pack?", Talia asked Cornelia.

"I...", Cornelia was not sure how to respond to this.

"We didn't talk about it.", James said while tightening his hold on Cornelia.

James didn't think about what will happen after he leaves the Dark Howlers pack. There was no time to think about such things!

But in just a second, James saw more than a dozen of red flags related to the idea of Cornelia cohabiting with him in the packhouse of the Red Moon pack. However, being apart from her was also difficult to swallow.

James looked at Cornelia and he felt his stomach tightening. Before last night he was not aware of her existence, and only a few hours ago he confirmed they were mates. James was still at a stage where he couldn't fully feel the bond, yet he couldn't bear the thought of being apart from her. That was not like him, but there was nothing he could do about it. He really wanted to tie her up to him, so they can always be together. But he needed a plan to keep her safe, because if his father finds out about Cornelia, it won't end well, even without the whole breeding-with-witches nightmare.

Talia didn't want to influence Cornelia's decision, but Talia knew firsthand how badly Omegas were treated in the Red Moon pack. Without her wolf or Aura, as an outsider, Cornelia will be categorized as the lowest Omega there is.

"I will go with George.", Dawn spoke to Cornelia. "I know a thing or two about Alpha Edward, and I assume that you shouldn't reveal your identity as James' mate, and that means you shouldn't go to the packhouse." Dawn turned to George. "Can she stay with us?"

George confirmed, and explained to the confused witch, "I have a villa that provides privacy. Dawn and I will be there with a handful of trustworthy staff. We can give you a bedroom, and you are welcome to stay with us. James can visit you when his schedule allows. However, if you plan to move about, you will need to be extra careful. Without a wolf, you will be just a human, and that's not favorable in the Red



Moon pack. Your identity as my guest might give you some protection, but I'm not sure how far that will stretch." No one dared to bully Estelle and other Omegas who worked in his villa, but that was only when George was around. He knew that all kinds of things happened when he was not looking.

"I will be with you whenever James is not around. Talk it over with James before deciding on anything.", Dawn said to Cornelia.

George told Dawn a lot about the Red Moon pack without sugarcoating things, and he also spoke about James and how he is in charge of James' training, so Dawn knew that James and Cornelia will be facing a tough decision. James was underage, and his father controlled his routine. James never opposed his father openly, and he probably won't be able to protect Cornelia. On one side, James will want to be with Cornelia, and on the other, he wouldn't want to put her in a difficult situation.

Dawn bit the inside of her cheek while wondering if she was too hasty to offer their help. Sure, she wanted to help, but she will be an underdog also. Dawn was an Omega, and she will need to conceal the boost in strength that came with the Alpha aura after George marked her. And considering George's plans to take down Alpha Edward, the situation was not favorable. What was she thinking?