

Alphas Bride 601

Chapter 601 Therapeutic outing (1)

Jade looked at Maya while wondering if her ears malfunctioned. Did Maya say how Jade won't stick around in the packhouse? Jade was thinking about how to avoid working in the kitchen or bathrooms because water will ruin her hands, but it seems that she might end up in a worse place.

"Where are you expecting me to work?", Jade asked Maya reluctantly.

"Our Omegas are doing whatever is necessary. In order to work in the packhouse, a special clearance is required which you don't have, Miss Jade. The suitcase you left in the hallway is already in the place where you will be staying, someone will escort you there once you are done with duties for the day."

Jade was afraid to ask for clarification related to the 'place where she will be staying'. Did they put her in some communal area where she will need to share a room with a dozen others?

But Maya was still talking...

"We had a landslide a few weeks back and several houses collapsed. There are ongoing efforts to clear the rubble and save whatever we can. You will join that crew."

"Landslide?", Jade asked breathily. "Isn't that dangerous? What if I get hurt?"

"Aren't you a werewolf?", Caden asked. "If an accident happens, you will heal in no time."

Jade realized that talking won't get her out of this, and no matter what she tried, it was just getting worse. What kind of a place was this?

Why did every female appear to be an Alpha? She never heard of such a thing! But even if she neglects the unreasonable females, Jade thought that the Red Moon pack will help her, and James not only closed that door, but he ended up extorting money from her.

Who could help her get out of this pit of misery which somehow was getting deeper by the minute? Was she really stuck with work to clear up the rubble from a landslide? This was a nightmare!

Damon and Talia were sitting on the grass in the shade of a lonely oak tree, both facing the black marble gravestone that had engraved in elegant cursive names of Jacob Blake and Violet Blake.

Damon and Talia were running through the forest without a particular destination in mind, and Talia's paws led them here eventually.

Liseli and Sapa were quiet, both content after last night's mating, and letting Damon and Talia deal with their matters.

The moment Damon and Talia shifted into their human forms, Damon produced an oversized t-shirt for Talia and sweatpants for himself so they were not naked, and here they were, at the eternal resting place of his parents.

Talia stared at the gravestone and Damon sat close to her, without touching her because he didn't want to disturb her. He knew that she was fighting internal battles, and he hoped that his presence helped.

Talia was thinking about everything that happened in the last few weeks, and she even remembered her time in the Red Moon pack, before Damon became part of her life.

She was alone, concealing her presence in order to survive, and then Damon came, encouraging her to stop hiding. Sure, they both made mistakes along the way, but he was by her side, patiently waiting for her to step out of her shell and try something new, and he was always there to catch her whenever she stumbled. He was her rock.

The only time he faltered was under the influence of the dark magic, and she couldn't blame him for it.

"Mr. Blake, Mrs. Blake...", Talia broke the silence. "I hope you know that what you saw here last night, was not Damon's fault. He was under the influence of dark magic. Damon is kind and caring and he is taking good care of me. I am lucky to have him as my mate."

Damon's heart tightened painfully. Not far from here, last night, on this same clearing, he pinned Talia down and treated her like she was not important, and now she was justifying his actions.

"Kitten...", Damon said while reaching to hold her hand.

Talia looked at their connected hands and she smiled a little when their fingers interlaced.

"I just wanted them to know that they raised a good person. That's all.", she said.

"I don't care about their approval."

"You should.", Talia responded. "They left you early, but the time you had with them was precious. Cherish it. Not everyone has good parents."

Damon's brows came together as he remembered that Talia told him how Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia were her parents. It's not that he didn't believe her, but it was difficult for that information to sink in. Two Alphas of a mysterious pack that was perfectly hidden gave their baby daughter away for... why would they do that?

Damon didn't understand. Werewolves were hardwired to cherish their mates and their offspring, at least until they were old enough to fend for themselves. Sure, there were cases of parents going astray, but that was rare.

Damon couldn't imagine how Talia felt when she found out that her parents abandoned her when she was a baby. She grew up alone, like an outcast, without anything and anyone to call her own, while her parents were alive and well and powerful. She even had a brother that grew up as part of the loving family that was hers, yet she never had it. It was twisted and sick.

And then those same people tried to cripple him out of fear that he was getting too powerful.

Damon realized that he was Talia's only family and his desire to protect her and give her only the best swelled within him.

Damon regretted immensely his actions while he was under the influence of dark magic, and he ended up in that wretched state because of Alpha Sophia and Alpha Isaac!

A low growl formed in the back of Damon's throat. "When are we going to the Midnight Guardians pack?" He had a lot of anger to vent, and those two Alphas were perfect targets.

"Not today.", Talia responded. "Can we not talk about that?"

"We don't need to talk at all.", Damon said while pushing a lock of hair behind Talia's ear. "We can stay here the whole day or not. Whatever you want, kitten. Did the run help?"

Talia released a long breath while assessing her emotions. "A little bit."

Damon leaned closer to Talia and extended his free arm around her. "Can I?"

It took Talia a long moment to understand that Damon was asking for permission to hug her, and his insecurity hit her hard.

"Don't ever... EVER, ask if you can hug me.", Talia said seriously. "Your proximity is essential for my sanity."

Damon smiled and scooted closer to Talia. His arm wrapped around her, and she leaned on him.

Talia turned to look at the gravestone. "See? Your son is wonderful. Damon knows how to take care of his mate. He is the one holding me together to prevent me from falling apart."

"You do the same for me, kitten", Damon murmured into her hair and then he kissed her there.

Talia took a few deep breaths and she pushed herself deeper into Damon's embrace, seeking the comfort his closeness provided. The sparks were there wherever their skin touched, and she greedily inhaled her favorite scent of the forest and the dark chocolate that had a therapeutic effect on her.

Chapter 602 Therapeutic outing (2)

"I'm still nervous.", Talia said after some time. Even with Damon all around her, he couldn't dispel the uneasiness that twirled in the pit of her stomach, making her whole body tingle in unpleasant ways.

"Do you want to run more?", he asked.

Talia refused. "I need something more than running. How about we spar?" A second later, she shook her head while dismissing that idea. She didn't want to risk any of them getting hurt, and if they didn't go all out, it wouldn't help.

Damon pursed his lips and then he got an idea.

His arms moved under Talia, and he stood up while carrying her.

Talia was not sure what he was up to, but his focused gaze and steady steps told her that he had a plan. However, why was he heading toward the cliff where the river was ending?

"Damon?", Talia asked, now a bit nervous. "What are you up to?"

"You will find out in a minute", he said, and her hands tightened around his neck on an instinct.

Talia's eyes widened when she realized that he was walking straight for the edge, climbing the massive rock where the two of them were sitting the first time he brought her here. That rock provided a great view of the forest, valley, Darkbourne, and the waterfall below it.

Damon pried Talia's arms from his neck and kissed the inside of her palms while putting her hands to rest on her stomach.

"Do you trust me, kitten?"

"Absolutely.", Talia responded right away while smiling at him stupidly. She loved those small kisses he would place randomly all over her body when she least expected them.

Talia wondered, why were they there? Did he bring her to enjoy the view? It was a nice view, and they could sit on the rock, but Damon didn't seem to have any intention of letting her down.

"Damon?"

He pressed his lips into a line while steeling his resolve and then his knees bent.

"Ahhhhh!", Talia screamed when Damon jumped off the rock with Talia in his arms without any warning.

She just told his parents how he was treating her well, yet now he was murdering her! What the hell!?

The moment Damon's legs parted from the rock, he flung Talia away from him and her arms flailed in an attempt to latch onto Damon, but he was far away.

Talia panicked. This was it. He was set on killing them both!

At that moment, Talia saw her life flashing in front of her eyes.

But why were all of her mental images filled with Damon?

Talia remembered a million moments with Damon, and she could see his expressions that were warm, tense, happy, anxious, cheeky, and naughty. Many of those moments included Damon and Talia naked, yet each of them was pure and unspoiled.

Talia was struck with a realization how every moment with Damon felt right, and any shade that was thrown in there was because of other people.

Didn't that mean...?

Before she could finish that thought, Talia's body painfully jolted when harsh icy water surrounded her from all sides and the pressure from the waterfall kept pushing her down and throwing her in various directions.

Intense clamor assaulted Talia's ears and the twirling bubbles and mud made it impossible to figure out which way was up, so Talia relaxed and allowed the currents to carry her.

It reminded her of the first time she jumped into the waterfall, and she remembered all the rocks that were there. What if she hit one of those!?

After the initial panic, Talia calmed down while repeating that the worst was over, and she probably won't die. At most, she won't be able to come out in time, she will run out of oxygen and faint, and emerge down the river to wake up eventually.

A dreadful thought shot through her. What if Damon was hurt? What if he fell on a rock? Sure, he was strong and athletic, but no one can control his direction mid-air! Why did he act so recklessly!?

Something hard wrapped around her waist and she felt solid warmth pressing on her back, dispelling her anxiety.

Talia turned around and her hands sought to hold onto a firm body that she was familiar with.

Damon found her, just how he did the last time... just how he promised that he always will.

She stuck to him closely, mindful of not obstructing his arms and legs. She believed that he will take them to the surface on time, but she also didn't care if she loses the air from her lungs and faints because Damon was there, and everything was fine when he was by her side.

'PAAAAAH!'

They inhaled in unison as they emerged from turbulent waters, with the waterfall on one side, and the steep cliff on the other.

As soon as she caught her breath, Talia kissed Damon with all her might, and he didn't delay in returning her kiss with equal fervor. They were alive!

'Should I take this as, the jumping therapy worked and you feel better?', Damon asked her through their private mind-link.

Talia looked at Damon with the intensity that made him hold his breath.

'Make love to me, Damon. Remind me that I'm yours.'

Damon's eyes flashed in surprise. He knew that Talia came out of her shell, and she was not a shy girl anymore, but when she boldly asked him to take her with that adorable blush on her face, it was the biggest turn-on ever!

Talia thought that he will take her right there in the water, but he twisted his body so that his back was facing her, and she heard his voice in her head, 'Hold onto me, kitten.'

Unsure of what he was up to, Talia put her arms on Damon's shoulders, and her grip intensified when she realized that he started climbing the cliff.

Damon expertly found grooves between massive rocks for his fingers to slide into, and he pulled them both up with ease. Talia really admired his strength.

They were about halfway up, and Talia stuck close to him because the water was now hitting her head, and then he said, 'Climb in first.'

Talia looked up and blinked to see that Damon was holding onto the edge of a narrow opening among rocks.

She used his body as a ladder and went in, and he was right behind her.

It was a short tunnel, only a few steps long, and then it widened into a small circular cave that was illuminated by streaks of light coming in through gaps between rocks that also allowed for green leafy vines to dangle from above.

Talia thought that she was in a place from fairytales. It looked magical.

The walls were made of uneven rocks while the ground was a mix of rocks, mud, and moss.

The ceiling was tall enough for Damon to stand straight and Talia wondered if he could touch it if he stretched his arms.

The humidity was high, but it was not stuffy.

Chapter 603 Therapeutic outing (3)

Talia looked around to see that there was a cot at the back of the cave, and protruding rocks were used as shelves made by nature that held some items: a blanket, a few towels, granola bars, cans of beer, and some other things Talia couldn't identify with a quick glance.

"I used to come here when I didn't want to be found, and when I couldn't afford to go somewhere far away.", Damon's voice sounded over the clamor from the waterfall.

Damon got a blanket and swatted it to smack the cot clean. The dust which rose made them both cough.

"It seems you haven't been here for a while.", Talia stated the obvious.

"About a year.", Damon said. He gestured toward the food. "I don't recommend eating those. If you like it here, we can get snacks for next time. We can make this our private hideaway. No one knows about this place. Not even Caden."

Talia's heart swelled at the thought that this place was their secret, and suddenly she thought how it was cozy. As long as she was with Damon, any place was welcoming.

Talia peeled the wet t-shirt off her body and flung it to hang on one rock that was sticking out from the wall. She enjoyed the way Damon observed her every move and the way his fingers twitched told her that he was eager to touch her.

She walked to Damon and snaked her arms around his waist. "I am hungry now. Is there something else you can offer me as a snack?"

Damon chuckled when he realized that she was talking about him. "Snack away, kitten. I am all yours."

"I would prefer if you eat me up.", she said cheekily. "Make love to me, Damon. Make me forget about everything beyond what's in this cave."

Damon hummed lowly and Talia threw her head back when his palms started moving over her sides.

Damon's head dipped so he can kiss his mark on her neck. It was still pinkish, yet to form completely, and he wondered if he would need to bite her again. He never heard of mates needing to bite more than once for the mark to form fully, but his first bite didn't show at all, and this one looked like a light hickey with a vague pattern around it. This pointed to the possibility that if he bites her again, his mark will intensify.

Talia moaned when his tongue moved over her neck, amplifying the sensation of his fingers teasing her flesh expertly. Damon's touch ignited the sparks that awakened every cell in her body, and it made her soul sing in search of his.

Damon lifted her up like she weighs nothing and placed her gently to lay on the cot.

Talia grabbed his sweatpants with urgency and tugged them down. Once her arms couldn't reach further because Damon was on top of her, she hooked her toes on the waistband and pulled the damp fabric all the way down.

Damon kept his weight on his elbows and observed her with amusement.

"Are you eager to feel me, kitten?"

She had no intention of denying it. She needed him and she knew he could smell her arousal. "Yes."

Damon licked his lips slowly. "From where should I start?"

Talia lifted her hips to grind herself on his erection. "Please... I want to feel you. We can do the rest later."

His half-smirk told her that was not going to happen.

"Patience, kitten", he drawled, and his breath splashed on her ear. "Let me worship you. I will make you come until you can't form a coherent thought."

Talia felt a wave of heat converging at her core. His words were scandalous, but what turned her on the most was that she knew he meant it, and she knew that he was capable of making it happen.

Damon Blake was not only outrageously handsome Alpha, but he knew how to please a woman, and he was her mate. Only hers.

Talia shut her eyes and enjoyed the sensation of his fingers caressing secret spots on her flesh, his lips that kissed and sucked all the right places, and his heat and strength... but the best part was that it was all wrapped in the emotions they shared through their mate bond.

Love. Trust. Admiration. Lust. Devotion.

It was all in there, pulling them closer with every heartbeat.

Damon took his time arranging kisses over her body, and by the time he unlatched himself from her left breast, Talia felt like she was floating.

"Ahh...", a lustful gasp escaped her lips when he kissed her right in the center of her drenched flower that was aching for his touch.

She looked down to see that her body was low on the cot, her butt nearly hanging down from it. When did that happen?

Damon was kneeling on the ground and holding onto her thighs to ensure she keeps her legs spread wide. His face was buried at the cradle of her thighs and his intense gaze didn't leave her eyes as his tongue moved over her clit in mighty strokes.

He enjoyed watching Talia's flushed face between her breasts which were rising and falling vigorously as she desperately inhaled much-needed air.

'I love to see you like that, kitten', Damon spoke into her mind while licking and sucking her down there. 'That's it... Let it out... Feel what I'm doing... Let your mate take good care of you...' And he had every intention of taking good care of her.

The fact that Talia laid there naked for Damon to feast on was the proof that she trusted him completely and that only made him love her more. She was powerful and kind and shy and beautiful, and she allowed him to touch her everywhere.

And right there, as he sucked on her clit, Damon knew that her mind was being emptied from anything that was weighing on it as the only thing she could focus on were the two of them and him caressing her sweet spots.

"Damon... Damon...", she chanted his name wantonly while fisting his hair, as he pushed her closer to rapture with every stroke of his tongue.

He listened to her gasps and wild heartbeats, knowing that she was almost there.

Talia's cry was stuck in her throat when her body arched as the orgasm hit her full force and she saw stars in front of her closed eyes.

She thought that Damon will cease his ministrations, but he had no such intentions as he gripped her hips and held her in place while greedily licking every drop of the citrusy-sweet nectar her body released.

"Da... Dam...", she tried to tell him to stop because she was on the verge of passing out, but she couldn't get enough air to form a word. 'Damon! Please...', she switched to mind-link.

'Just a bit more... bear with it...!', he responded, and Talia's mind blanked out when he increased the pace and intensity.

Every stroke of his tongue delivered another dose of cataclysmic sensation that made her whole body shudder in ecstasy and didn't allow her to come down from her high.

Was he really set on killing her? The waterfall murder failed, so he will give her death by sex?

Maybe that was not a bad way to go.

Chapter 604 Therapeutic outing (4)

Talia struggled to breathe as she realized that she was not only staying on that high, but she was going higher. Was there higher?

Her mouth opened in a soundless scream when a second orgasm pushed her to another peak, one that she never felt before, and she wondered if her soul was about to leave her body.

Damon growled as he lapped at Talia's citrusy-sweet juices. The mate bond allowed him to feel her emotions and he thought that he will come right there with her. Damn! That was good. His chest swelled with pride. HE was good.

Talia's whole body was numbly twitching in the aftershocks of the mind-blowing orgasm, and she barely noticed that Damon moved her to lay on the cot properly and that he was next to her, cradling her in his arms.

"How was that for your mate treating you well?", he asked smugly, knowing very well that it was fantastic, but he wanted to hear her praise him.

Talia blinked a few times, but she was unable to focus on his handsome face that was grinning at her.

"Is that it?", she asked breathily. "I was hoping you will plunder my insides."

"Ah!", she exclaimed when he flipped her over, so she ended up on her stomach, with Damon pinning her from the back.

He spread her legs with his knees, to position himself there and she held her breath in anticipation when his chest pressed on her back as he pinned her under him.

"I thought I should be nice and give you a breather", he growled close to her ear, and she could feel his erection prodding at her entrance down there. "But it seems you don't want one, and that's fine with me."

Talia moaned loudly when he entered her in one mighty stroke, filling her up completely, and charging her insides with addictive sparks.

She enjoyed his weight on her. It was enough to constrict her movements without being too much.

She angled her hips so that her ass lifts up and he gets better access.

He hummed in approval and used the gap under her abdomen to reach her breasts. He loved the way she filled his palm, and that hard bud at the peak was like a pleasure button that made her squirm whenever he pinched and twisted it.

Outrageous sounds filled the cave as they moaned, groaned, and even the slapping of flesh against flesh could be heard over the clamor of the waterfall.

Damon was lost in the sensation of Talia's insides clutching his cock. Everything about her was perfect and he didn't want to share her with anyone. She was his!

A deep rumble formed in Damon's chest, and he pushed Talia's hair to the right so that he can expose the left side of her neck.

He kissed and licked her there and Talia moaned wantonly. It was such a sensitive spot, and it urged her to get more, much more of Damon.

"Harder... Harder...", she chanted, spurring him to increase his pace, but something was missing.

"Mark me...", Talia breathed as he pounded himself inside her. "I want to feel your fangs in my flesh... I want to feel that I am yours... Claim me, Damon..." She wanted confirmation that she belonged to him. She needed a place to belong, and he was her home.

Damon's fangs were already out, and her words confirmed that he shouldn't suppress his urges.

Damon wrapped his arm around Talia's hair and pulled her back, making her body arch in a way that opened her up more for him to reach deeper from behind.

Talia hissed at the sharp pain in her scalp. Damon was not gentle, but her whole body was buzzing, and gentleness was not what she was looking for.

The friction of his cock entering her and pulling out was driving her mad, and she wanted to drown in that madness only Damon could provide.

Damon's focus narrowed on Talia's neck that was now bared for him completely, all with that pinkish mark that stood there and called for him to strengthen it.

"AHHH!", Talia's cry bounced off the walls of the circular cave and it drowned in the noise of the waterfall when Damon's venom entered her body, the intense heat threatened to burn her alive.

Pain mixed with pleasure, rapidly reaching the critical mass, and Talia's insides burst into an orgasm that made her mind spin.

Damon groaned into her skin, and she could feel him filling her up with his hot seed. The movements of his hips didn't stop even though they became jerky.

For a brief moment, Damon was concerned if he was too rough, but Talia's emotions pouring into him told him that was just what she wanted. Actually, she wanted more and he was delighted about it. Next time.

Damon was firmly latched onto Talia's neck and his chest was pressed on her back as his hips rocked into her, his one arm held her from below while the other one was pulling on her hair... Damon was inside her, above her, all around her, and she felt the comfort of knowing that Damon was right there where he should be, everywhere.

'I love you, Damon...', Talia spoke into their mind link. 'I am yours. Don't ever stop loving me.'

'I will never stop loving you, kitten.' Even through the mind-link, he sounded breathy. 'We will be together, forever. You are my only one, and I am yours.', he assured her and he knew that she needed to hear it.

He slowly extracted his fangs out of her neck, happy that he got to mark her again. Will the mark be fully visible now? He was looking forward to tomorrow when he could confirm. Damon licked her wound to help it heal and he enjoyed the sensation of Talia's body shuddering under him.

'You are mine. Only mine.', Damon said, and he pulled out so that she can turn on her back and face him.

He loved seeing her flushed face after an orgasm when she glowed with the bliss he provided. He did that!

Talia opened her emotions fully so that he can feel her happiness, and he did the same.

One happiness amplified another, and their bodies started pulsating in a silvery glow that followed the rhythm of their matching heartbeats.

Damon touched her cheek and observed that both of them were glowing. "It's happening again."

"I told you. This happens when we are in sync."

Damon looked around to see that the whole cave was illuminated by the silvery glow they created, and he was glad that it was midday because if this was night, the light show they created would definitely attract attention and his secret hideout wouldn't be secret anymore.

Damon hoped that this silvery energy will help dispel the dark magic which seeped into Talia, or at least that it will suppress the darkness somehow. But regardless of any long-term effects, Damon could feel her emotions, and he was confident that right at that moment, Talia's happiness was untainted and that was all it mattered.

Damon smiled wickedly. "If we are in sync, does that mean you want to spend the rest of your life here with me, having sex?"

Talia burst into giggles, and she raised her arms to lace her fingers into his raven black hair. "That, my love... sounds wonderful." And then she lifted herself up to kiss him on the lips.

His heart swelled at the endearment she used. Talia rarely called him anything other than his name, and that made it special.

Talia gasped when he entered her without any warning.

She was wet and sensitive from what they just did, and he was hard as he obviously didn't have enough of his kitten. He never had enough of Talia. She was addictive, perfect, and his, and he just marked her, again!

"Well then", Damon drawled as his hips started rocking slowly. "We shouldn't delay the rest of our lives. Every. Minute. Counts."

Talia embraced him with her arms and legs, happy that Damon was there with her, happy that he was there for her, and she wouldn't want it any other way.

Chapter 605 Plans for the evening [Bonus chapter]

Damon and Talia returned to the packhouse at sunset. They headed to their bedroom to tidy up before they came down for dinner, and the way they were connected at the hips told everyone that they worked out whatever was going on.

No one mentioned Jade or any other pressing matter. It was like no one wanted to bother with negativity during the meal.

When all the food was served, Zina gingerly joined the table at Talia's and Dawn's insistence. They were all friends and familiar with each other, but Zina thought that chattering in the kitchen was one thing, while dining together with guests present was another.

Damon hovered around Talia who looked at him with hearts in her eyes, and he managed to keep her plate filled with food, to feed both her and himself, and whenever he had a free hand, he would reach for hers to hold it. The mood was so lovey-dovey, that others avoided looking at them.

"Any plans for the evening?", Caden asked at a certain point. "How about we go to the Shifters? After everything we had in the last few days, we could all use some time to unwind." He turned to Talia and Damon. "And our people will appreciate it if their Alpha and Luna make a public appearance."

Talia glanced at Damon who shrugged, indicating that it was up to her.

Talia was attracted to the idea of dancing and having fun, and maybe they could get drunk as well. She wanted to let loose and have fun. Her enthusiasm dwindled when she remembered that since last night everyone in the Dark Howlers pack knew her as their Luna, and she was not sure how that changed things. Can Luna go to a nightclub and party like no one was watching?

'Is it OK if we go there?', Talia asked Damon through their mind-link.

'Why not?'

Damon chuckled when Talia shared her concerns about appropriate behavior.

"Kitten", he responded for everyone to hear. "If you want to go, we will go. If you want to drink, we will drink. If you want to dance, I will be your partner. This is your pack now and you can do whatever you want, and if anyone has problems with that, I will take care of it."

Talia smiled foolishly at Damon's doting expression and she really hoped that no one noticed how his right hand was under the table, under her skirt, squeezing her thigh and caressing her there.

"It seems we are going to Shifters tonight.", she said.

Dawn was excited. She looked at George eagerly, and when he gave her a small nod, she announced, "The two of us are in."

Mindy responded without consulting Gideon, "We will stay here tonight."

"We can go if you want.", Gideon said. He had a feeling that she refused because of him. After all, how can a Shaman appear at the nightclub, and he previously told her that he was not into dancing. Gideon was worried that he was too boring for his pumpkin-infused princess.

Mindy refused. "No. We should rest. We have an early start tomorrow."

"What are your plans for tomorrow?", Talia asked, genuinely curious. Mindy told her that they won't return to their place because amenities were lacking, and with the pack run over, they didn't have any official work to handle.

Mindy grinned. "We will move to the house you said we can use. It looks perfect."

Talia's face exploded into a smile. "Really? That's great! We can get a few warriors to help you move stuff."

Gideon approved the idea of getting help. "Tomorrow morning, we will go to our place and start packing. We will let you know when we are ready to move stuff."

"If we can have help in the afternoon, that would be perfect.", Mindy already had a plan going. "After lunch sounds good. We won't pack everything until then, but we can move things in phases as the new place is furnished so tomorrow we will get only necessities."

Mindy looked at Gideon questionably and when he approved, Mindy asked, "Can have someone help us prepare the soil for the garden in the new house?" She really liked the house and she hoped that it will work. It had space inside and out, and with guards securing the perimeter, they will have their privacy also.

"That can be arranged.", Maya said. "Where are you moving to?"

"The house where Marcy and George stayed after...", Talia's voice trailed while wondering if mentioning George and Marcy in the same sentence was disturbing to anyone.

Dawn saw that Talia was looking at her apprehensively. "It's fine, Lia." She turned to Mindy. "That's a wonderful house. I'm sure you will be happy." She grinned at George. "On the upper floor, second room to the right, that's where I recognized this hunk as my mate."

Mindy's brows came together to form a frown. Mindy knew which room Dawn was talking about because she and Gideon visited it earlier that day. If that's the room where Dawn and George recognized each other as mates, weren't they frisky in there?

"Does that mean we need to replace the mattress?", Mindy asked.

Dawn giggled. "I'm not sure about the mattress, but bedsheets definitely. And you probably don't want to use those pillows."

Zina couldn't believe Dawn's cheeky expression. She enjoyed teasing Mindy, but Mindy was visibly uncomfortable.

"Don't worry, Mindy.", Zina said. "By noon tomorrow, I will get you new mattresses and pillows in every bedroom. Just in case."

Mindy looked at Zina gratefully. "Thank you. You are a sweetheart."

Zina noticed that other than Petra, Zack, and Erik, Zina was the only unmated person at the table. And teens were underage, so they didn't count.

"You should stick close to Talia so that you find your mate.", Mindy said to Zina.

Zina didn't get it. "Talia will find me mate?"

Maya nodded earnestly. "Malia always delivers. Satisfaction guaranteed. You should take advantage of this promotional period until we figure out the prices for services."

"We need to call Lina and Tanya and figure out the logo, brand, and marketing strategy.", Mindy said with all the seriousness in the world, and Mindy, Dawn, and Maya started chattering about Malia, the mating service. They already mentioned the whole Malia idea to the Wilkow sisters who were interested in being a part of it.

Talia waved dismissively. "Don't listen to them, Zina. They believe that I have the power to bring mates together."

"You say you don't have it, and all mates here are proof that you do.", Dawn said. "Well, except for Maya and Caden." She turned to Zina. "Stick close to Talia, Zi. Worst case, you won't find your mate."

Zina glanced in Talia's direction, and she didn't miss the dark cloud that was forming above Damon's head. Zina lowered her eyes and focused on the food that was in front of her. The worst case won't be that she doesn't find her mate; it will be that her Alpha puts her in the dungeon (or worse) because she will intrude on his time with Talia.

By the time dinner ended, they concluded that Damon, Talia, Maya, Caden, Dawn, George, and Zina were going to the Shifters, while the rest had other plans.

Zina was excited and she hoped that she will get access to that highly coveted VVIP booth that belonged to Alpha Damon.

She knew that with the new position that Talia gave her, Zina was above Omegas, but this dining with everyone and then going to Shifters nightclub in the same group with Alpha, Luna, and Betas... it felt unreal.

Mindy and Gideon said that they need to rest and plan for their move tomorrow. Teens were underage so they couldn't go to Shifters; Petra, Erik, and Zack went to Darkbourne to find themselves teenage-appropriate fun.

Cornelia was eager to see what Shifter nightclub was, but she didn't feel it was right to go without James who couldn't go because he was underage.

She hoped that James will say how they will join Petra, Erik, and Zack, but James said that he had other plans.

Unsure of what to do, Cornelia ended up stuck in the packhouse. Again! But it wouldn't be proper if she went out without James who was right there.

Chapter 606 Financially securing a witch

Cornelia was not in a good mood. Instead of exploring this realm and checking out the human city, she spent most of her afternoon alone in the room, browsing on the tablet.

James had no intention of neglecting Cornelia, actually, everything he did was with Cornelia on his mind.

He was busy dealing with the necessary paperwork to transfer a portion of Jade's company to him, and he also wanted to secure Cornelia financially.

James went to meet with the lawyer to discuss his plan and to provide the necessary information. That shouldn't take a lot of time. They would meet again when the lawyer prepares everything, and James only needs to sign the paperwork.

Unfortunately, everything took much longer than James thought.

Cornelia legally didn't exist in this realm so in order to name Cornelia as his beneficiary, James worked with Caden to produce identification documents for Cornelia. She needed an identity that will be valid when presented in front of humans. Luckily, the Dark Howlers pack had this in place as they created IDs for many refugees that came their way.

Cornelia didn't understand what James was doing most of the afternoon, so she asked him about it after dinner, and she was not happy when he told her that he needed to meet with a lawyer (again!) later that evening.

"Why?", Cornelia asked.

"I want to give you full access to my assets and to name you as a beneficiary of my will. Documents are mostly ready, and I need to verify the information and sign them."

"Why are you doing that?", Cornelia asked, and her expression darkened as James explained. It all sounded confusing, but one thing she understood was, "Are you planning to die?"

"Of course, not.", he said. "However, I am not immortal and I will die one day."

"You don't need to.", Cornelia said and James's eyebrows shoot up. Was she serious?

He dispelled those thoughts and said, "It doesn't need to be death. Maybe I won't be around for other reasons and in case that happens, I want to know that you have access to my assets."

Cornelia didn't like this. "Why does it feel like you are planning to leave me?"

James was not sure if Cornelia's doubts related to him abandoning her were because of her initial disappointment when she realized that he can't feel the bond, or because she saw how werewolves are licentious, or maybe her insecurities went deeper than he could imagine. But he knew that he needed to assure her that he was not going anywhere. Not willingly, at least.

"Cora", he called. "Imagine that the two of us live in your Coven, and then something happens to you. Wouldn't you want to know that I am taken care of?"

Cora had difficulty seeing the problem. Witches were not materialistic, and they were not hoarding things. In their Coven, everyone did their part be it cooking, cleaning, harvesting, or weaving... they would eat how much was needed and practice magic, and that was it. She didn't understand the need of having money. Can you eat it?

James realized that his hypothetical situation didn't have the desired effect. He tried another approach.

"How about this scenario? We live in your Coven, and your sisters are not accepting me. I am a male and not a witch and none of them wants to get close to me. I get to eat and a place to sleep only when we are together. And then one day, you need to leave on a mission, and I can't follow. Will you be at peace while wondering if your sisters kicked me out?"

Cornelia's expression changed. Her sisters wouldn't do that.

Actually, if James was there and Cornelia was not close to protect him, Cornelia feared that her so-called sisters will try to get their hands on James. He was a handsome, healthy male, able to copulate and produce offspring. That's why Cornelia didn't want to take him to the Silver Flame Coven, but she didn't want to tell him that, fearing that James will be interested to go there when he hears how hundreds of attractive (and scarcely dressed) females will be available for him to pick from. After all, if James doesn't feel the bond, there will be nothing to remind him of fidelity. Will he abandon her?

Unaware of Cornelia's thoughts, James was pleased to see Cornelia's face darkening which meant that she wouldn't be happy if he was in the Coven without her.

"In case that happens, you will want to have something in place to assure I am safe. Right?" James waited for Cornelia's confirmation, and then he continued, "This is a similar thing. I have no intention of leaving you, Cora. And I have even fewer thoughts about ending my life before it's my time. However, accidents happen, and if it comes to that, I want to know that you won't be left to fend for yourself. Yes, you could reach out to Talia, Damon, and many others to help you, but money is a necessity if you want to be independent."

"I thought that werewolves live in packs." Just as witches live in Covens. "Why do you speak of independence as a necessity?"

James was embarrassed to say this, but he had to, "Because my pack is not a good place to be, and my family sucks. If I have a choice, I would leave, but I'm not reckless to put myself in a position where I won't have a place to sleep or what to eat."

"If your pack is not good, why don't you stay here? This pack seems nice."

James had to agree with that. The Dark Howlers pack was nice, however... "My father wouldn't let me go. If I stay here, I will attract trouble for Alpha Damon and his pack. If I leave in the near future, my father will accuse Alpha Damon of putting ideas into my head."

"And that's why you are going back, to a no-good place.", Cornelia said solemnly.

"Right.", James confirmed. "But it's temporary. We have two years to come up with a plan that will allow us to sever the connection with the Red Moon pack and to disappear without endangering anyone."

"Since you have an exit plan in place, why do you need to give me access to your wealth?"

James liked that she called it wealth. It was not much, but she didn't grasp the concept of money and assets, and he wanted her to think that he was mighty.

"Just in case an accident happens.", James said with a smile and gave her a small kiss on her cheek. "I need to meet with the lawyer. You are welcome to join, if you wish."

Cornelia refused. She gestured toward the tablet. "My time will be better spent learning."

James wondered what she was learning about. He told her to stay away from social media because they are full of unreliable information, but even that was learning about human culture, so he let it be.

"Cora", he called. "I know that today didn't pass as planned but I promise to make it up to you. I will be back in no time, and then we can do something fun."

He kissed her again, this time on the lips, and then he rushed out of the room before he changed his mind and missed meeting with the lawyer who was already waiting for him.

Chapter 607 There is always tomorrow

James returned to his room to find Cornelia sleeping on the bed with a tablet under her hand.

He exhaled helplessly. He thought that meeting with a lawyer will take no more than half an hour, but it dragged for more than two hours. There were so many documents to sign, and it took much longer than he thought it will. Again.

James kept the folder on the side table and pried the tablet from Cornelia's fingers, and then he sat on the edge of the bed and observed Cornelia's sleeping form. She was beautiful.

He regretted that they didn't have a date, and they didn't spend the day alone either. But on the other hand, she was now his beneficiary, and she had her identification documents in order, and those were important.

If James was a regular guy, none of those would be necessary, but the circumstances of his birth forced him to do many things that were not common for a person his age.

James was a young boy when he realized that his father was not a caring parent like the ones he saw on the television. Alpha Edward was interested in results and maintaining his image of a strong Alpha, which meant that James needed to be strong and excel in his studies in order not to tarnish Alpha Edward's reputation.

More than anyone else, James would be punished harshly whenever he lagged behind the schedule others set for him, so James made sure to meet expectations, so he doesn't end up in trouble.

James was about twelve years old when he found out that he doesn't have an Alpha aura.

At first, he was in disbelief. The guy testing it made a mistake! The equipment was defective! And then he panicked as the truth set in: he really didn't have an Alpha aura.

But, what did that mean? Was he a faulty child or... was he not Alpha Edward's son? He already knew that his parents didn't practice monogamy, so the latter was highly possible.

Everyone knew James as the son of Alpha Edward, the young Alpha of the Red Moon pack, the leader of the next generation of Alphas. That glorious image was crumbling in front of James' eyes as he could see his father disposing of him secretly in order to conceal the disgrace of raising an impostor as his own child. Heck, the old guy would probably make it look like one of his enemies did it, so that he can get some benefits!

James was aware of Alpha Edward's personality. If James was not his son and didn't have an Alpha aura, it meant that James had no value, and he was in trouble. Big, big trouble.

James wanted to flee, but where would he go? His father had spies everywhere and they could track him easily, and James fell into depression while thinking about harming himself. James was looking into ways to cripple himself and make it look like an accident. In that way, he can blame the injury on his lack of Alpha aura.

Just before James did something irreversible, George showed up with a story about how there were cases of late bloomers where Aura shows later.

James suspected that was a bunch of rubbish. He did his research, and he never heard of such a thing as late bloomers. James didn't understand why George helped him out, and in time he realized that George was not Alpha Edward's loyal dog as others portray him.

Could James use George? He was not sure, so he decided to observe the youngest Commander.

James was always wary of George, waiting to find out George's motives, which only made him more cautious about everything.

He needed a plan, but time was passing quickly between training and studying, and the only consolation James had was that he was relatively safe until his eighteenth birthday.

James' childhood was not a carefree one; someone was always watching him and waiting for the young Alpha to make a mistake. As James grew older, more and more people were looking his way and James knew about their intentions. They were wondering how strong he was, how smart he was, and how much they can use him to get to Alpha Edward and then to the Red Moon pack. James pretended not to see any of those, but the tension was intensifying by the day.

James was sixteen years old now, and not a naïve child. He survived so far by doing enough, yet not too much to stand out. However, now that he found Cornelia, James knew that things would need to change.

He needed to provide for her, and he will need to protect himself and his mate. Was he strong enough for that? Probably not. He was desperate for allies, but the trick was that the more people knew about Cornelia, the bigger was the possibility of Alpha Edward finding out about her.

James needed to be smarter than ever, or everything might collapse.

James saw the lawyer's confusion when they were putting the will together and how everything will go to Cornelia Silver (the name on Cornelia's documents). However, the guy was not nosy, and James hoped that Caden was right about the lawyer knowing how to keep secrets because if this reached Alpha Edward's ears, a lot of people will be in trouble.

James released a long breath and looked at his chocolate-colored beauty that was sleeping peacefully. His good mood about settling the paperwork was spoiled at the thought that he neglected his mate. Again.

James knew that Cornelia was curious about the world, yet because of him, she stayed in the room. He hoped that she will forgive him, and he decided to address her needs as his highest priority going forward.

Even if Heaven collapses, tomorrow, they will go on a date, and he will treat her as a lady worthy of admiration and respect, and give her only the best of things.

James got up and swiftly changed into sweatpants and a cotton t-shirt. He brought those for training, as he would usually sleep in his underwear (or nude), but because of Cornelia, James decided to cover up

while sleeping so he doesn't make it awkward for her. But once they go all the way, he will definitely NOT wear any sleepwear, and he won't allow her to cover up either. He will cover her up, with his body. He liked that mental image.

Slowly, very slowly, James lifted the blanket and scooted under it to join Cornelia.

The moment their bodies touched, Cornelia moved, and she ended up with her head on his shoulder.

James loved that Cornelia gravitated toward him in her sleep. Was that their mate bond showing her the way? He liked to think so.

James buried his face in her hair and took a deep breath, allowing the sweet scent of wild berries to fill his system. It was appetizing and it made him think of Cornelia's addictive flavor he tasted while they kissed earlier that day.

His crotch area tightened as he thought about how she would taste when he kisses her on her lips down there. James never went down on a woman, but while thinking of Cornelia, he really wanted to bury his tongue between drenched folds, and... he groaned and moved sideways to adjust his erection.

James and Cornelia didn't go on a date, nor spent the day alone, but they were together now, and they had tomorrow. They definitely had tomorrow, and that was a good thing.

With those thoughts, and Cornelia in his arms, James closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 608 Back at the Shifters nightclub (1) [Bonus chapter]

Talia and Damon stood on the elevated platform at the entrance to the Shifters nightclub that provided a good view of the space and the crowd that filled it.

Maya and Caden were on the left, and Dawn and George were on the right, both a step behind Damon and Talia, showing non-verbal respect for their positions as Alpha and Luna.

Zina was also with them in the group, and now she really felt that she was dateless. If Talia had any power to attract mates, Zina hoped it will take effect soon.

It took a second for people in the nightclub to start nudging each other as they turned toward the elevated platform, and it seemed that even the music quieted down.

This was not Talia's first time in the Shifters nightclub, but the place looked more packed than ever before.

'Most of the crowd is from the Dark Howlers pack.', Damon spoke to Talia through their private mind-link. 'Last night the Shifters was closed due to the pack run, and people came here tonight to make up for it and to celebrate their Luna. Many businesses in Darkbourne closed early and some suggested that the day of your Luna ceremony be a holiday.'

Talia's insides trembled from anxiety and she hoped it didn't show. Why was everyone looking at them?

Damon lifted her hand to his lips and kissed the back of her palm, right there, for everyone to see.

'Our people want to welcome you.', Damon said.

Talia was not sure if the crowd was welcoming because they were just looking at her.

Damon raised his head and his howl was louder than the music.

"AWOOOO!"

Before his howl ended, the whole nightclub shook with the uproar of howls, claps, whistles, and cheers.

'They are happy you are here.', Damon spoke into Talia's mind. 'Do you want to respond to them?'

Talia looked at Damon apprehensively. All that was for her? She didn't have the pack mind-link to peer into their thoughts and emotions, but she could see that they were smiling, and the mood was good. It didn't seem right for her just to stand there and not reciprocate. But... Should she start shouting? Or howling? Nothing seemed appropriate. She was the quiet type.

Seeing her reluctance, Damon said, 'Let's do it together. One, two...' And he opened up for her to feel his excitement and pride, but mostly happiness.

Talia gasped for air as emotions swelled within her, and then both of them howled, "AWOOOO!"

The crowd in the nightclub was jumping and the noise increased further when Damon raised Talia's hand that he was holding, high above their heads, and Talia was confident that all eyes in the club were on them. It was nerve-wracking and heartwarming at the same time. Somehow, this noisy bunch of people made her feel welcome.

Damon pulled her closer and gave her a mind-spinning kiss as the crowd below them exploded in another wave of noise. Damon smiled into the kiss. He was enjoying it.

People were visibly excited, but they were all orderly as they parted to open up a path for their Alpha and Luna to reach their VVIP booth.

Talia met many eyes that observed her with curiosity, and she was pleased with herself that she projected confidence. Damon's proximity gave her the courage to stand tall, and she didn't want to disappoint him by shrinking and appearing insecure. As Damon's Luna, she needed to show the Dark Howlers pack that she can take care of their Alpha and of the whole pack.

They all sat on sofas in pairs, except for Zina (she didn't have a pair).

Zina wanted to leave and mingle, but at the same time, the appeal of being in the VVIP booth was urging her to stay.

"How about we go to the bar for some girl-time?", Maya suggested.

Talia glanced at Damon, silently asking him what was going on.

'Caden and I want to talk to George.', Damon spoke to Talia into their mind-link, and Talia understood that this might be something for Dawn not to hear. She was curious but she knew that Damon would give her a heads-up if he could.

"Sounds like fun.", Talia responded to Maya, and Dawn and Zina followed.

...

Zina, Dawn, Maya, and Talia sat at the bar in the Shifters nightclub, each with a colorful cocktail that Katya personally prepared for them.

Pierce, Liam, Caleb, and Lulu found them quickly. They saw them entering the club, but they didn't dare go into the VVIP booth without invitation. But now that the ladies came to the bar, they decided to approach them.

Sandy was in the pack hospital, giving Keith company for the evening. They were taking turns so that Keith was not bored while waiting to be discharged.

"Guys, why do you look like you are guarding Talia?", Lulu asked while eyeing Pierce, Liam, and Caleb who were standing to form a protective half-circle around Talia as she was sitting on the barstool.

"We are her guards.", Liam responded matter-of-factly.

"You don't need to do this.", Talia said.

Caleb shook his head. "Do you think that Alpha will forgive us if anything happens to you and we are around?" He leaned closer to continue in a lower voice, "Besides, standing next to Luna is increasing our popularity."

Talia laughed at Caleb's cheeky expression.

Pierce ordered a round of shots to toast for their Luna, and the mood became lively quickly.

...

In the VVIP booth, George was going through the folder that Caden gave him. It contained information about Penelope Faith, twenty-two years old daughter of Alpha William Faith from the Night Sentinel pack.

When looking at the number of pack members, the Night Sentinel pack was the third pack in North America. However, their influence was not significant as they were sixth in terms of the military and fourth in terms of economy, and they were ranked eleventh when looking at the size of their territory. But they couldn't be dismissed as insignificant either because Alpha William formed various alliances with other packs, and one of those was with the Red Moon pack.

George flipped through the files that were in the folder to see pictures and information on Penelope Faith. Her education, hobbies, friends, favorite foods, music, books she likes to read... it was detailed.

"I assume there is a reason why I'm looking at this.", George said.

Damon took a sip of whiskey from his glass before responding, "We are watching movements of Alpha Edward. His interaction with the Night Sentinel pack increased in the last few weeks, and our spies confirmed that he is putting an extra effort for Penny to attend James' sixteenth birthday."

George cocked an eyebrow as he picked up something amusing. "Penny? Are you so close to the daughter of Alpha William to address her by a nickname?"

Damon froze and cursed at himself silently. These small things will get him in trouble!

Actually, he forgot about Penelope as she was one of many, but when he saw the blonde in those pictures, and her name in the files, he got a flashback or two.

Should he tell George how Penelope was one of his bride candidates that he explored thoroughly about two years ago? It was one night and a number of unanswered texts and voicemails. Damon decided not to share those details. His past was not important. Damon was glad that Talia was not nearby because he didn't want to risk another meltdown.

Damon cleared his throat. "The point is that Miss Penelope will attend James' birthday party. I suggest you keep an eye on her. We know that Alpha Edward is trying to secure his alliances through marriages."

George didn't understand why he should be concerned with that woman. For years, there were many females buzzing around James, but it was nothing serious because... "Alpha Edward won't pressure James to choose his mate before his eighteenth birthday."

"I was not talking about James.", Damon said, and seeing George's confused expression, Damon clarified, "I'm sure you know that there is a shortage of unmated young Alphas who are willing to mark a chosen mate, so ambitious ones will target the next best thing. You are the youngest Commander of the Red Moon pack, with the position just below Beta Raymond. Officially unmated. Available."

George's eyes nearly popped out of their sockets when he realized, "Are you saying that Alpha Edward wants to set ME up with this woman?"

Chapter 609 Back at the Shifters nightclub (2)

"We are not sure why Alpha Edward is so eager for Penelope to attend James' birthday party.", Damon said to George. "However, other than being easy on the eyes, and having Alpha for her father, she doesn't have much going for her. As you said, James is too young to choose his mate, and it doesn't make sense to ask them to date for two years. On the other side, Alpha Edward doesn't know about Dawn being your mate, which makes us believe that he will match you with Penelope. But even if our guess is false, you should keep an eye on Penelope because she will be there, and she will come with an agenda." Damon's brows came together. "And I don't need to remind you to keep Dawn safe."

George rubbed his forehead with force.

George was planning to bring Dawn with him to the Red Moon pack and conceal her existence from Alpha Edward. Estelle and other people who are close to George would know that Dawn is his mate, but he didn't want her to draw attention to herself.

The thing was that if Alpha Edward hears that George found his mate, even if George tells him that Dawn is insignificant Omega, she came from the Dark Howlers pack and the old guy might want to meet with her. George wanted to avoid that.

Asking Dawn to keep a low profile would be inconvenient, but only temporary until George finds the right time to issue an Alpha challenge to Alpha Edward. Per George's plans, it shouldn't be more than

two-three months until everything is ready, but if Alpha Edward starts pushing women into George's lap, and George refuses them, Alpha Edward will figure out that something was off.

Ah, this was a problem!

There was an option for George to say how he was not interested in other women because he found his mate, but Alpha Edward was known to be sick and greedy; what if he tries to harm Dawn or eliminate her in order to make George available? Or what if Alpha Edward finds out that Dawn is an Alpha female and tries to take her for himself?

George was not sure what to do. It would be safer if Dawn stays in the Dark Howlers pack, but no matter what the best choice was, the mate bond urged them to stay close, and if they separate, both of them will suffer.

"Don't make any decisions without talking to Dawn. She is smart and strong, and most of all, she is your mate. It happened for a reason.", Caden said.

George nodded gratefully, and then he asked, "Is there something else, or can we join the girls?"

Caden took the folder with information on Penelope Faith. "You can get a copy of this if you want." And then he gestured toward the bar, indicating that George can join his mate.

George downed his drink and turned to his right. "Will you..." His question was cut short when he realized that Damon was not there. Where did he go?

Caden chuckled. "Damon left a while ago."

Actually, Damon left after delivering the threat about how George needs to keep Dawn safe. Those words reminded Damon that he needed to keep Talia safe, and he couldn't stay away from her anymore.

...

At the bar, Dawn and Zina were chattering with Talia's five guards excitedly. Their new statuses made them all feel important.

Talia was sipping her drink while thinking how this was different. Wherever she looked, Talia met gazes directed at her that were full of curiosity; some held admiration, some were happy, but none were mocking or malicious. Talia concluded how that was because now they knew she was Damon's fated mate and their relationship was serious.

Well, at least no woman will dare to come and talk to Talia like she was Damon's temporary entertainment.

Talia was concerned about she-wolves that were coveting Damon. Will they give up, or become craftier in getting close to him? Whichever it was, Talia hoped that they won't try anything funny because she didn't want to send any more women into the dungeon.

At the thought of the dungeon and women, Talia remembered Nora. George and James were not interested to discuss Nora's situation, as none of them liked her, and Talia feared that they will head to the Red Moon pack and leave Nora behind. She didn't want to keep Nora in the dungeon forever and letting her out didn't sound good either. The right thing would be to send her to the Red Moon pack, but the transportation seemed to be a problem. Talia shook those thoughts away. Surely, Damon will come up with something and they will get rid of Nora.

Talia glanced toward the VVIP booth, and she wondered what Damon, George, and Caden were talking about. It took a while. Talia measured her time at the bar as: four shots, one cocktail, and one beer.

She wanted to check on him. Should she go there?

Talia remembered one thing. Their mind-link! 'Are you done with your secretive thing?'

'Almost', Damon responded. 'Are you missing me?'

'Immensely.'

"Good thing that I'm close." His breath splashed on her ear.

Talia's eyes sprang open and then she jerked to face him. She was lost in her thoughts, and she missed that the chatter around her quieted down.

Maya, Dawn, Zina, Lulu, Liam, Pierce, and Caleb saw Damon approaching, but none warned Talia. They were all watching them with amused smiles on their faces, obviously entertained by seeing Damon cheekily sneaking on Talia, and Talia couldn't blame them. It was a rare sight for Damon to be so playful in public, and Talia was happy to know how that was because of her.

"Hey, handsome, are you here to buy me a drink?", Talia asked Damon.

Damon chuckled. "It will be my honor to treat such a beautiful lady."

Talia cocked an eyebrow at him. "Oh?"

Damon nodded earnestly. "I feared that the hottest female in the nightclub will reject me, but it seems I passed her test because she called me handsome."

Talia burst into giggles at Damon's shameless flirting, and she snorted a bit while inhaling. Was she drunk? Yup, she was.

Maya announced that she will join Caden. He mind-linked her so she knew that he was waiting for her in the VVIP booth.

Dawn was quick to follow Maya. She wanted to go to George.

Halfway to her destination, Dawn stopped abruptly when someone grabbed her wrist.

"What the...?" Her frown immediately turned into a bright smile when she noticed that the hold was charged with sparks. It was George.

Dawn's smile fell when she realized that his emotions were unstable.

"What happened?", Dawn asked.

George wrapped her in his embrace and buried his face in the crook of her neck.

"Dance with me", he said, and they started swaying on the tune of their own.

Dawn realized that George's mood was probably due to something that Damon and Caden told him, but this was not the time to ask questions.

She hugged him tightly with, "No matter what's coming, we will deal with it together."

George's heart jolted. Those were the words he hoped to hear.

"I am lucky to have you.", he said.

Dawn smiled dreamily. She was the lucky one. Her mate was better than she ever imagined him to be.

Dawn was on cloud nine, she was dancing with George. There were no fancy moves involved, but it was their first dance, and that made it special.

Chapter 610 Back at the Shifters nightclub (3)

At the bar, Zina rushed to finish her drink, and then she spoke to Liam, Pierce, Caden, and Lulu. "Now that Alpha is here, we should make ourselves scarce so that the couple can enjoy their evening."

Zina had already seen a lot of public display of affection during dinner, and she couldn't stomach any more. But she was happy for Talia.

Zina grew up in the Dark Howlers pack, and she was two years younger than Damon, so she knew him pretty much all of her life, and she never saw Damon so lovey-dovey. It was the way it's supposed to be when fated mates are together. Zina hoped that rumors about Talia's powers were true and that soon

she will find a man who will look at her like that because now that her bestie (aka Dawn) found her mate, Zina felt lonely.

Damon didn't take a seat at the bar. He was standing next to Talia and stared into her eyes that were slightly unfocused and sparkling from the alcohol that coursed through her system. She was beautiful.

"What are you thinking about?", Talia asked.

"You.", he responded.

"What about me?"

"Many things." Naked mostly.

"Like?", she persisted.

Damon leaned to speak close to her ear, "I'm thinking how ravishing you look tonight. I wonder if I will be able to tear that dress in one move, or if it will need two. Should I tell everyone to scam so that I can take you on this bar counter, or maybe we can go in the car, or would you rather do it in the forest? Restroom stall? Or we could sneak into Katya's office..."

"Please, stop.", Talia said breathily. Somehow, she could see graphic images in her mind and it took her a few long seconds to realize that Damon was sending them to her. Naughty Alpha!

Her eyes moved to his lips and then she glanced at the bar counter. "Can we really do that?"

Damon burst into a laugh. "We can do whatever you want, kitten. As long as you are willing, I am available."

He stepped closer to press his crotch area on her hip and to make a point that he was hard and ready.

"Should I request for the club to be emptied?"

Talia was speechless. Tempted but speechless. "No.", she responded after an intense internal struggle. His proposition was enticing, but she would die of embarrassment because people will probably know why the club was emptied.

Her face lit up with mischief when she got an idea. "Not here, but we have a bar at home. Don't we?"

Damon's eyebrows rose in slow motion, together with his lips that formed a smile like there were strings attached and someone was pulling them up.

"Should we go home then? Can you walk, or should I carry you?"

Talia burst into giggles. She really loved when Damon was carefree and playful.

"We came here to drink and dance.", she said and swayed a bit on the chair. "Maybe I had enough of drinks. I'm not sure if I can dance."

"You can drink as much as you want, kitten.", Damon said. "Have fun and don't worry about anything else because I'm here. If you want to dance, I will make it happen."

Talia smiled at him foolishly. Yes, she was drunk, but she was more drunk on happiness because Damon was by her side, looking at her like she was the only woman in the world, and THAT was all it mattered.

Talia finished her drink and demanded, "Let's dance."

"As you wish", Damon said, and he chuckled when he saw her tripping over her own feet. He didn't let her fall as he held her close to him.

Talia leaned on Damon and his hold was solid as they swayed on the dancefloor.

Her body was limp, and she moved with him while humming a tune.

Damon chuckled and pressed his lips on her forehead.

His kitten wanted to dance, and he was determined to make it happen, even if he needed to dance for the both of them.

...

Lulu arrived at the pack hospital, and she slowly opened the door of Keith's room.

The light was off, and she was not sure if they were sleeping or not. It took her a few seconds to get used to seeing in the dark and to spot Keith on the hospital bed and Sandy lying on the sofa.

Keith was sleeping, but Sandy was looking at the door.

"You are early", Sandy said while checking the time.

They were taking turns in keeping Keith company while he was in the hospital, and Lulu was supposed to come at midnight, yet it was barely eleven o'clock.

"Shh...", Lulu waved at Sandy to keep it down in order not to wake up Keith.

"He is not sleeping.", Sandy said. "We were talking until a minute ago."

"You can turn on the light. I was just resting my eyes.", Keith said, and a second later Lulu flipped the switch that illuminated the room. "I don't need company. I will leave in the morning."

Keith was perfectly fine, and Doctor Travis told him that he can leave, but that was late in the evening, and Keith thought that there was no point in heading home.

Keith's plan was to sleep in the hospital and from there head to the packhouse in the morning. Damon told him that they will discuss the current dangers Talia is facing after breakfast. It was Keith's first task as Talia's head guard and he was taking it seriously.

Katya already brought him a change of clothes, he had an attached bathroom, the room was spacious and clean, the bed was fully adjustable and there was a button for him to call nurses to bring him food and whatever else he might need. It was like a luxurious hotel, and Keith would take this chance to relax and think about things, but somehow he ended up always in the company of people who thought that he needed to be entertained.

Keith paused at the outfit Lulu was wearing. It was a sparkly black tank top and a red miniskirt, and she had a black leather purse and matching shoes with stiletto heels that made her long legs appear even longer. Lulu's clothes were tight and even though her important parts were covered, nothing was truly hidden.

"I think Lulu is here to tell you that there is a party, and she won't come tonight.", Keith said to Sandy with amusement in his voice.

Lulu needed a moment to realize that Keith was looking at her outfit. "No. No. I'm coming from Shifters, that's all."

"Did they close early? Or did something bad happen?", Sandy asked. Leaving Shifters before two o'clock in the morning is considered early. "In any case, you had time to go home, change clothes, and come here before midnight. Or did you come here like this with an intention to seduce Keith?", Sandy said teasingly.

There was a time when Sandy thought that something was going on between Lulu and Keith, but neither of them acknowledged it and Keith was no more than his polite self, so Sandy assumed that it was Lulu's one-sided crush.

Chapter 611 Talia's head guard (2)

Lulu rolled her eyes at Sandy's comment about seducing Keith. "Why would I change clothes? Is something wrong with this? I'm not going to exercise, and these are comfortable enough for the night. Not everyone is like you."

"What's wrong with prioritizing garments that don't restrict movements? Can you even run in that skirt?"

Keith looked away from them. He didn't care about Sandy's sweatpants and a sporty t-shirt, nor about Lulu's tight tank top and miniskirt. He wanted them gone. Or at least quiet.

Keith's ears perked up when he heard Lulu talking.

"When I left Shifters, Alpha Damon and Talia were dancing. They clung to each other and kissed like no one was watching. I was not needed, so I thought of coming here before I get too drunk and forget about spending the night with Keith."

Keith's irritation rose. Did she need to bring up the point of how Talia and Damon were lovey-dovey?

"How much I know, we are off duty.", Keith said dryly. "Did you go to Shifters to have fun, or to watch Alpha and Luna? Please, don't skip an evening of fun on my account. Both of you can leave. I plan to sleep."

Sandy was on her feet, packing her things into a small backpack, and Lulu plopped on the sofa that Sandy vacated.

"Why are you sending me away? Is it a problem if I crash here for the night?", Lulu asked Keith with a pout while arranging the pillows for her to rest her head on. There was a blanket as well.

Keith didn't want to talk about it. "Do whatever you want."

On her way out, Sandy asked, "Should I turn off the light?"

"Yes.", Keith responded.

"Let me know what happened after your meeting tomorrow.", Sandy said, turned off the lights, and left.

"What meeting?", Lulu asked.

"Alpha Damon called me to the packhouse in the morning."

"Just you?", Lulu continued probing.

Keith was not sure. "I assume that Talia, Caden, and Maya will be there."

"Does that mean you are our leader? Or are you in trouble?"

"From today, I am the head guard for Luna Talia.", Keith said with pride in his voice. It was not announced, but it was not a secret. Soon, everyone will know.

"Who made you the boss?", Lulu asked.

"Alpha Damon."

"Does he know about your feelings...?"

"Lulu!", Keith exclaimed, not allowing her to finish that question. "My feelings have nothing to do with my ability to protect Luna."

Lulu felt that she stepped on the invisible line, so she didn't press this further. "If you say so."

Keith placed his forearm over his eyes as an indication that he wanted to sleep. The room was dark, but he was confident that Lulu can see him.

Seconds trickled in silence, and Keith relaxed with the thought that Lulu gave up on chatter. When she came into Keith's room, he picked up perfume and alcohol, so he assumed that she fell asleep on the sofa. He didn't mind her presence.

Lulu was a hardworking warrior, but her mouth had no filter. She would say whatever was on her mind and sometimes it would come out crude. Lulu's mother passed when Lulu was young, and she was living with her father who doted on her, hence she didn't get much disciplining as a child. It was not that Lulu's way of talking deviated from other werewolves, but she had a problem holding back when it came to interacting with superiors.

In a pack, talking smack about Alpha and Luna can be considered treason, similarly to how talking back to superiors in the army is considered insubordination.

Keith wondered if Lulu was jealous of Talia. Well, any she-wolf would want to be in Talia's shoes and become Luna of the Dark Howlers pack. That position came with affection from Alpha Damon, and Talia being Damon's mate meant that she was a queen. Would Lulu do something about it? Keith didn't think so.

Keith's thoughts wandered to the upcoming meeting. Damon said how Keith will find out about the dangers Talia was facing, and Keith tried to think what they might be.

Was Talia in danger because she was the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack? Keith had difficulty wrapping his head around that information, but... don't those guys have mystical powers? If that's the case, wouldn't they be better equipped to guard Talia? Suddenly, Keith felt inadequate. He will train harder to assure he can keep Talia safe.

Keith didn't understand why Talia's well-being became his obsession, but his choices were to go with it and see where it will lead or to fight back against the urge to stick close to Talia. He reminded himself many times to keep his distance and not act too friendly, knowing that Talia won't approve, and Alpha Damon will skin him alive, but staying away was creating painful knots in his stomach.

He decided to use this inexplicable urge as a motivation to keep Talia safe.

Keith didn't get it. What kind of dangers could Talia face that Alpha Damon thought she wouldn't be able to handle herself or with him? Why would she need guards?

She was the Alpha of the mysterious Midnight Guardians pack!

It was common knowledge that Alpha females were coveted, but once mated, others would step back.

Everyone respected the mate bond because it came from the Moon Goddess, but the truth was that no one understood what it actually does to a person until they experience it. Love stricken is a mild expression for what a werewolf goes through when he (or she) meets his mate.

Keith remembered Damon hovering around Talia in the gym, and how he chased away Keith during the Summer Solstice festival, and many things fell into place. Damon was always indifferent or rude toward females, just as he was acting with Talia on that clearing before they dispelled the dark magic, but Keith couldn't deny that when Talia and Damon visited him in the hospital, Damon was caring and gentle with Talia.

Another thing bugged Keith. He was confident that Damon was aware of Keith's affection toward Talia. Why did he appoint Keith as Talia's head guard?

The more Keith thought about these, the more questions popped up, and he was not getting any answers.

Keith jolted when he felt a warm palm on his hand. He was so consumed with his thoughts that he didn't notice Lulu approaching him.

Keith removed his arm that was covering his eyes so that he can see her, and he paused when he realized that she was topless.

Nudity was not a big deal among werewolves, but that usually applied when they were shifting into their wolf form, or out in the forest, and not in a setting like a pack hospital. And the way the tips of her fingers traced the grooves between muscles on his arm was a clear indication of what she wanted.

"What are you doing?", Keith asked Lulu.

"Do you need to ask?"

She took his hand into his and lifted it toward her breast.

Keith could feel the heat of Lulu's body against his palm, but before he could touch her flesh he pulled his hand away. "Don't."

"It's just the two of us. It's obvious that you are not sleeping."

Chapter 612 Talia's head guard (3)

Lulu's brows came together in a frown as she looked at Keith who was avoiding to meet her eyes.

"Are you rejecting me?", Lulu asked.

"Do you need me to spell it out?"

Lulu clicked her tongue impatiently. "This is about Talia, isn't it?"

Keith frowned. "Not everything is about Talia, Lulu."

"You started avoiding me when she appeared."

Keith wished that they didn't have this conversation, but his silence would confirm her words. "That's not true. What we had ended a long time ago. I told you that I won't be involved with my subordinates."

Why did Lulu bring this up now? They had a few dates (and sex) about two years ago. He never promised her anything, they were not exclusive, and once he was promoted to a Lieutenant, Keith told Lulu (and other she-wolves that were involved with him) that he won't be getting romantically entangled with warriors.

In the end, they were all waiting for their fated mates, and if it was not with a mate, it was temporary fun, physical release, and almost anyone would do.

But more than the mate-business, as a Lieutenant, Keith was responsible for his squad and he made important decisions, and he didn't want his personal life to impact his judgment. Would he be able to send a woman he was sleeping with on a dangerous mission and stay cool about it? Probably not.

Keith knew that they didn't like it, who likes to be rejected? But it's been more than two years, and Lulu was quiet so far. He didn't see the reason why she brought it up now.

"I remember you saying that you won't mix business and pleasure.", Lulu said. "Yet here you are, the head guard to the woman you set your eyes on."

Keith couldn't believe this. Did Lulu think that because of his affection for Talia, Lulu had a chance with him? That was twisted.

"If your eyes are more on Talia and less on me, you will see that she is a wonderful person, worth protecting. Get your priorities straight, Lulu, or I will dismiss you as Talia's guard."

"Won't that be convenient for you to get chummy with Luna? Liam, Caleb, and Pierce are staring at her with stars in their eyes, and Sandy wouldn't know who is sleeping with the boss even if you draw it to her."

"Watch your mouth, Lulu.", Keith growled. It was one thing to say how he looks at Talia, but if Lulu starts spouting nonsense about sleeping around, both Talia and Keith might get a dose of Alpha Damon's anger. Rumors always spread faster than the truth. And how can he prove that he was NOT sleeping with someone?

"What will you do if I don't watch my mouth? Will dismiss me? How about you tell Talia that I said mean things?", Lulu challenged him. "Weren't you the one who said that we shouldn't let our personal feelings impact our duties? If you dismiss me for this, aren't you dismissing me because you don't like what I said?"

Keith looked at Lulu's pretty face which was scrunched into an ugly grimace.

"What are you trying to accomplish, Lulu? Do you want to have sex with me? Is that it? Do you think that insulting me will get me hard? Don't tell me that you want more than a hookup because even before all

this, there was nothing more than sex between us. We both had our fun, and it was over. You know that. Why are you acting like a heartbroken ex-wife? Or do you have another agenda?"

Lulu glared at him for a few heartbeats, and then she snorted, walked to the sofa, grabbed her tank top, bra, and purse, and left the room.

Keith stared at the closed door. Now what?

...

Since waking up, James was hovering around Cornelia.

He helped her get ready for the day, and he obediently waited in front of the bathroom while she showered. Sure, Cornelia locked the door, but a lock so flimsy wouldn't hold James back if not for his desire to respect her wish for privacy.

When they entered the dining room for breakfast, everyone else was already there. Damon, Talia, Maya, Caden, Gideon, Mindy, Zina, Dawn, George, Petra, Erik, and Zack.

"Can you not feed me?", Cornelia asked James while looking at the piece of sausage that was hovering in front of her mouth. She took another fork and pushed his arm away. "I have hands." She allowed him to fill up her plate with food, but feeding was too much. After the previous day, she didn't feel like indulging in a lovey-dovey mood.

James' lips curved down to form a pout and he looked like a sad puppy.

He didn't mind groveling in front of an audience. He didn't care about anyone other than Cornelia.

"Cora, please, I know I messed up. Let me make it up to you today."

"That's what you said yesterday.", she responded in a hushed voice, hoping that others won't hear her. She didn't want to cause a scene in front of other people, but she didn't want to let him have his way either. Yesterday was not the first time that he left her on her own. She felt neglected.

"Today it will be different.", James said.

"I'm sure it will.", Cornelia responded. She decided to go out and see the world outside the packhouse, even if she will be on her own. On the previous day, they went to the human city, and they only started having fun when they were summoned to return.

Cornelia was determined to explore human realm or go home. OK. Maybe not go home because she was not sure what to do about James.

She had a lot of time to think about their relationship and future. No matter if she stays with James, or returns to her Coven, the fact was that James was too young to feel the bond completely which brought the question of his commitment to their relationship. What's to say that another woman won't seduce him easily when Cornelia was not looking?

Another point was that the Red Moon pack didn't sound like a good place to be. Why would Cornelia go there if she will need to hide somewhere while James does his young Alpha duties? And then she was back to questioning his fidelity.

Cornelia asked around and she knew that licentious nature didn't apply only to Alphas but to all werewolves. Was James expecting her to sit put and wait for him while wondering if he was training, studying, or indulging in some woman? That was unacceptable.

The truth was that if Cornelia didn't feel that pull toward James, she would leave after the pack run.

Was she looking for reasons to leave him? Not really, but she couldn't see many reasons to stay either.

James irritably threw the fork on the table. He woke up super early so that he can plan their day, and he wanted it to be a surprise, but seeing how stubborn Cornelia was, James realized that he will need to tell her about his intentions.

"Alpha Damon", James called in an official tone. "Today, after breakfast, I plan to take Cornelia out on a date. Please, prepare a car for us. We won't be back until evening, and don't contact us unless a war started."

Chapter 613 White and Silver (1)

Damon chewed in slow motion while looking at James with a blank expression.

James requested a car and not to be disturbed. That was not a problem, but Damon didn't want to respond right away.

One second, two, Damon could see James' impatience growing. Four seconds, five, six... Damon jolted when Talia pinched his thigh under the table.

"Alright.", Damon said and then he cocked an eyebrow at Talia while speaking to her through their mind-link. 'Why did you do that?'

'Why did you delay?', Talia responded with a question. 'Don't you see that they are having a conflict? Help him pacify Cornelia, and he will be indebted to you.'

'If I help him right away, he won't appreciate it.', Damon said. 'While he is waiting for my answer and sweating, he is thinking about what will happen if I don't cooperate, and the fact that he won't need to go through THAT will make him indebted to me.'

Talia stared at Damon while processing his words. He was right. It was so simple, yet she didn't see it. James and Damon were on friendly terms, but they were not exactly friends.

A hundred questions suddenly weighed on her.

Is that what an Alpha does? What if her ignorance causes trouble for Damon? And what about the Midnight Guardians pack? How will she lead them if she couldn't see what was happening right in front of her? She thought that Damon was mean, yet he was only making the best of the current situation.

Will she ever learn those things about interacting with friends and foes? She was not sure.

Talia didn't act on her own many times, but those few she did mostly ended up with her erasing memories of the other party. That was not a solution that could be used long-term.

Damon saw that Talia was troubled and he wondered what was going on in her pretty head. Was she overthinking things again? Probably.

Damon caressed Talia's knee under the table, and she looked at him when he gave her a squeeze.

"Eat, kitten", Damon said, and she saw a forkful of food in front of her face.

She opened her mouth obediently and Damon reminded her, "Keith will be here soon." Talia chewed faster.

On Talia's left, James was back to trying to feed Cornelia.

"Come on, Cora", James said. "Just this much."

"If I accept one, then I will need to accept every next one.", Cornelia responded matter-of-factly. "Why did you make plans for me without consulting me?"

"I remember that we spoke about it, and I promised you a date.", James said.

"That was yesterday."

James was exasperated. He knew that she was giving him a hard time because he messed up, but how can he pacify her if she was not giving him a chance to do so?

"Do you have any other plans for today?", he asked.

"What if I do?", Cornelia responded defiantly.

"Cancel them. Today is for the two of us."

"That was yest..."

She couldn't finish her word because James pulled her in for a kiss.

Cornelia's eyes widened and she couldn't believe that James' hand was at the back of her head, holding her in a firm grip, and his lips were covering hers gently, and it was at the dining table with people watching, and she hated it that her lips moved on their own to respond to his kiss. Why was her own body not listening?

When James inched away, Cornelia looked around the table to see that everyone was busy with their food or with their partners. She was grateful that no one was staring at them, even though she knew that they were aware of James kissing her right there shamelessly.

"I apologized.", James said. "But I know that words are not enough, and I want to make it up to you. Today. Stop being stubborn so that we can enjoy our date."

"And what if I want to stay stubborn?", she challenged him. Did he think that a kiss will melt her reasoning away? "What if I don't want to go on a date with you?"

"Then you will be stuck with me following you around and apologizing until you give in. It won't be pleasant for either of us but I will do it until you give up on being stubborn."

Cornelia was not sure how to respond to this. Wasn't he aware of their audience?

"Are you sure you will be able to follow me?"

Well, no. "I know that you can leave if you want, but that would break my heart and yours, and you won't do that."

Cornelia didn't want to admit it, but he was right. That was the reason she didn't leave so far. It would break her heart. And his. And she couldn't make herself hurt him.

After a few exceedingly long seconds, Cornelia opened her mouth, and when she saw that James was looking at her in confusion, she asked, "Are you going to feed me or not?"

James' face lit up and he quickly grabbed a fork and stabbed food with it. He can feed her! That was definitely progress. The date was ON!

...

James held Cornelia's hand and led the way outside of the packhouse.

Caden gave James the keys to the white Lexus that was waiting for them. James nodded in approval of the sleek sports car that came with the right dose of luxury, and James could see himself making the engine roar and impressing Cornelia with his driving skills.

James opened the front passenger door for Cornelia. "My lady", he said in a singing voice while gesturing for her to sit.

He couldn't stop his eyes roaming her body. She was wearing a simple knee-length off-white summer dress with blue flower print on the bottom hem and flat sandals, yet she was the most beautiful female he had ever seen. Gorgeous.

Cornelia observed that James sat in the driver's seat.

"I thought you can't drive."

"I can, but I am not old enough to get a license.", James responded and reached into the inner pocket of his jacket.

Cornelia looked at the driver's license with James' photo on it and James explained, "With this, I am James White, a nineteen years-old male from Pasadena, California. Your boyfriend."

Cornelia flipped the card to see the back. "It doesn't say here that you are my boyfriend."

James chuckled. "It says in here." He pointed at the middle of his chest. "Your name is etched in here, so I am yours."

Cornelia felt her cheeks heating up and she handed him the driver's license back. Why was he so flirty?

She focused on the ID that he was putting back into his pocket. "Is it easy to get one of these?"

"It's not too much of a problem if you know the right people.", James responded smugly. "This one is yours."

Cornelia looked at another driver's license that was on the name Cornelia Silver. A twenty years-old female from Pasadena, California. If she paid attention, she would notice that the address was the same as on the license with the name James White.

"I don't know how to drive.", she said.

"I can teach you if you want.", James responded and started the car.

"You can?"

James' lips lifted into a wicked smile as he hummed in confirmation.

Chapter 614 White and Silver (2)

"You can sit on my lap, and I will show you how to press the pedals and steer the car.", James said like it was a totally normal thing.

Cornelia was curious about driving, but she was not sure about sitting on his lap. Will there be space for her to sit? And how can she focus on anything if her behind is on his thighs? Won't that be too intimate?

Cornelia wanted to do many things with James, but first, she wanted to know, "Where are we going?"

"To have fun. Just the two of us."

He took her hand into his and kissed the back of her palm, pleased that she was not pulling back.

"Cora, do you trust me?", he asked.

"About?"

James shook his head. "You were supposed to say, yes, but I understand. I disappointed you too many times. From now on, I will not give you a single reason to doubt me."

"You didn't tell me where we are going."

James inched closer without breaking eye contact. "Tell me, Cora. Tell me, honestly, does it matter where we are going?"

Cornelia blinked rapidly. Why was he so close? She couldn't think.

James reached behind her and she held her breath as he pulled the seat belt to buckle her in.

The buckle clicked into place, but James didn't straighten his posture. His eyes moved to stare into her lips.

"Cora", he called.

"Yes?"

"Can I kiss you?"

"Why are you asking now?" Didn't he kiss her many times without asking? And he did it in front of an audience!

Her eyes widened as he inched closer, and when their lips connected, she closed her eyes. His kiss did funny things with her insides, things she didn't really hate, but she was not sure what to do with them.

The kiss ended and James moved away to see that her eyes were still closed. It took her a few long seconds for her eyes to flutter open. He loved that he had such an effect on her.

James chuckled. Today will be a good day, and he was determined to make it one of many.

The engine roared and the white Lexus slid down the driveway with ease.

Erik, Petra, and Zack were standing at the main door of the packhouse and looking in the direction where the white Lexus disappeared.

"We should pack our things and leave before they kick us out.", Petra said sourly, and she got silence in response.

The three of them were summoned to the packhouse to entertain James, in exchange for benefits that would enhance their education and training, and Alpha Damon also hinted that there will be some gifts. On top of that, the opportunity to make friends with the future Alpha of the Red Moon pack was something many coveted, and staying in the packhouse was worth bragging rights.

No one told them that they were not needed anymore, but it was obvious that James was not spending time with them. Did this mean they failed their mission?

Since Cornelia appeared, James was with her if not busy otherwise. The teenage trio hoped that their usefulness will extend with all five of them going to the human city, but then James and Cornelia left them early, and now James and Cornelia went on their own, confirming that there was no need for Petra, Erik, and Zack to linger around the packhouse.

They loved staying there, but they were embarrassed to freeload.

Petra, Erik, and Zack dragged their feet to their rooms to get their stuff. It was time to go.

...

Talia, Damon, Maya, Caden, Dawn, and George were in the lounge.

Zina pushed in a three-layered serving cart that was filled with trays that held small pastries, cheese, crackers, and fresh fruits for snacks. There were also pitchers with chilled milk and orange juice, and a pot with coffee.

After arranging all those on the bar counter together with empty plates and napkins, Zina returned to the kitchen to finish cleanup and start planning for lunch. With guests in the packhouse, she was always busy.

Gideon and Mindy were not present because they went to Gideon's cottage to pack so they can move into their new house.

"What do you want to discuss?", Caden asked Damon.

Damon summoned them there after breakfast, and they were all seating on sofas and munching on food (like they didn't have breakfast previously), and no one was talking.

"Talia and I are planning to be away for a few days.", Damon said.

They will visit the Midnight Guardians pack and the Silver Flame Coven. Damon and Talia were not sure how long they will stay there, but they wanted to make preparations if things happen in their absence.

Damon also hoped to sneak in some alone-time with Talia, like a vacation. He really wanted one, and with the time difference between realms, he hoped it will happen.

"I want us to discuss our current situation, short-term plans, and how it relates to the Red Moon pack. However, we are waiting for one more person."

"If it's related to the Red Moon pack, James should be present.", George said.

"James is on a date with Cornelia, and he said that unless there is a war, he shouldn't be disturbed.", Talia reminded everyone.

George shrugged. "There is always a war, somewhere."

"We should let James and Cornelia have their privacy.", Dawn said. "They won't have much time to be together after we go to the Red Moon pack."

Well, George agreed with this. He wondered if he should take Dawn on a date. Since they recognized each other as mates, they are mostly in the packhouse. George took a mental note to ask Damon about fancy restaurants in the area and see if he can secure a reservation for tonight. He will treat Dawn as his queen.

"While we are waiting for another person to arrive, I want to share some good news.", Maya started. "The first pack run in a decade was a huge success. People are energized, and their morale is high. They were all pleased with the ceremony, and they saw it as a sign of Alpha Damon mending his relationship with the Shaman."

Maya pulled a paper from her back pocket and unfolded it before placing it on the coffee table that was in front of her. "We have confirmed seven pairings of mates and three second-chance mates."

Talia didn't understand how so many mates could be found. Weren't all participants from the same pack? Was it possible that they all lived in the same territory and didn't bump into each other?

Talia had a feeling that Maya will use these pairings to boost Talia's matchmaking ability-nonsense.

Maya grinned knowingly. "Do you want to hear all the names, or just the important ones?"

Everyone looked at Maya with curiosity other than Caden, indicating that he already knew whatever Maya was about to announce.

"You probably have someone on your mind.", Damon said. "Let's start with that."

"Steph found her second chance mate!", Maya exclaimed, getting everyone's attention.

"Eeeh?", Dawn made a silly sound and her eyes sparkled with curiosity. "Who is it?"

"Robert the blacksmith.", Maya responded, and Dawn nodded, indicating that she knew who he was.

Talia had no idea who Robert was, but she was happy for Stephanie. Dawn and Maya were smiling, so he was someone they approved. It also meant that Stephanie won't leave Darkbourne. Will Steph move in with the guy? Probably. But... "What about Lisa? Is she OK with that?"

Chapter 615 Talia's head guard (4) [Bonus chapter]

Maya waved with the paper in her hand. "Lisa is also on the list."

Dawn inhaled audibly. "Are you saying that Lisa found a mate? Who is that unfortunate soul?"

"I don't know.", Maya said, obviously displeased by this. "I was making calls to congratulate newly mated couples and to inquire if they will need help with relocations, or maybe a new place to stay because some of them were in single-bedroom apartments. That's when Steph told me that Lisa found her mate and she went with him. Steph didn't know more than that."

Talia's brows came together as her instincts told her that something was wrong.

She should be happy for Lisa. Didn't this mean that Lisa's negativity will end? But after remembering Lisa's attitude that got her into the dungeon, Talia couldn't relax. She looked at Damon. "Can you use your connection to the pack and find out who he is?"

Damon's eyes lost focus for a moment, and then he shook his head. "Lisa shut down her mind-link, or she is far away, and I can't reach her."

Talia didn't like this. As an Alpha, Damon was able to reach any pack member within his territory, and he should be able to force his way into anyone's mind. Talia heard how seasoned werewolves with strong will can keep Alpha out, but Lisa was neither strong nor trained. Was Lisa out of the Dark Howlers territory? Why would she leave?

"Is her mate from another pack?", Talia asked.

"That's possible.", Caden responded. "Our borders are open to the Spring Leaf pack, and the Blue River pack. Their members shouldn't come here without announcing their intention to do so, but everyone was excited about the pack run, and slipups were possible."

"We can't blame people for wanting to join their pack in the run.", Damon said, even though he didn't like lapses in security. He could understand that no one wanted to miss the pack run because they had to be on duty, and he heard that some patrols joined the run for a short stretch, but he didn't want to punish them for doing so.

How Damon saw this, the biggest asset of the Dark Howlers pack was their members. Children and elders were secured in Darkbourne, and others were all participating in the run. If someone used this window of opportunity to steal, at most, they would take some items that can be replaced.

Talia had another concern, "Don't you think it's suspicious that Lisa didn't tell her mother who her mate is?"

Maya didn't think it was a big deal. "When mates find each other, they seek solitude. Lisa probably didn't want to say much to avoid Steph coming to check on her. And don't forget that Lisa grew up in the

Lightclaw pack where females are more obedient. The fact that Lisa contacted Steph to explain her absence was more than most of the females from the Lightclaw pack would do."

Talia wondered if she was worrying for no reason. Everyone seemed relaxed and happy that Lisa found her mate. Surely, it was a good thing.

Talia hoped that Tony and Kalina will change the Lightclaw pack because it was not fair for a female to forget about her past because she found a mate. However, wasn't that what Talia was doing?

She didn't only leave her past at the Red Moon pack behind after finding Damon, but she refused to accept her identity as Talia Moonrider also, completely disregarding Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia as her parents. Would she act differently if they showed remorse and asked forgiveness for abandoning her when she was a baby? Talia was not sure.

Keith cleared his throat from the door to announce his presence, and Damon waved at him to enter and take a seat.

"I believe you all know Keith.", Damon said. "Since yesterday, Keith is Talia's head guard, responsible for Talia's safety."

Keith tensed under the weight of his new responsibility, Talia's safety. Did that mean he will get to live in the packhouse? Keith left those thoughts for later.

"Did you have breakfast?", Talia asked Keith who took a seat on a sofa chair.

"Yes.", Keith lied. He was anxious about coming here and he couldn't eat.

"Help yourself with those.", Talia said to Keith while gesturing to snacks that Zina previously arranged on the bar counter. Keith said that he ate, but she saw him eyeing the food.

Seeing that he didn't move, Talia insisted, "Fill up the plate, so that we can start."

Keith stood up and turned to face Damon with a determined expression. "Alpha", Keith called. "Before I start as Luna Talia's head guard, I want to do one thing."

Talia didn't like that he was so formal. "What do you want?", she asked.

Keith glanced at her, but he spoke to Damon. "I want to do a blood oath."

Talia's stomach dropped. That was such a big responsibility. "Why?"

This time, Keith spoke to Talia. "Alpha Damon said it. I will be responsible for your security. I don't want you to have any reasons to doubt me. I will do my best to keep you safe, or it will kill me."

Before Talia could object, Damon said, "Alright. We will arrange it with the Shaman."

Keith nodded in agreement and moved to the bar to grab food.

Talia looked at Damon helplessly. They spoke about Talia's guards taking the blood oath after Gideon suggested it, and Talia was firmly against it. Damon wanted all her guards to take the oath, but Talia thought that they can protect her without putting their lives on the line. Actually, Talia didn't want any guards because she didn't want any of them to be harmed in her place.

'Is that necessary?', Talia asked Damon through their mind-link.

'Keith thinks it is. As a warrior, he is used to putting his life on the line. This oath will be a show of his sincerity. By denying his request, you will look down on his resolve and insult him.'

The truth was that Keith was unsettled by the idea of the blood oath. Who would be alright knowing that one can seriously harm him, and maybe even cause death, with a mere thought?

However, as Talia's guard, Keith would be responsible for her safety, which meant for her life. A blood oath was a way for Keith to prove his loyalty, and it will also serve as a reminder of his place whenever his mind wanders where it shouldn't go. Keith will be Talia's guard, her servant, and nothing more.

Their talk lasted until mid-morning.

Damon didn't go into too many details because of the wide audience, but he wanted everyone to know that Maya and Caden will be in charge of the Dark Howlers pack while Damon and Talia were absent, and they also discussed several scenarios related to the Red Moon pack and Alpha Edward.

Talia hoped that Dawn won't leave with George before they return, but just in case they do, she made a point that they can't go without Nora. As expected, Dawn and George were not excited about anything related to Nora.

Damon and Talia were planning to head out the next day, and with that, Dawn, George, Maya, and Caden went to deal with their matters.

This left Damon, Talia, and Keith in the lounge, and Keith was not prepared for what he was about to hear.

Chapter 616 Talia's head guard (5)

Talia started talking to Keith about the Midnight Guardians pack and how they are in a different realm that can be accessed through a portal.

Keith had a question that was burning him since he found out about that pack, "How come no one discovered the portal?"

"They tried.", Talia responded. Axel was telling her about it when she was there. "Portal is surrounded by a natural maze and traps. Paths are enchanted to lead you away from it and energies are preventing electronic devices from working properly. Due to the terrain, the only way to reach it is on foot and unless you know the way, you will find yourself walking in circles. And even if you are right in front of it, you might miss it. It's fantastic, you will see."

Talia told Keith about different passing of time, and how through there they can reach the portal to the realm of witches. She warned him to be cautious of his behavior because the Midnight Guardians pack is aware of the human realm (how they call it), but the witches were isolated in their realm for centuries, and their way of doing things is different.

Keith didn't show any visible reaction when Talia told him how all witches in the Silver Flame Coven are females who wear scarce clothing.

Talia wondered if Evanora will try to strike another deal in order to keep Keith there and other male guards, how she tried to keep Axel with a "mate for mate" nonsense. What about Damon? Maybe Talia should leave males in the Midnight Guardians pack. Just in case.

While Talia worried about witches trying to get her hands on males, Damon was telling Keith about Guardians and Alpha Edward coveting Talia, then Talia said that she is really Axel's sister and that her parents gave her away when she was a baby because of a prophecy, and then Damon told Keith that Talia was far away from the Dark Howlers pack on the first night they were guarding her, and Keith was not sure which one was more shocking.

When Damon and Talia spoke about Talia being the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack, Keith thought that they were oversharing, but now he realized how that version barely scratched the surface.

Will he be able to protect her? She was awesome, and that meant many will want to get Talia on their side or eliminate her. But the biggest problem was Talia's recklessness.

Keith didn't dare to look at Damon, but he looked at Talia grumpily. "You escaped through the window? And Beta Maya covered for you? Do you know that Alpha Damon would make us suffer and not let us die if anything happened to you? How can I keep you safe if you are acting like a toddler? Are you invincible? Why don't you dismiss me or kill me right away? Give me a quick death so that I can avoid endless torture by Alpha Damon..."

Talia was shrinking in her seat while Keith ranted, and Damon chuckled. Damon wouldn't let anyone talk to Talia like that, but he knew that this was Keith's way of showing that he cared, and it was a confirmation that he will guard her right.

When Keith let out the steam, Talia apologized.

"I was not thinking. It won't happen again."

Keith was not sure if he should believe Talia, but he couldn't be angry at her either. This was the first time she apologized to him. And she was cute.

"I will believe you.", Keith said. "This time."

"We will get Shaman to conduct the blood oath tonight.", Damon said. These things worked better under the moonlight, and he wanted it done by tomorrow.

Keith nodded in agreement, and Damon continued, "As Talia's head guard, it's your responsibility to manage other guards. Tell them to get ready by morning. We will be heading out after breakfast. Have a few changes of clothes ready. It might be a few days here, but for us, it will be weeks. Maybe months."

"How many guards will be needed?", Keith asked.

"All of you.", Damon responded without missing a beat. Since they were taking the guards with them, he wanted to maximize Talia's security.

Damon noticed Keith's discomfort, so he asked, "Is there a problem?"

Keith had a whole night to think about his confrontation with Lulu. He thought he had it figured out, but now that he was looking at Damon and Talia, he was not so sure.

"You said that as the head guard, I can decide who will be part of the team.", Keith said to Damon while picking his words.

"Do you want to add someone?", Talia guessed.

"No. This is about Lulu.", Keith said.

"What about her?", Talia probed.

Seeing Keith's hesitation, Damon guessed, "Are you shaking a bush with Lulu, and now it's awkward to work together?"

"No, no!", Keith denied it with haste. The shaking of bushes happened more than two years ago, and that was not relevant.

Damon didn't believe Keith. Damon had a nose for those things, and he was confident that the relationship between Keith and Lulu was not strictly professional, but he didn't want to push for it. "Then, what?"

Keith pressed his lips into a line. How can he tell them that Lulu came onto him last night and when he rejected her, Lulu assumed that was because of Keith's feelings for Talia? Or can he just say that Lulu was jealous of Talia? But they will probably ask for details. Was Lulu really jealous of Talia, or was she upset and saying mean things because Keith rejected her?

"Keith?", Talia called. "Did you fight with Lulu?"

"Something like that."

"Is your argument so bad that you want her to lose her position?", Talia asked. She knew that all six of them took great pride because they were Luna's personal guards. Those positions meant that their skills were acknowledged, and that came with raised status in the pack.

Keith didn't want Lulu to lose anything. As much as Lulu's mouth was flapping without control, she never did anything bad.

Seeing that Keith didn't respond, Talia asked her next question, "Do you think that she will put me and all of you in danger?"

"No." He really didn't think so.

Talia smiled. "Then, she will stay."

Keith was exasperated. Last night, when Lulu came onto him and said all those nasty things, he was confident that she should be dismissed. But now that he cooled off and was facing Talia's genuine smile, Keith was not so sure.

Was there a reason to dismiss Lulu, or was that his bias? Would he think of going to such an extreme if there was no history between him and Lulu and if he didn't have feelings for Talia?

Lulu was a good warrior, and Keith was confident that if she spends time with Talia, Lulu will change for the better. But he couldn't make a decision without talking to Lulu again. Unfortunately, he was running out of time.

Keith got an idea, and he asked Damon, "Can some of the guards stay behind?"

By now, Damon confirmed that Keith was doubting Lulu and even if Keith was wrong, discord in the unit could lead to failure. Talia believed that they were all a happy family and that little spats can be easily smoothed out, but Damon knew better.

Chapter 617 Talia's head guard (6)

Damon thought about how to respond to Keith's question. Were the guards even needed?

Part of Damon hoped that Talia had a matchmaking ability. Then, Keith will find his mate in the Midnight Guardians pack or among witches, and the wretched Coach will stay there and be out of Damon's hair forever. Ah, but then he will lose a Lieutenant and a guy who would put his life on the line to protect Talia and... Damon struggled to keep his jealous beast in check.

Damon reminded himself that this was business where he was an Alpha talking to his Lieutenant, and not a husband who was looking at his love rival. Love rival? How can a puny Coach be a rival to an Alpha? Keith had no chance. This thought made Damon happy and his lips stretched into a smile that sent shivers down Keith's spine and he fought mightily against his instinct to flee.

"This trip will be for you to learn about the environment where Talia is, and about the people she is working with. Unless something unexpected happens", like me forgetting about my mate, "I will be with Talia most of the time. If we are lucky, your time away will be like a vacation, but that usually doesn't happen, and Talia tends to attract trouble. Think of it as a long mission where you will need to stay alert."

Keith decided to leave Lulu out of this, and maybe someone else so that she doesn't suspect she was singled out. By the time they return, Lulu will cool off and things will get back in place.

"Should I ask other guards to take the blood oath?", Keith asked. Secretly, he was hoping they will say it was mandatory, and that Lulu will refuse. Then, he will have a reason to dismiss Lulu without making it like it was his call.

"No.", Talia responded. "You don't need to do it either. However, it's a way to show sincerity. I don't wish my guards to put their lives on the line for me because one life is not more worthy than another. I hope that we can all work together to keep each other safe."

Damon smiled at Talia's words. He knew that she didn't approve of the blood oath, but she still took Damon's words into consideration how refusing Keith's request will hurt his pride.

His kitten was learning and growing, and he loved that he got to see it happening right in front of him.

...

Keith left the packhouse and headed to the training center after mind-linking Sandy, Lulu, Liam, Pierce, and Caleb to meet with him there.

Keith heard a lot of information, and he needed to share some of it with other guards, like that they have a mission tomorrow. Which one of them should go?

Keith realized that Damon and Talia told him all that because they trusted him.

His stomach tightened. Was he worthy of that trust?

Would Talia be so friendly with him if she knew that he had an ulterior motive?

Keith had no intention of acting on his feelings. Trying anything romantic with Talia would be suicidal because Talia would reject him, possibly hate him, and Damon would definitely kill him.

But if not for those feelings, would Keith be so eager to protect Talia? Probably not.

Keith was fascinated to hear how Talia, witches, and members of the Midnight Guardians pack have mystical powers. It was also frightening to some degree. As a warrior of the Dark Howlers pack, Keith relied on his speed, strength, and skills to survive, and if someone could strip all that away with a single chant, it would turn him into a weak human. It was scary.

And it's not that there were only spells that could do all kinds of things (like sealing his wolf, what dark magic did to Damon so he forgot about Talia and he couldn't recognize her as his mate), but there were also items that could cancel the magic. And who knows what else was out there?

This meeting with Damon and Talia opened the door to many uncertainties and Keith was not sure how to deal with them.

Lulu and Sandy arrived last at Keith's office at the training center to see that Keith, Liam, Pierce, and Caleb were already there.

"What's up, boss?", Sandy asked Keith cheerfully while closing the door behind them.

As warriors, Keith was their superior, but outside work, they were friends.

"We have a mission starting tomorrow.", Keith said. "Alpha and Luna are heading out, and we will escort them."

"Where and for how long?", Lulu asked.

Keith paused to observe Lulu. She was wearing casual clothes, and her expression was calm. If he was not there last night, Keith wouldn't know that they had an argument where Lulu said mean things about Talia before storming topless out of Keith's hospital room.

Maybe she really said those in a fit of rage and didn't mean it, Keith thought. Was he overthinking it?

"Only the ones who are going on this mission will hear details.", Keith responded.

"That means, not everyone will go.", Pierce voiced his thoughts. "How many of us will go?"

"It depends.", Keith said. "I plan to take a blood oath tonight where I will pledge my loyalty to Alpha and Luna and state that I will not act with ill intentions against them. Will any of you join me?"

Keith looked at five faces that were frozen while processing this information. Blood oath was a big deal.

Lulu was the first one to react as her brows came together to form a frown. "You are asking us like we have a choice."

"You have a choice.", Keith said.

"Yeah, right.", Lulu said sarcastically. "Refusal to take this oath means that we are planning on betraying Alpha, Luna, and our pack. You say it's a choice, and I say it's forced because the other option is to declare ourselves as traitors. Don't you think that's insulting?"

"I will do it.", Sandy said before Keith could respond to Lulu.

"Me too.", Liam was next.

"Same here.", Pierce said, and Caleb nodded in agreement.

Lulu looked at them in disbelief. "How can you agree so easily?"

Sandy didn't think it was a big deal. "The Dark Howlers pack is my home. My friends and family are here. As a warrior, it's my duty to protect them and to put my life on the line when needed. A blood oath where I pledge not to have malicious intentions toward Alpha and Luna won't change how I lived so far."

"Do you plan to betray our Alpha?", Keith asked Lulu. He was pleased that others agreed easily.

"This is not about betraying him.", Lulu said. "This is about you forcing me. I am not concerned about acting against our pack because that's not going to happen. However, should I put my life at the mercy of Alpha's mood swings?"

Sandy stifled a giggle. "Come on, Lulu. Why are you so dramatic? Did you forget that Alpha CAN end us in a second if he wants to? This is just us showing good faith."

Keith didn't want this to escalate. He gestured toward the door. "Lulu, you can leave. Think about it until our next mission."

Chapter 618 A birthday invitation

"No one is forcing you to take this oath. I will not bring this up again.", Keith said to everyone, and then he locked his eyes with Lulu's. "If you change your mind, let me know."

Keith gestured toward the door, obviously telling her to leave.

Lulu pressed her lips into a line and after a few seconds of hesitation, she stood up, saluted, and left Keith's office.

With Lulu gone, Keith looked at Pierce, Liam, Caleb, and Sandy. "We are leaving tomorrow morning. Alpha and Luna are still figuring out details, but I'm fairly confident that we will be heading to the Midnight Guardians pack."

Sandy's eyes sparkled with excitement. The Midnight Guardians pack! She heard stories about that pack. Other than Talia confirming how they have mystical powers, members of the Midnight Guardians pack were staying pure for their mates. How romantic!

Just like many other she-wolves who still didn't find their mates, Sandy tried to get close to the members of the Midnight Guardians pack during the Summer Solstice festival when their soccer team was visiting. Unfortunately, Sandy only managed to catch a glimpse of them from the stands while the Midnight Guardians were playing. Those guys had separate lodging, they were keeping to themselves, and they left the festival after their last game was over.

If they participated in any activity other than the soccer tournament, they were doing it under disguise. Sandy couldn't blame them because more than a dozen handsome guys who were untouched could easily create a riot among a crowd of licentious she-wolves.

But this time it will be different. Sandy was going there, right at the center of coveted virgins, where will they run?

After the initial excitement dwindled, Sandy asked Keith, "Are we really going without Lulu?" Lulu was also eager to know more about the Midnight Guardians pack. Who wasn't?

"She is not in the right state of mind for a mission.", Keith responded. He was glad that Lulu left on her own, considering her temper, Keith was expecting that she will argue more.

Keith was wondering who should stay behind, and their readiness to take the blood oath helped him decide.

"Sandy, Liam", Keith called. "The two of you will come with me to escort Alpha and Luna. Our mission will be to keep Luna Talia safe. Pierce, Caleb, the two of you will stay behind with a task to keep an eye on Lulu."

Pierce was not happy to be stuck with babysitting Lulu. He glanced at Caleb to see that he was also frowning in disapproval. The chance to visit the most mysterious pack slipped through their fingers only because Lulu was throwing a tantrum. However, Keith was their superior and they couldn't complain.

Liam and Sandy were unsettled by the implication of the task that Keith gave to Pierce and Caleb. All of them knew about Lulu's mouth with no filter, but they were all friends who partied, laughed, cried, trained, and killed together. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that they saved each other's lives more than once. Their bond was deep.

Liam had to ask, "Do you think that Lulu will act against Alpha and Luna?"

"I hope not", Keith said honestly. "I'm sure that Lulu has her reasons for being reluctant to take the blood oath, and I won't pry into her private matters. But I know that if she is left on her own, Lulu's dejection will grow, and I can't predict if that will be directed at me, you, or at Alpha and Luna. Maybe

Lulu will realize that she overreacted and comes to apologize. Anything is possible. But until then, I don't want her to think she was singled out."

Keith instructed Pierce and Caleb, "With you being her close friends, you can be with Lulu without her suspecting that something is off. It is not your duty to prevent Lulu from making a mistake, but if she makes one, I want to know about it. I am aware that you want to visit the Midnight Guardians pack, but with Luna Talia being their Alpha, I'm confident we will have more chances of going there."

"How will she be their Alpha and our Luna at the same time?", Sandy asked.

Keith shrugged, indicating that he doesn't know. "I'm confident that Alpha and Luna will figure it out. I'm not sure what they are up to, but changes are already happening. You are aware that we opened our borders to two packs. That was unprecedented, yet days passed without incidents, and I believe that this is just the beginning..."

Pierce and Caleb left the office after agreeing to meet in the evening for the blood oath. Until then, the duo will keep an eye on Lulu.

Sandy looked at the closed door after Pierce and Caleb left.

"Are you worried about Lulu?", Keith asked Sandy.

"Aren't you?", she responded with a question.

"She is a grown woman and a good warrior. By the time we are back, she will be over this and we can talk normally."

With that, Keith decided to move to the main point. He needed to tell them about the upcoming mission.

...

After Keith left, Talia and Damon went to the study to deal with some matters.

Damon was checking his email, and Talia was also busy at her desk.

Damon smiled while looking at one email he just received. "Cristian is inviting us to a birthday celebration for his son."

That got Talia's attention. She didn't know that Cristian had a child. Didn't that mean he had a mate also? She knew that he was Alpha of the Spring Leaf pack and that he was on friendly terms with Damon, and... that was mostly it.

Talia was excited. It will be her first time attending a birthday party!

"How old is the boy?"

"It will be his sixth birthday.", Damon responded.

"Come on, tell me the details.", Talia urged him.

Damon chuckled before responding, "Party is in a month. The afternoon will be family-friendly, then there will be dinner, and evening for adults only. I want us to look good", since that will be their first time attending an official event in another pack as Alpha and Luna. "We should order our clothes. Couple's outfits."

Talia was not sure if they needed more clothes. She had other things on her mind, "What about the present? What do young Alphas get for their birthday?"

Damon shrugged. "At that age, just like any kid. Toys, clothes, a trip to Disneyland, stocks, a motorcycle..."

Talia smiled at the first two, but then her face turned into disbelief. How can those be for children? But then, Alphas of packs are rich, so even those toys and clothes Damon mentioned were probably exclusive and expensive.

Damon saw Talia's expression changing and he burst into laughter. "The little snot has everything he wants. We can show up with a happy birthday card, or with a mountain of gold. He won't see the difference. If the birthday card is shiny, and it plays a tune when it's open, he will love it."

Talia shook her head helplessly. How can a six years-old be happy with a singing card? But this reminded her, "We need to go baby shopping."

Damon froze and he stared at her as the whole world slowed down and the only thing he could hear were his raging heartbeats. It took him some time to speak.

"Are you... pregnant?"

Chapter 619 Family planning (1)

"Uhm, no.", Talia responded awkwardly. Why would Damon ask if she was pregnant? It took her a few long seconds to realize that Damon thought how baby shopping was for her, so she quickly explained, "Yasmin is expecting twins. Now that we are going to the Midnight Guardians pack, we shouldn't go empty-handed. I'm going to be an aunt, and that makes you an uncle."

Damon's disappointment seeped into Talia through their mate bond, and her heart cracked.

Did Damon want kids so badly? She was not aware of it.

It's not that she didn't want kids, but she never seriously thought about it. A few times when kids were mentioned, Talia brushed it off because she was young, and she only started getting to know the world. However, Damon was twenty-seven years old and Talia realized that he had babies on his mind.

Damon saw Talia's concerned gaze directed at him and he cursed internally while focusing on his computer, pretending to be busy. He didn't want to make it sound awkward or like he was pressuring her, but here they were.

Talia could feel that he was unsettled.

She swiftly moved to Damon's desk and sat on his lap. She gave him a smacking kiss on the lips and spoke cheerfully in an attempt to lighten up the mood, "I am not pregnant because I didn't go into heat, yet."

Damon was silent, so she persisted, "You know that, right?"

"I know you didn't, but so many things are different with us, and I thought..."

Talia caressed his cheek gently. "Do you really want babies?"

"I told you. Five. At least." He paused. "Don't you want kids?"

"I thought you were joking."

"Kitten", Damon called seriously. "You should know by now that I don't joke. I tell the truth. Always."

"I didn't realize how important kids are to you."

"Important? No.", Damon said honestly. The only important thing in his life was Talia. "I never liked kids. They are small, fragile, messy, and loud."

Talia stifled a giggle. This sounded like Damon, but it didn't match his feelings.

"If they are so bad, why do you want them?"

"Since I met you, and I started thinking how five stinky noisemakers with copper-colored hair and honeyed eyes would be a delight to have. We will go for walks and spend the day in the forest, I will give them piggyback rides, they can chew on my ears, wreck the packhouse, and we will shower them with our care and the best things money can buy."

Talia stared at Damon in disbelief. "You really thought about this."

Damon looked away awkwardly. For some reason, he was uncomfortable admitting these thoughts that seemed too personal.

Talia smiled and cupped his cheeks, forcing him to look at her.

"Damon", she called. "I don't know when it will happen, but whenever I get into heat, you have my permission to impregnate me."

"I don't want to if you are not ready."

"Who said I'm not ready?"

"You are not excited about the idea.", Damon voiced his thoughts. "Is it because I keep on hurting you? You know that was just dark magic, right? Now you have your guards, and I will give them permission to be hostile toward me. We will be careful and it won't happen again. Maybe I should do a blood oath, so I can't act against you. I would never..."

"No, no!", she interrupted him. What hostility and blood oath nonsense? She wouldn't allow anyone to harm him, even if he lost his mind completely. "I know that was not you. You are the best mate in the world, but..."

"But?", Damon urged her to continue.

Talia couldn't lie and say how things were perfect and she was ready.

"I am scared.", Talia admitted. "I grew up without parents, hiding. I don't know much about this world, and I definitely have no clue how to be a good mother. The closest thing I ever had to a mother was Stephanie. No one else cared about me in such a way."

Damon's heart cracked and he pulled her into his embrace, making her lean on him completely. He wanted to comfort her, to encourage her, but he was not sure what to say, so he just held her tightly, letting his emotions fill her up with the hope that Talia will realize that she was enough. She will be enough, because, for him, she was everything.

"You will be a wonderful father.", Talia continued talking after some time. "Maybe you can teach me. Tell me more about your childhood and what you did with your parents because I would like our kids to grow into exceptional individuals just like their father is."

Damon's lips lifted into a smile. Talia complimenting him will never get old. He knew that he did many cruel things. No matter what his intentions were, someone always judged him and called him names (behind his back), but none of those were important, because Talia's love and trust in him overshadowed everything.

"You will be an amazing mother.", Damon said, his voice rumbled deeply as her ear was on his chest. "You are taking care of me. You are taking care of your friends and everyone around you. I know you will take care of our kids also."

Talia released a slow breath. She hoped he was right. She read somewhere that mothers develop an instinct that tells them what their children need. Talia pushed her insecurities aside. Was there a point in psyching herself out about babies? Even if she got pregnant right that instant, it would take months until she became a mother. Considering how much she learned and had grown since she met Damon, Talia was confident that she will learn at least some basics about babies during her pregnancy.

Pregnancy.

It was a foreign term, but the thought of having a part of Damon growing within her made her feel all warm and tingly inside.

Talia lifted her head and Damon saw her eyes sparkling with mischief.

"No matter how I feel about babies, I am excited about babymaking. Does that count?", she asked with a sly smile.

Damon's eyes clouded with lust and Talia felt his erection growing under her behind.

"Show me.", he said.

Talia was not sure what he meant, but then a mental image flashed in her mind of her riding him in that chair they were sitting on and Damon's playful smirk confirmed that he sent her that.

Her heart started racing as she stood up and reached under her skirt.

"Slowly", Damon demanded. He wanted to enjoy the striptease.

Damon observed keenly as she shimmied out of her panties, letting them fall on the floor before she stepped out of them.

"This also?", Talia asked while gesturing toward her blouse.

"Only buttons.", he said, and Talia started undoing three buttons on the top of the blouse that revealed the pink bra under it.

Talia thought that Damon will remove his pants, but he didn't move a muscle.

Ah, the naughty Alpha wanted to be served. She didn't mind.

Talia got on her knees and slowly worked on his belt and buttons, without breaking eye contact. She could see his anticipation building. Desire. Approval. And it was all wrapped in an endless amount of love and lust that left her breathless.

Damon lifted himself slightly so she can slide his pants down, and his erection sprang free. He was half-hard already.

Chapter 620 Family planning (2) [Bonus chapter]

Damon showed Talia the mental image of what he wanted, but when his scent of the forest mixed with manly muskiness hit her nostrils, and when Talia saw glistening precum on his tip, she got another idea.

Talia released the waistband of his pants once it reached his knees and she leaned over his legs, pressing her breasts on his exposed thighs as she took him into her mouth.

Damon hissed at the same time she hummed, both in pleasure.

He loved the way her tongue wrapped around his cock, and she loved the sensation of him growing in her mouth.

"Yeah, kitten... just like that...", he breathed when her head started bobbing.

Talia knew what he liked, and she did it for him with satisfaction because she could make him feel good. The big and powerful Alpha was vulnerable and exposed, gasping and groaning in the rhythm her tongue set and the biggest turn-on was that he willingly lowered his guard in front of her.

Damon was staring at Talia as possessed, her every move sent a stream of electric current from his groin to his brain, and when she pressed her tongue to slide along the crack at his tip, Damon threw his head back. She could suck his soul out of him and he won't resist, not even a little bit.

Talia enjoyed the feeling of his hot and hard flesh in his mouth, but she enjoyed the most that she was in control. She looked up to see Damon leaning in his chair. His chest heaved as he panted, his firm muscles tightening the white shirt to give her a hint of the magnificent landscape that laid below that fine fabric. Damon was at her mercy, totally enjoying it, and she loved it!

Without slowing down the movements of her mouth and tongue, Talia's hand reached just below his scrotum, and she pressed the magic button that was hiding there, giving him that last push he needed to reach Heaven.

The armrests of the chair creaked under the pressure of Damon's grip when he groaned as he shot his hot seed deep into her throat.

Damon loved the fact that she swallowed it all greedily, and then she licked him clean, to make sure not a single drop was wasted.

She told him once that he tastes like dark chocolate, and Damon was not sure if she was messing with him or if that was the mate bond. But then, she tasted citrusy sweet, unlike any other woman (and he tasted many), so he didn't question her about it. Talia enjoyed his flavors, and that was all it mattered.

Talia couldn't believe this. She was pleasuring him, but the fact that his hot and hard cock was in her mouth was arousing. And then there were sounds, and the scent, and the sensations that she could feel through their mate bond, and she was close to orgasm herself. She needed just a bit to reach that high, and she was eager to get there.

Damon was still catching up his breath when Talia straddled him.

"Make me feel good, Damon", Talia demanded while grinding herself on him.

Her skirt was bunched around her waist, exposing her lower half of the body completely. Damon's pants were down, so he could feel her drenched folds gliding over his cock that was still twitching from the orgasm. Damn, he was sensitive.

"Give me a moment, kitten", he pleaded.

Damon hated that he needed a breather, but what she did was magnificent, and if he could have just a minute, no... thirty seconds... fifteen...

"Ahh...", a shaky breath escaped his lips, followed by a throaty moan when her lips latched on his neck. She was licking and sucking on her mark, sending electric currents all over, and just like that, he was fully hard again.

Talia smiled victoriously against his flesh, and she raised her ass to reach between her legs for his cock and to hold him in place.

They both released lustful sounds as he made his way into her hot and moist flesh that welcomed him.

Talia gripped the backrest of the chair for support and her hips moved with urgency. She was almost there. Almost.

Damon groaned like never before. He just came, his orgasm making him sensitive, and his kitten knew exactly how to drive him crazy, crazy for more of her.

Damon wished to have her breasts in his mouth, but the blouse was partially obstructing him, and there was a bra as well. After a second of hesitation, Damon gripped the fabric and tore it with ease. Now there was nothing to obstruct him from enjoying two bouncy peaks of his mate.

Talia was too consumed in chasing her release to notice that her garments were ruined. But she definitely noticed when his lips latched on her nipple and he sucked harshly.

"Oh, God!", Talia exclaimed and pressed herself on his face. "Harder", she demanded, and she moaned loudly when his teeth tightened around her hard bud, sending just the right amount of pain to amplify her pleasure.

Talia's movements became jerky, but she gripped the backrest and kept on going, knowing that her orgasm was approaching rapidly. And there it was, with stars and rainbows, and delicious sparks that tingled her body into numbness.

'SLAP!'

Damon spanked Talia's bare ass when she slowed down, but she barely noticed.

Damon was not happy. Sure, the ride was good, but he didn't finish, yet she stopped moving!

Next time, he will order her to hold it in until the time is right so they can come together.

Talia was resting limply on Damon and catching her breath when he stood up with her, without pulling out, and she felt the cold surface of his desk on her buttocks when he put her to sit there.

Damon swung his hand haphazardly behind Talia over the surface of his desk, sending pens, papers, mail from that day, and a cell phone to fly through the study, and then he pushed her to lay back on the cleared area with her ass on the edge, nearly dangling off it.

"Ahh...", Talia moaned breathlessly when he started rocking into her.

She was sensitive, and her body was buzzing, but her position didn't allow her to move much. Did she want to move? Not really. She was at his mercy, and she didn't want it any other way. Damon knew how to make her feel good, to deliver the right amount of addictive torture which put her right in the middle between wishing for it to stop and to never end.

Damon held Talia's legs and lifted them up straight to connect at the ankles in front of him, and then he thrust into her vigorously. The height of the desk was just right for such activities.

Talia gasped for air, unsure what do to with her hands. She wanted to hold onto something because the whole room was spinning, but she was in the middle of a massive desk, with nothing solid in her reach, and Damon was too far away. What should she do? She couldn't think because every Damon's thrust brought her a dose of mind-numbing sparks and she left her arms on her sides to do whatever they wanted but her hands moved to her body, searching for her breasts to touch her nipples.