

Alphas Bride 641

Chapter 641 Back in the Midnight Guardians pack (11)

Damon raised his arm, at the same time as he released a short burst of his aura, and two-hundred-something people in the noisy cafeteria quieted down abruptly like someone flipped a switch.

"I am glad to be here.", Damon said. "The Dark Howlers pack was always on friendly terms with the Midnight Guardians pack. We are in the process of discussing how Talia and I being mates will reshape our relationship, but I can assure you that our bond will strengthen. We are a family now. Your Alpha here is planning a mixer for unmated members of our packs, and I will help her make it a reality. Expect it in the near future."

Boisterous cheers shook the cafeteria, and Talia allowed all that joy to wash over her. They were really looking forward to this, and Talia appreciated this dose of happiness that Damon gave them.

'Axel?', Talia called through the pack mind-link. 'Do you have pack runs?'

'We didn't have one in a long time, but yes, we do.', Axel responded.

This information was just what Talia hoped to hear. She wanted to address people in the cafeteria, but the clamor was not subsiding, so she released a burst of her aura, just as Damon did before.

Compared to Damon's aura, Talia's was not so sharp, it was like when a mother gently pats her child's shoulder to get his attention.

"Tomorrow, we will have a feast, and after that, we will have a pack run.", she announced, making Axel, Yasmin, Meg, and Kai look at her questionably. That was news for them also!

Talia was not sure if Cassandra's helpers can do the ceremony in her absence (because Cassandra was used as a lab rat by witches), but Talia didn't think that was a problem. Even without the ceremony, it was about the pack coming together, establishing hierarchy, and confirming the existing one while strengthening the bond between the pack members.

'Will you lead the pack run with me, Alpha Damon?', Talia asked Damon through their private mind-link. 'Sapa and Liseli can have some time together also.' As an added bonus, here they didn't need to worry about someone seeing them emit the white light because members of the Midnight Guardians pack definitely saw all kinds of abilities.

Damon responded to Talia with a lopsided smile that promised carnal pleasures. Talia took that as his agreement.

"I will lead the run with my mate, Alpha Damon", Talia said to everyone. "I hope you will join us, and I also hope you won't mind our friends joining." She gestured toward Keith, Liam, James, and Cornelia. "Keith and Liam are capable warriors from the Dark Howlers pack, they are my close friends and my personal guards. James is our friend from the Red Moon pack, and Cornelia is Luna Yasmin's sister from the Silver Flame Coven."

Talia didn't mention Sandy because she was not sure if Sandy and Tyler will end their activities until tomorrow evening, but as Tyler's mate, Sandy won't be an outsider.

Axel noticed that people were still looking at Talia, expecting her to say more, so he stepped in.

"Alpha came here to eat, so we appreciate your understanding in letting her have a breather. Spread the word that the feast is tomorrow with the pack run afterward. Who doesn't attend will miss a good thing.", Axel said, and he remembered one more thing, "Before we resume our regular activities, I want to share another good news..." He made a dramatic pause. "Our Gamma Tyler found his mate. It's Sandy from the Dark Howlers pack, and she is the reason he won't be joining us for dinner tonight."

Laughter and claps erupted, and Talia couldn't believe how all of them were happy for Tyler. They were all locked up in this realm for a long time, sharing hardships and desires. Weren't they like a big happy family?

For a brief moment, Talia wondered how things would turn out if she grew up here instead of the Red Moon pack. If she knew about her identity with an Alpha bloodline and a special wolf, would she be so confident like Marcy, Mindy, Cassie, Jade... Talia shook those useless thoughts away. It's not like she could turn back the time.

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In Tyler's room...

There were tatters of red and gray fabric scattered on the floor, shoes, black trousers, a bra... all those forming a path from the door to the bed where Sandy and Tyler were lying naked.

Tyler was on his back, staring at the ceiling with a big grin on his face. If not for his ears, his mouth would form a full circle around his head. It was his first time having sex (and second, and third, and fourth), and he thought it will be amazing, but now he confirmed that his imagination paled in comparison to the real thing. Even just holding Sandy like that and inhaling her zesty scent while sparks of their bond danced wherever they touched was phenomenal.

Sandy was next to Tyler, her body leaning on his, equally dazed by the marvels of the coitus that was amplified by the sparks of their bond. The man was not only gifted with a cock that had a generous girth that stretched her perfectly with a hint of ecstatic pain, but Tyler was adorably curious and cautious, and she loved the way his maple-infused breath splashed on her face whenever he groaned that silly nickname Sasa. She had no intention of correcting him.

Tyler kissed Sandy's forehead, happy to finally hold his mate in his arms, and he opened up his feelings to share his joy, but he paused when he felt that there was some dejection coming from her.

"Sasa?", he called. "What's wrong?" The first time it was short and a bit clumsy, but every next time was better and longer with different angles and rotations, and he was confident that he did a good job of satisfying her. Or maybe it was not good enough?

Sandy looked at him after a long second of silence. "Do you think I'm worthy of being a Gamma by your side?"

Tyler didn't get it. "Gamma is just a set of duties I can handle on my own. If you are interested in sharing them, I will show you what I do, and you can pick what you want to do. Don't worry about it."

"If that's not the problem, then what is? Don't you like me?"

Tyler felt like someone poured a bucket of ice on him. Where did that come from? "What made you think I don't like you?"

"Why didn't you mark me?"

"Oh...", he exhaled audibly in relief. For a moment, he thought that his performance in bed was lacking and she thought his heart was not into it because his cock was all in.

Now he also understood the Gamma question because he got his Gamma position after a ritual that strengthened his bond with the pack and gave him a power boost. As his mate, Sandy will get the same after he marks her.

But the Gamma position was not the reason why he didn't mark her yet.

"We need to talk.", he said.

Sandy was alarmed. This sounded serious. The 'we need to talk' was usually something people said before breaking up. But they were mates! Why would he break up with her, unless... "Do you have another woman? Or do you prefer men?"

Chapter 642 Missed talk before intimacy [Bonus chapter]

Tyler stared at Sandy while her words 'another woman' and 'prefer men' bounced on top of his head, refusing to be processed. Did she just accuse him of womanizing? Or did he look like he would rather be with a man than with her?

For more than two decades, Tyler kept himself pure, body and mind, suffering endless lonely nights and faking smiles whenever he saw a couple while longing for his mate, and now that she was finally there, she was doubting him!

"What!? From where are these ideas coming from?", Tyler asked in outrage. "Why would I look at men or women when I have you for a mate? I gave you my first kiss, my first everything."

Sandy pressed her lips into a line guiltily. She knew that as a member of the Midnight Guardians pack, Tyler was saving himself for his mate, and the mate bond rewired any previous crushes to become

insignificant when compared to Sandy, but that didn't mean Tyler didn't have some other commitments. But it seemed that there was no one else, so why did he want to talk so seriously then?

She pushed herself into a seated position while clutching the comforter to cover her breasts.

"Then explain quickly, why were you so eager to have sex with me?", she asked stiffly.

Tyler's stomach dropped. Was he so horny that he didn't realize she didn't want to?

He swallowed hard. "Were you not willing?"

Sandy shook her head. "That's not the point. We kind of jumped into it and I have no regrets because it was great. However, we are mates, and it should end with you marking me and not like this."

Tyler stared at her. She said so many things. He heard that sex was great, but she also said it was rushed and she was upset because he didn't mark her.

Ah! Did he end up looking like a lecher who won't cherish her!?

"Sorry, Sasa.", Tyler said with sincerity, and he got up to sit and face her. "It's just... you are so sexy that I couldn't help myself. Before we undressed, I was supposed to tell you that the members of the Midnight Guardians pack are different from regular werewolves."

"How different?", Sandy asked reluctantly. How much she saw (and she saw plenty), Tyler was not missing any parts, nor did he have any extras.

Tyler felt the loss of Sandy's proximity, so he took her hands into his. The comforter fell on her lap to expose her breasts and he really wanted to touch and lick her there, but the timing was off, so he forced himself to maintain eye contact.

Elders warned them to do this talk before any intimacy, but he got carried away and now it looked like he used a honey trap. But it would be worse if he actually marked her, so this was salvageable. Hopefully.

"You know what magic is, right?", Tyler said cautiously.

Sandy guessed what he wanted to say. "Are you going to tell me how members of your pack have abilities?"

Tyler blinked. "You know?"

Sandy smirked proudly. "I am Alpha Talia's personal guard. How can I not know that she is amazing? And she gave us a heads-up before we came here so we don't freak out and embarrass ourselves if we see something unusual."

Tyler exhaled in relief. He was glad that she knew already, and she didn't seem to think badly of it. "Well, then this talk will be short. Do you know that when I mark you, there will be a chance of you getting an ability?" Not just a chance because all marked mates got something, but the question was if that was an ability worth using or not.

"What? Are you sure?"

She knew that members of the Midnight Guardians pack have abilities, but she didn't know she can get it as well. This mate bond brought her a hot mate, mind-blowing orgasms, and now abilities as well? It was getting better by the minute!

Tyler confirmed. "My venom carries my DNA and the potential of awakening your ability. We are not allowed to mark our mates unless we explain this and get permission. It sounds great when you think about the possibility of flying or moving things with your mind, but some abilities are more a hindrance than useful. However, no matter what your ability will be, it will change your life forever, so you should know what you are getting yourself into. In the outside world, our members are hunted by people who want to figure out the secrets behind our abilities, and how to get in here. We stay inside this realm for our safety, and when we go out, it's always in groups, with GPS devices, following predetermined routes and schedule, so that in case something happens, our people can find us."

"I see", Sandy said thoughtfully. She already heard about witches and breeding, so that was not new. However, now it concerned not only her mate, but her as well, so the threat became more real.

But Sandy was a capable warrior, working closely with Damon and Talia, the two most powerful Alphas, and who will dare to mess with her?

Sandy remembered Talia's demonstration when she glowed, and the tornado when they dispelled the dark magic and she wondered if she will be able to do something magically-cool.

Sandy looked at the man who was holding her hands and anxiously waiting for her to say something.

"What is your ability?", she asked.

"I don't know.", Tyler admitted. "Our abilities awaken after we give our first time to our fated mate."

Sandy's mouth formed a big 'O' as she understood how that's why they were keeping themselves pure. She thought it was for romantic reasons, yet it turned into something practical.

"So?", Tyler asked, and licked his lips nervously before asking, "Do I have your permission to mark you?"

Sandy inhaled a shaky breath. It is happening! "Yes."

Tyler pushed Sandy to lay on her back with his body and stared into her blue-green eyes.

"You are perfect, Sasa.", he said with all the seriousness in the world. "Thank you for expressing your willingness to wear my mark and bear the consequences. No matter what your ability will be, I promise, we will go through it together."

"And no matter what awaits for us in the future, I will stay by your side.", she said, feeling the need to assure him that she will carry her weight in their relationship that just started, yet both of them were confident it will last forever.

Tyler hummed in approval. "You have no idea how happy I am that I've found you."

Sandy raised her hips to press herself against his erection, making him groan in response.

"I think I have an idea.", she said cockily.

"Oh, Sasa...", Tyler murmured while getting lost in her green-blue eyes that contained his whole world. "I endured so much alone, and I want to make up for it. Are you ready?"

Sandy's insides trembled as arousal swelled within her. Was she ready? She was born ready! "Don't make it sound like you were the only one waiting. I watched my friends and family find their mates, wondering when my turn will come, and here you are."

"Here I am.", he confirmed.

His hips moved, and Sandy's mouth opened in a gasp when his hard and hot cock glided between her drenched folds.

Tyler loved seeing her dazed expression as she was drowning in lust. Because of him.

His lips covered hers to swallow her moans, determined to fuck her, feed her, and they will have sex every day, and he will never sleep alone again!

His tip pressed at her entrance and they both froze, their intense gazes locked on each other as both breathed heavily in anticipation of what was to come.

Tyler grinned. "I want to hear you scream my name, and then I will mark you, and the rest of our lives will begin. How does that sound?"

Sandy's fingers laced behind his neck. "It sounds wonderful." And then she pulled herself up to kiss his lips and take in his flavors of freshly made pancakes that came with a generous dose of maple syrup. Her favorites.



"Fuck!", she cursed into his mouth when he entered her in one powerful jab that stretched her just right, and then she clawed at his back in an attempt to get him closer to her.

Tyler smiled into the kiss. Fuck. Exactly. He was doing it! And it was fantastic!

Chapter 643 Phenomenon at the bottom of the lake (1)

After dinner, Axel and Yasmin led the group to a lake.

It was a fifteen minutes-long walk that passed in friendly chatter.

Talia noticed that some members of the Midnight Guardians pack were following them. It felt awkward because they were keeping their distance, but she knew that they were curious about her and Damon, yet staying away out of respect, so she pretended not to see them.

No one talked about swimming, but it was an opportunity to spend time outside, see the area, and enjoy the night scenery with the lake as a backdrop.

The forest ended abruptly to open into a narrow clearing that was covered in grass and occasional protruding rocks before it melded into a calm lake that glistened under the moonlight.

Talia smiled at the sight. It was beautiful.

They all sat on the rocks and ground and chattered.

Yasmin and Cornelia were talking about the outside world with James and Axel listening.

Kai and Meg were asking Keith and Liam about Sandy because Meg wanted to prepare a welcoming party for Sandy.

Talia thought how that was cute. "Do you normally arrange a welcome for new members?"

Meg was not sure. Other than Yasmin, no one else joined the Midnight Guardians pack after her, but... "I am thinking about my experience. Everyone had their duties and routine, and with my ability flaring out of control and breaking things randomly, it was tough. If not for Kai, I would be totally lost. I want to do something to let Sandy know that her presence is appreciated and how besides her mate, other people are also happy she is here."

"That's so sweet of you, Meg.", Talia said. "Let me know if I can help you with this."

Meg needed a moment to come up with an idea. "The big lounge in the main building. We can invite Elders and anyone who has some rank and introduce Sandy officially, and when that's done and guests leave, then just our circle can continue in an intimate setting with fruit cocktails and roasted marshmallows. Something homey."

Damon shook his head in disapproval. "Sandy is a warrior. If you want to make her feel at home, instead of cute cocktails and gooey chocolates, we should have a hunt."

'I could use a hunt!', Liseli shouted in Talia's mind and Talia felt excitement swelling inside her. Her wolf wanted to stretch her paws, probably with Sapa, and Talia couldn't ignore her.

"Hunt sounds like a good idea.", Talia said and looked at Damon. "How about we add a competition for some fun and bragging rights?"

Damon was up for the challenge. "Do you have something on your mind?"

Keith made a face. "If Alphas are competing, we might as well sit this one out."

Meg agreed with Keith. Alphas are faster and stronger, with sharper senses, but she liked the hunt idea, just like anyone else. Was there a way to level out the field?

"We can come up with goals for the hunt.", Meg suggested.

That got Liam's attention. "What animals do you have here? Maybe we can mark a few in advance, and only those would count toward the final score."

"And if we hurt an unmarked animal, then the score will be deducted.", Keith chimed in.

Meg's eyes lit up, obviously in approval of this twist. "How should we mark them?"

"Make sure that mark doesn't leave a scent and it's not a physical object that can be seen because that will allow your Alpha to cheat.", Axel said teasingly from the side.

Talia blinked at him when she realized he was talking about her. "You think I will cheat?"

Axel shrugged. "When the competitiveness kicks in and you see that you are losing, anything is possible."

Talia puffed her cheeks in protest, but she didn't comment on it. Talia and Liseli would love to win and impress Damon and Sapa, but would they cheat?

"Talia", Axel called. "While they are planning the hunt, can we have a word?" He tilted his head to the side, telling her that they should step away and talk in privacy.

"Of course", Talia responded and stood up from the rock with Damon right behind her. He had no intention of leaving her on her own. Not anymore.

Talia smiled at the clingy Alpha and took his hand into hers, their fingers interlacing immediately as a silent confirmation that he was coming with her.

Axel didn't mind Damon's company, knowing that Talia will tell him everything anyway.

Axel led the way toward the lake, and they stopped where water kissed the damp soil.

Axel closed his eyes to sense the surroundings and when he confirmed that no one was within the hearing distance, he said, "Since I have unrestricted access to all archives, I use my free time to read. It's

mostly historical data, some sounding like fairytales, but I found something interesting about this lake. There is a phenomenon at the bottom. Can you sense it?"

Both Damon and Talia closed their eyes and started feeling their surroundings with the focus towards the depths of the lake.

The outlines showed uneven ground with rocks and some plants swaying slowly, and then there were clams, fish, and turtles.

As their senses moved toward the middle of the lake, there was an absence of animals, and then the water became blurry.

'How far can you see?', Damon asked Talia through their private mind-link. 'I can't see beyond the kelp forest.'

'Let me show you.', Talia responded and opened her mind to project what she sees directly into Damon's mind.

Damon was surprised to see that Talia's perception was sharper than his. Sapa told him that Damon had a physical advantage when compared to Talia, while she had sensitivity to energies and could manipulate them, but Damon didn't think that she would have this much of an advantage.

It's not that he was jealous of her, but Damon craved more strength and abilities, how else will he be able to protect his kitten?

Damon shook those thoughts away and focused on the mental images Talia was sending him. She was going deeper into the kelp forest that moved with the strong unpredictable currents and Damon thought how that was familiar.

It took him a moment to realize that this resembled the depths of the lake that's next to Darkbourne, the same one where Tatiana got stuck in kelp and Maddox saved her.

Talia continued deeper to find that the currents in the lake rotated around the center that pulsed with an unusual amount of energy, reminding her of energies at the portals where one can cross to a different realm, yet not quite the same.

The energies prevented her from seeing what was at the center no matter how hard she tried, so Talia opened her eyes and asked Axel, "What's down there?"

"You can feel it, right? There is something."

Talia understood that Axel didn't know what it was. "Did you dive there?"

"I couldn't reach far on my own. I was thinking that we can go together."

"Are you sending her to danger?", Damon growled with warning dripping from his word.

Axel raised his hands, palms toward Damon, signaling that he doesn't mean harm. How could he forget about this protective Alpha who will attack first and then ask questions?

Chapter 644 Phenomenon at the bottom of the lake (2)

Axel didn't want to cause trouble, or start a fight he can't win. He needed to be friendly with Damon because he didn't want to make things awkward for Talia, so Axel quickly said to Damon, "Investigating the phenomenon doesn't mean actually going there. We have various ways to get information."

When Damon's shoulders relaxed, Axel continued talking to Talia, "I was reading some old documents and I found a cryptic text that points to the lake, and then I discovered this. Yasmin said that this amount of energy is not natural. There is something down there, something powerful."

"Do you think it's a portal?", Talia asked Axel with concern while looking toward the center of the lake that shimmered under the moonlight.

If there was a portal at the bottom, it was open because a non-active portal wouldn't create any disturbance. Before the portal to the realm of witches was opened, anyone would pass next to that massive rock without finding anything unusual.

Talia remembered the map which showed that there were other portals in this realm, but they were marked as not active. She didn't remember if there was a mark in the lake, but she definitely remembered that the only active portal was the one toward the realm of humans.

Evanora also hinted that there were more portals in the realm of witches. What if the witches also had a lake with unexplained energies at the bottom? Would such a thing exist unnoticed by witches who are trained to sense energies?

Talia was unsettled at the thought that there were other portals in the human realm also. Without knowing where they were and where they led, they could be easily ambushed. What if they were relaxing here by the lake while cyclops invaded Darkbourne?

Axel saw that Talia's expression was changing, and it was not good, so he tried to comfort her. "It doesn't mean this is a portal. It can be many things. Yasmin can explain in detail, but the short version is that when energies are disturbed, nature will try to put things back in place. The currents at the bottom of the lake are not natural, just how the maze and traps in the human realm at the entrance to this realm wouldn't be there normally; those are results of nature trying to restore order."

Talia didn't know much about witches but so far she heard about channeling energy with the help of runes, energy crystals, chants, hand seals, potions, and magic-imbued items, and some of them were more permanent than the others.

Talia remembered how before she poured energy to open the portal to the realm of witches, Cassandra put some rocks in specific places. Those were special rocks that prevented the portal from being closed by nature.

Talia wondered if just removing one of those rocks will close the portal. It could be that easy.

Or maybe those rocks were not foolproof, and the portal would lose its energy in time. If that's the case, then no one closed the portal on purpose, but it just ran out of energy.

Talia puffed her cheeks. "I want to see the text that pointed you here, and I want to talk to Yasmin and see what she thinks. We should involve Cornelia in this discussion also." She wanted to ask Axel if any other pack member went down there, but if Axel couldn't go, then no one else could. She looked at

Damon. "We need to investigate this. If it's a portal, we have an opening with an unknown threat. Or maybe it could be a magical item that can help us stay safe."

Damon didn't like this. "And it could be a ticking bomb that will go off when disturbed."

Instead of responding to Damon's obvious disapproval, Talia asked, "You felt it also, right? You know it's similar to what we have in the lake near Darkbourne."

Axel's eyes widened at this information. "You have the same?"

Talia nodded. "I never looked into it, but it looks like the same thing. Strong currents, kelp forest, and no one actually knows what's down there so people are speculating how there are mermaids at the bottom of the lake."

Damon disapproved, but he couldn't ignore a potential threat that was right in his backyard. This didn't look like a vacation anymore, damn it!

"We should check if other packs have something like this.", Damon said.

"You think there are more?", Talia asked.

Damon shrugged. "We both have a lake with an odd thing at the bottom. Do you think this is a coincidence? Or do you think we are the only ones?"

Axel agreed. "We have five more lakes that are deep enough, and I checked them all. Only this one has this oddity, and this one is the closest one to the center of our territory. If you ask me, one odd lake would be a coincidence, but since you have one also, I believe they are definitely artificially made. We should check other deep lakes that are in territories of other packs."

The more they spoke, the less Damon liked this. "It doesn't need to be a lake. It can be a cave or any other difficult-to-reach place. You spent most of your life here, yet you were not aware of what's down there. Talia is sensitive to energies, and she wouldn't look there if you didn't tell her. We need to find out who created this and with what purpose."

Talia leaned on Damon, and she loved how his arms wrapped around her naturally. His presence calmed her down, just as hers soothed his temper.

Her gaze moved over the surface of the lake that glistened under the moonlight, and now that she knew what was brewing at the bottom, she didn't think of the image as serene.

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They returned to the room to retreat for the night.

Talia showered and wrapped herself in a fluffy towel, and then she stood in front of the sink while looking at her reflection in the mirror.

"What are you thinking about?", Damon asked from the door. He didn't bother dressing up, knowing that they will sleep naked, so he only had a towel around his waist. He thought she will join him in bed, and they can talk there (and indulge in carnal pleasures) as usual, but she was just standing in the bathroom.

Talia didn't respond, so Damon guessed, "Are you worried about your talk with Alpha Sophia and Alpha Isaac tomorrow? Or is this about the lake? Or are you thinking about our upcoming visit to the Silver Flame Coven?"

"All of it." And none of it. "It's just that stress accumulated over time and..."

"And that's why we came here.", he interrupted her. "A vacation is to unwind." He walked to Talia and hugged her from the back. His chin rested on her bare shoulder, and he looked into the mirror. "But instead of unwinding, you just replaced one worry for another and then added more. Talk to me, kitten."

Talia snorted. "Just how you talk to me?"

Damon cocked an eyebrow at her. "What does that mean?"



"Do you think I don't know how many things you are hiding from me? Of course, it's not on purpose to deceive me, but you think that I shouldn't worry."

"I am used to working on my own.", Damon said to his defense. "Sharing my burdens with you is something I'm working on."

"Fair enough."

He was happy with this response. He kissed her shoulder and he stayed there, his lips moved against her skin as he spoke, "How about we take this to bed?"

Talia grimaced.

"Is there a problem?", Damon asked.

"That's the bed Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia used. I'm not comfortable sleeping there."

Damon couldn't believe this. Was that the reason she refused to join him on the bed that afternoon? But he had no intention of sleeping anywhere else.

He grinned. "Who said we will be sleeping? Besides, as proof of dominance, we should leave our scents there."

"Ahhh!", Talia shrieked when he picked her up without any warning and carried her out of the bedroom.

He threw her on the bed and Talia bounced on the mattress. Before she could catch her bearings, Damon was on top of her.

"Let me love you here, kitten. I want to love you everywhere..."

Talia's arousal swelled, making her forget about the discomfort related to the people who were using that bed previously. Her handsome Alpha wanted to love her everywhere, how can she say no to that?

Chapter 645 Back in the Midnight Guardians pack (12)

Talia dressed up for breakfast and she turned to see Damon buttoning up his shirt with much more force than necessary.

She knew that his mood was fluctuating because they were about to meet with the ex-Alphas.

"Damon?", Talia called. "Will you be OK talking to Sophia and Isaac?"

How can he be calm when he was about to meet with two people who were directly responsible for Talia growing up in hellish conditions? And then they tried to harm him which caused him to forget about his own mate!

Damon rolled his shoulders to release tension, with little to no result. "I will try."

"You don't need to force yourself.", she said.

Damon's head snapped to look at her. Did she think that he will sit this one out? "I want to."

"I know, but it won't help if you commit murder before we find out anything useful. Remember, they have the information we need."

"I will pressure them with my aura and squeeze all their secrets.", Damon said through his teeth.

Talia was conflicted. She understood Damon's anger because she was angry as well, but they were Axel's parents, two people who raised him, and Talia couldn't be harsh toward them. Killing them won't fix any of the wrongs they did. In Talia's opinion, letting Sophia and Isaac live without their powers and without authority, was the appropriate punishment for someone who was used to controlling things. Besides... "Violence won't be necessary."

Damon cocked an eyebrow at Talia suspiciously. "Do you think they will open up and admit things they were hiding for decades?"

"Yes.", Talia responded with a small smirk which told him there was more to it. "Axel will spike their tea with a truth serum. It will make them eager to talk and they won't be able to lie. It's like a drunk person, but with a clear mind."

"A truth serum", Damon repeated. There was a memory-erasing concoction, and now a truth serum. Damon took a mental note to get his hands on some of those interesting things that the Midnight Guardians pack has.

"What if they don't drink it?", he asked.

"Then we will inject them with it, or you can use your aura.", Talia said and walked to Damon. She put her hands on his shoulders and looked him in the eyes. "You are my rock, Damon, and I want you there. But I need you to stay calm no matter what you hear."

"For how long?"

Talia was not sure how to respond to this. "Ask me that after our meeting."

Damon nodded stiffly and then he watched as her hands moved lower, her dainty fingers elegantly buttoned up the last few buttons on his shirt.

"There...", she said, feeling proud of herself.

Every time she did something for Damon, no matter how small it was, it filled her with satisfaction. She wondered if those were her emotions, or Damon's. Was he so pleased because she was helping him?

Damon's gaze was soft and all-consuming, and her breath hitched when their eyes met.

"Thank you for taking care of me, Mrs. Blake", he said, his words slow and deep from all the love he had for her. "I hope you will let me take care of you. I know you are strong and capable, but I hope you keep in mind that you don't need to be strong by yourself."

Talia smiled at the emotional Alpha who was telling her they were equal. He was there to protect her and to take care of her, and she will do the same for him because they were equal, and that was perfect.

...

For breakfast, they didn't go to the cafeteria, and the formal dining room in the main house was used for the first time since Alpha Sophia and Alpha Isaac lost their positions. Normally, Axel, Yasmin, Meg, and Kai would either eat in their rooms or in the cafeteria.

Talia was sitting at the head of the table with Damon on her left. On the other side of the table, opposite Talia, was Axel with Yasmin on his left. Meg, Kai, Keith, Liam, James, and Cornelia were at the table as well.

Sandy and Tyler didn't come down, and the only sign they were alive was a tray filled with empty plates that they left outside of their room sometimes in the wee hours of the morning. Yasmin arranged for dirty dishes to be taken away and to be replaced with fresh food. With all the activity new mates normally go through, Sandy and Tyler will need the nutrients.

Sophia and Isaac, previous Alphas of the Midnight Guardians pack arrived late. They didn't want to eat with others, but Axel told them that they can come on their own, or he will get them dragged there, so they didn't have a choice.

Not welcoming Talia when she arrived, and not joining them for dinner was as much as disrespect Axel was willing to allow.

Axel knew his parents as stern and stubborn, but he believed they were acting with pure motives and taking care of the pack. Since Axel told them about Talia after the Summer Solstice festival, the pure image he had of his parents was crumbling and now he was not sure what to think of them.

In order not to do something he will regret, Axel distanced himself from his parents, and he buried himself in work, looking through old archives and trying to create an objective image of who his Alpha Sophia and Alpha Isaac were.

Since they lost their positions, ex-Alphas were keeping a low profile, mostly staying inside. In front of the pack members, it looked like a peaceful transition of power to the younger generation, but the insiders knew how it happened and Sophia and Isaac were ashamed by the way their roles were taken away from them. In addition to that, they even lost their powers.

Sophia looked dejectedly at the head of the table. That was her spot, yet now Talia was there. Axel was sitting in the spot that belonged to his father.

Sophia released a long breath. Things changed. Her mind flashed with images of many meals they shared there, just the three of them, yet now it felt crowded, and their spots were not theirs anymore. They were replaced.

"Mother, father", Axel called without getting up. "Nice of you to join us. Please, sit." He gestured at the empty chairs that were in the middle of the table. "After the meal, we will move to the study."

Sophia was hesitating, but Isaac placed his hand low on her back and nudged her to move. They talked about this. Neither of them was happy with the current situation, but Talia was back, as the Alpha this time. Talia took their powers, and if they provoke her further, she could take much more.

Sophia and Isaac didn't know why they were summoned here for breakfast and a meeting. It was unimaginable that they were patching up things to function as a family. Talia was never part of their group of three, and Axel distanced himself to the point that Sophia wondered if he was her son anymore. The couple held onto the slim hope that if they cooperate, Talia might return their abilities.

Chapter 646 Family's secrets (3)

Sophia and Isaac took seats at the table, and Talia wondered if they knew that Yasmin was pregnant. Wouldn't it be normal for future grandparents to inquire about the progress of pregnancy?

Axel waved at Omegas who approached the table to serve tea.

Axel spoke to his parents, "This is your favorite tea. Help yourselves with the food. We were just about to discuss Alpha Talia's plans for today. Everyone should know this because all of us will be involved in some capacity."

Axel glanced at Kai, who understood that he should take over.

"After breakfast, Alpha Talia, Alpha Damon, Alpha Axel, ex-Alpha Sophia, and ex-Alpha Isaac will head to the study. During that time, the rest of us will be engaged with preparations for the feast and the pack run tonight."

Meg couldn't wait to add, "Oracle's assistants will perform the ceremony before the pack run, and Sandy will officially become a member of the Midnight Guardians." The ceremony was not mandatory, but it would definitely lift the spirits of pack members.

"Sandy?", Isaac asked.

Axel responded, "Sandy from the Dark Howlers pack came here as Alpha Talia's guard, and the Moon Goddess blessed her to be Gamma Tyler's fated mate. Sandy is a skilled warrior with a great ethic that earned her to be Alpha's guard. I am confident she will be an amazing Gamma. "

Isaac nodded in understanding, and Kai continued with the schedule.

"Later in the morning, Alphas will meet to talk to Luna Yasmin and Cornelia about energy activities that were recently discovered, and they will plan for the trip to the Silver Flame Coven. After lunch, Meg and I will be available to give a tour of our facilities to the guests."

Meg spoke to Talia, but it was for Damon, Keith, and Liam also because they were new. "We will show you the map and points of interest, and you can decide what you want to see. If it's too much for one afternoon, we can stretch it over the next few days."

Talia was happy with this schedule. Other than morning meetings, the rest was free to sightsee and relax until the feast and the pack run. That sounded like a vacation.

Talia opened her mouth when a fork full of food reached there and she looked at Damon who was feeding her.

Damon focused on feeding Talia in an attempt to ignore Sophia and Isaac who were sitting at the same table. The usually calm Sapa was stirring inside Damon with the desire to rip their throats out.

Sapa was furious. Because of those two narrow-minded people, he was sealed, and he was unable to reach Liseli. He waited centuries for a chance to reunite with his mate, unsure if it will ever happen, and when it finally happened, those two despicable people intervened. And why? Sapa didn't care why because no reason was good enough to justify what they did.

Another grave sin was that they gave up Talia which put her in a position where she was neglected to the point of Liseli sacrificing herself to save Talia's life. What would happen if Liseli perished!? Would he need to wait another hundred empty lifetimes for a chance to meet his other half?

Sapa wanted Sophia and Isaac gone, and only their blood could soothe his rage.

Talia noticed that Damon was stiff as his Alpha aura was leaking, and she tried to distract him.

"What do you think about the schedule?", Talia asked Damon while chewing.

"As long as there is a relaxing time and you are not getting yourself in trouble, I'm fine.", Damon responded and then glanced at Keith and Liam. "The two of you must tour facilities. I want you to see every part of this pack."

Keith and Liam nodded obediently. It's not that they were planning to skip finding out more about the Midnight Guardians pack, but they didn't understand why Damon was making it sound important. Were they acting as spies? It didn't make sense because Talia was the Alpha.

The truth was that Damon was hoping that those two will find their mates, Keith in particular. The Midnight Guardians pack had a rule that their mates (male or female) get to join the Midnight Guardians pack, but considering Talia's status, Keith would continue guarding her even if his mate was from here.

Damon was aware that Keith was the best person to guard Talia, but if the wretched coach could find his mate, Damon won't worry about Keith making a move on Talia.

Talia was thinking about the ceremony, and she thought of reminding everyone of one thing, "Oracle Cassandra will probably stay in the Silver Flame Coven for a while. Can we get one of her helpers to become the Oracle? It could be either her most experienced helper, or we can perform a test in competency."

"Oh!", Yasmin exclaimed excitedly. "Cornelia and I will be happy to come up with the rules and select the most competent one."

"Me?", Cornelia asked. She had no idea why Yasmin was dragging her into this. She was just visiting!

"Yes, you. If you don't keep busy with work, you might have too much time on your hands and end up getting marked by your soulmate. It happens when things get heated.", Yasmin said cheekily, and she winked at James who was getting alarmed by Yasmin provoking Cornelia in front of others. At this rate, Cornelia might leave him because of Yasmin's teasing.

Yasmin continued talking to Cornelia, "I am familiar with what the healers do, and I know you are the right person to do it. After breakfast, I will take you to the lab that healers are using, and you will see for yourself. They are behind with energy manipulation and herbalism, but I was impressed with some potions they are making here. If we infuse them with chants, we could improve them further."

Cornelia was interested in seeing what others were doing, and there was even a chance for her to conduct experiments!

Despite Cornelia's interest, her expression remained stiff. She didn't like that the young witch was manipulating her. Can she refuse when Yasmin was talking about this in front of others?

But what else would she do? Since she left the Coven, Cornelia saw some of the human's realm, but most of the time she was stuck in a room. If she accepts, Cornelia will have something useful to do, and she will find out more about the Midnight Guardians pack. But... what about James?

"Do you mind?", Cornelia asked James, and James' lips lifted into a smile in slow motion.



She asked for his opinion! Suddenly, he felt important.

"You can do whatever you want, Cora." As long as you don't leave me.

"Hehehe...", Yasmin giggled mischievously.

"What?", Cornelia snapped.

"This is the first time for me to see you asking permission. It seems that the bond is affecting you more than you are willing to admit."

Cornelia glared at Yasmin and her eyes widened when she saw food hovering in front of her face. He turned to look helplessly at James and then she opened her mouth to accept his offerings.

...

Talia, Damon, Axel, Sophia, and Isaac settled in the study.

Talia and Axel discussed on the previous day that this meeting was about business. They will ask about the Guardians and the portals, and then they added the phenomenon at the bottom of the lake to that list.

Talia wanted to know about her past also, but she feared that information as well, so she was postponing it for later. Much later.

'Let me see if the potion works', Axel's voice sounded in Talia's head, and she nodded in agreement, knowing that he had something on his mind.

"Why did you give your daughter away?", Axel asked, and Talia's head snapped toward him. Why did he ask that question?

"I didn't.", Sophia responded, and Talia wondered if she heard her right.

Isaac's eyes flashed with outrage when he realized that something was wrong. "What did you do to us?"

Axel waved his hand, indicating that it was not important. "Just something to make you unable to lie. It will wear off in a few hours." He turned to his mother. "Are you saying you didn't give Talia away when she was a baby?"

"I am saying that I didn't give away my daughter."

"I am not your daughter.", Talia said with relief. It made her feel better to know that her mother didn't discard her. But then... "Who are my parents?" Knowing that there are only two Alphas who could be her parents, Talia looked at Isaac suspiciously. Did he sleep around?

"Your father was Valerian Moonrider. My older brother.", Sophia said.

Chapter 647 Family's secrets (4)

"Your father was Valerian Moonrider."

Sophia's words echoed in Talia's head as her emotions fluctuated, curiosity mixed with relief and excitement, and it all drowned in grief when she realized that Sophia spoke about him in the past tense.

As much as the idea of Sophia and Isaac being her parents felt wrong, something about the name Valerian Moonrider called to Talia, and she wanted to know, no... she needed to know everything.

Who was her mother? What happened to her father? Based on the last name, Talia understood that the Alpha gene for the Midnight Guardians pack was coming from Sophia's side of the family.

Was Sophia behind Valerian's demise in order to become an Alpha? Was Isaac involved? Talia told herself not to jump to conclusions, but Sophia and Isaac showed that they were capable of harming others for their own selfish goals they conveniently packaged as concern for the Midnight Guardians pack.

Isaac held Sophia's hand and his other arm was around Sophia's shoulders, and Talia understood that this was Sophia's story to tell.

"Tell me about him.", Talia demanded from Sophia. Her voice was not loud, but it rooted them all in place and Axel was confident that his mother would tell the truth even without the truth serum.

Sophia's expression became wistful as her memories took her to the past.

"Val was the best in everything. He was the next Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack, and rightfully so. He was the fastest, the strongest, the smartest, and the funniest person in the pack. Other than being tall and handsome, he was also sharp, kind, and considerate. He could read a room and get what he wanted without even trying. Everyone worshiped Valerian Moonrider as the one who will lead the Midnight Guardians pack into a bright future."

Sophia's brows came together in a frown. "The only thing he was missing was his mate, and one day, he decided it was time for him to find her."

"What happened next?", Axel asked. He remembered records about Valerian Moonrider, but they were without dates, which was not unusual considering their extraordinary flow of time. Creatures with centuries-long lifespans don't bother counting days, months, or years. They would mark significant events like a plague, a war, or a volcano erupting. Axel assumed that Valerian Moonrider was one of his ancestors because his mother would talk only about her parents, the previous Alphas of the Midnight Guardians pack.

"My parents were Alphas and they were growing restless with every day they didn't hear from their son.", Sophia continued. "You see, at that time we didn't have safety protocols or required check-ins, but whoever went through the portal knew about different passing of time. Val was a free spirit, but he was not irresponsible, and he was aware that his prolonged absence will create unrest. It was shortly after my first shift into wolf form that Alphas went to search for Val, and I was left behind with Elders to wait for the news."

Sophia shook her head.

"There was no news. All three of them disappeared along with the people who accompanied them. Eventually, I came of age and went out. That's when I met Isaac." Sophia looked at her mate now. "Isaac was the second son of the Alpha of the Whisper Pride pack. He was my perfect mate, not only because of the mate bond but because he had Alpha blood and as the second son he was not tied to his pack. His brother stayed as the heir and Isaac came with me. We didn't know that the Red Moon pack will attack them shortly..."

"Can you go back to the point?", Talia interrupted Sophia impatiently. She didn't want to listen about some random pack that was defeated and absorbed by the Red Moon pack. This was about her father and how Sophia became Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack in his place.

Sophia looked at Talia irritably, but she got back on the topic.

"As time passed without news of my brother or the Alphas, Elders advised that the pack can't go on without an Alpha. I had my mate, so we became the Alphas of the Midnight Guardians pack."

Talia didn't miss the emphasis Sophia put on how she took over as Alphas only because of Elders. Was she trying to make herself less guilty? Probably.

"The pack would know if their Alphas perished.", Damon said. "Did you confirm that your parents were not alive?"

"It's not so simple.", Sophia said. "When Alpha travels through the portal, the connection to the pack will weaken. As the time passed, we could all feel the connection weakening to the point where we couldn't sense it anymore, but there was no sudden breakage that should happen when the Alpha dies."

Axel was looking at his parents with a deep frown. "Are you saying that our grandparents might be alive, out there, and you didn't search for them?"

"Don't be quick to judge us.", Sophia responded. "We were young and inexperienced. Val is the one who got all the training to be the future Alpha and I was still a child when he and the previous Alphas left. I was doing my best to keep the pack from dissolving in panic. I needed to be present. WE needed to be present. It took us years to get people to calm down and to believe that we won't abandon them."

"And where would we search?", Isaac asked indignantly. "Do you think we didn't try? Whenever I went out, I was searching for information, but there was nothing."

"Of course, there was nothing.", Damon said with disapproval in his voice. "The moment you took over as Alphas, their connection to the pack was broken. At most, you could feel them as pack members, and that's not easy to detect unless the other party is nearby."

Talia waved her hand impatiently. She didn't hear the part she was interested in the most.

"Continue. You became Alphas and then what? My father returned to the pack, right? Or did he contact you? How did I end up here?"

Sophia took a deep breath and said, "Isaac and I became Alphas. It took us a while to establish some resemblance to normal. Axel was born and we came up with rules that tightened security around the portal, and we swore to our people that no matter what happens, at least one Alpha will stay with the pack. Our peace was disturbed when Val returned with a baby girl." Sophia looked at Talia reluctantly.

Seeing that Axel, Sophia, and Damon were at the edge of their seats, ready to snap at the slightest provocation, Sophia didn't want to talk further, but the potion eased her resistance and she continued.

"Val was emaciated, a shadow of what he used to be. He said that we need to hide his daughter, that no one should know she was his. His mate was gone, and he brought his daughter here, believing that this is the only safe place."

"Safe, from what?", Axel asked.

"I don't know.", Sophia said. "Val didn't stick around. In the morning, he was gone, leaving behind a necklace and a note that the girl's name is Natalia Moonrider."

Chapter 648 Family's secrets (5)

Talia's eyes flashed at the mention of that name. Natalia Moonrider.

She had a name, a full name that her parents gave her. Talia was her nickname and not a name someone made up.

Where did she hear it the first time? People at the Red Moon pack called her derogatorily as 'roach', 'rat', and 'slave', but she knew that her name was Talia, which confirmed that someone addressed her as such at the Red Moon pack, and that meant Talia was not randomly abandoned and found. She was given away, together with her name.

Talia forced herself to focus. She had so many questions, and the people with answers were right in front of her.

"You said, my mother was gone. Does that mean...?", Talia couldn't finish.

"We are not sure, but we can assume she is dead.", Isaac responded. "That would explain Valerian's sorry appearance. The death of his mate was killing him."

"Did he say where he went?", Damon asked.

"No.", Sophia responded. "We guessed that he went to get revenge for his mate. It didn't appear she died of natural causes."

Damon frowned at Sophia. "You better tell us the details."

"What details?", Isaac asked while moving his body to shield Sophia in front of Damon's rising rage.

"Everything!", Damon demanded.

"We don't know more than what I said.", Sophia responded.

Damon's frown deepened. "Your brother returned, and you didn't ask him where he was or where he was going after leaving you with a child? Did he say anything else about his mate? How did she die? Was someone chasing him?"

Sophia shook her head helplessly. "You need to understand that Val's appearance was a shock to us. I didn't know he will leave, and we didn't press him with questions, thinking that he will rest, and we will have plenty of time to talk later. I was happy that my brother was back, and people wondered if he will take over as the Alpha." She smiled bitterly. "He was gone for decades, yet people still saw him as the Alpha."

"So, it was about your position.", Damon said through his teeth.

"It was about the pack!", Sophia snapped back.

Talia's heart tightened. In the last few minutes, she heard the story about her parents that gave her hope, and then took it away. The good thing was that her father brought her here with the intention to keep her safe. They didn't abandon her. Her parents were protecting her. But why was her heart aching like someone was digging nails into it?

Talia had no idea at what point Damon wrapped her in his embrace, but there he was, holding her to prevent her from falling apart.

Axel remembered one thing. "I read a document that spoke about Talia's birth. How the stormy clouds parted, and the moon shone on her."

"I wrote it down because that was the only thing Valerian told us about the child's background.", Isaac said. "We were planning to ask him about it and get more details, but he was gone."

Axel thought that was another prophecy, but it seemed it was just a note his father made. When Axel spoke to Cassandra, she confirmed gibberish because she was in cahoots with Sophia and Isaac to keep it a secret.

"And then what?", Axel continued probing. "How did Talia end up in the Red Moon pack if her father asked you to protect her?" Axel was back to the question that started this avalanche of information. Why did they give Talia away?

Sophia responded. "We noticed immediately that Natalia was quiet. Too quiet. She was barely able to sit without support, yet she would look at us like she understood everything. It was not normal for an

infant to act like that. We took her to Cassandra, and that's when Cassandra told us that she is the child from the prophecy, the one that will bring calamity."

Axel's mood worsened. "Your brother gave you his daughter, believing you will keep her safe, but you heard some nonsense from an old Oracle, and you decided to discard her." Cassandra lied to him openly, who knows what else she lied about?

Isaac frowned in disapproval. "Don't accuse us of such a thing. We raised you. Do you know us as people who will abandon a helpless child?"

"If you don't want me to accuse you of such a despicable act, then tell me what happened.", Axel's temper was rising.

"Please, understand", Sophia pleaded. "We had you and the things were going fine, but then Val returned and the pack was getting restless again. With Cassandra confirming how the baby is the one to bring calamity, we were facing two choices, neither was an easy one."

"And your choice was to give her away.", Axel said.

Sophia's face was filled with grief. "It was to sacrifice one for the many. Valerian was the best one among us, and he went out with our strongest warriors. If enemies managed to reduce him to that state, they would have no issues destroying the pack. With enemies on the outside, we couldn't afford the calamity from the inside."

"Why the Red Moon pack?", Axel asked.

Isaac shook his head. "We didn't give her to any pack. The people we gave Natalia to were reliable. After some time, we checked on them, but we found that they were gone. We thought they moved and took Natalia with them."

Sophia continued talking to Axel, "Until you came to us after the Summer Solstice festival with a story about how there is one of us in the Dark Howlers pack, we thought that Natalia was somewhere far away, but then you said that the girl's name was Talia and after you described her, I suspected she was Valerian's daughter."



"Who were the people that took Talia?", Damon asked.

"It was a human family who already had three foster children.", Isaac responded. "Their identity is not important because they were one of many points of contact where our members would check in while staying in the human realm. We told them that Natalia was a child we found and that we were searching for her parents. They didn't know she was one of us. Unless our powers awaken, we are no different than any other werewolf and if she gave herself to a man who was not her mate, no one would ever know."

"You planned out everything.", Damon spoke while eyeing them suspiciously. "Did you also count on Alpha Howard taking her?"

Alpha Isaac responded, "I know what you are thinking, Alpha Damon, but regardless of if they were working for Alpha Howard or if they were forced to give up Natalia, the only thing they could tell him was that we asked them to take Natalia in."

"Did you investigate where that family went?", Damon continued asking.

"No.", Sophia admitted. "We had many things to deal with and..."

"Is that how you lead our people? Did you ever own your mistakes, or are you just capable of coming up with excuses?", Axel asked irritably. He didn't want to hear another lame justification for how things were done for the safety of the pack.

It made him wonder if he would be abandoned like that if Cassandra said that he was the child from the prophecy. And what about his unborn children? Were they in danger as well from their own grandparents?

Chapter 649 Family's secrets (6)

Axel knew that Sophia and Isaac believed they were putting the safety of their pack first. The fact that they were saying this under the influence of the truth serum, confirmed it.

Axel could find justification for almost everything they did, but he couldn't accept that they gave away Talia when she was a baby. Even if they feared that she would destroy the pack, and there was no way

to assure that wouldn't happen with her in the pack, they could have sent her to a safe place, to a place where they would visit and keep an eye on her, yet they just left her with a family of humans and didn't check on her until it was too late.

Two decades passed, and they didn't seek that family to see if Talia was alive? What kind of people do that?

He remembered teachings on how the pack comes first, and every pack member was important, but wasn't Talia part of their pack? She had the same blood running through her veins! And she was a helpless baby, needing love, care, and protection, yet they left her with strangers!

Since Axel told Sophia and Isaac about a girl he met in the Dark Howlers pack (aka Talia), Axel started seeing the side of his parents he didn't know before. It was one disappointment after another, with the latest one when Cassandra attempted to deprive Damon of his emerging powers. That procedure could cripple him, yet his parents coldly said how they would push the blame on Talia as the effects of her marking him.

As Damon's Luna, if the word were spread that she was responsible for weakening their Alpha, she would be shunned by the pack. Axel realized that his parents endangered Damon and were willing to pin on Talia a crime for which she was not responsible and leave her on her own. Again.

How could they talk in front of Talia and Damon like they didn't do anything wrong?

Axel guessed that Talia's emotions were all over the place under her calm facade, so he decided to move on to the present. "Where is the necklace?"

"What necklace?", Sophia asked Axel.

"The one that uncle Valerian left for Talia."

Sophia hesitated for a moment. "I have it." She obviously didn't want to part with it, and she guessed that Axel was asking so that Talia could have it.

"Where is it?", Axel continued pressing.

"In my room.", she said.

Axel stood up and gestured to Sophia to stand up also. "Let's get it."

Sophia was still sitting. "Now?"

"Yes. Now.", Axel responded. "You either get up, or I will make you."

Sophia stood up abruptly and started waving her arms wildly while talking, "You are treating me like I did an unforgivable offense. Put yourself in my shoes and ask yourself if you would act differently. Instead of growing up with my family, Val took it away and left me with a mess to handle. Only after I became the Alpha I realized how much lack of training harmed me and our people. And then he came back to cause another uproar and leave a cursed child behind without an explanation. Do you have any idea how stressful it is to live with the responsibility of protecting a pack when you don't know who is hunting you? And then there was...."

Damon bolted to his feet. "Shut up!"

Sophia plopped back onto the sofa, and sweat immediately formed on her forehead as Damon's aura held her down, and the moment Isaac moved, he was pinned down also.

Damon struggled against his urge to rip Sophia and Isaac into pieces. How dare they treat Talia's life like it was not important? And did they call her, cursed?

Sophia and Isaac were not Alphas. They were whiny little bitches, and just the sight of them made Damon disgusted.

Damon knew very well what it meant to become an Alpha without the right training and with enemies lurking behind every corner. Since he became the Alpha of the Dark Howlers pack, he made many difficult decisions, but he never abandoned any of his people. If anyone needed to stay back and face dangers, it was him. That's what Alphas do.

"I don't care why you made the decisions you did back then, but I am glad you are not an Alpha anymore. You lost your parents and your brother, and you gave up your brother's child. Do you regret it? It doesn't look like it because you didn't learn anything. You lost your pack and are in the process of losing your son, and enemies are multiplying. Was it worth it?"

Sophia looked at Damon defiantly. "You have no right to judge me."

"And you have no right to call my mate CURSED!" Damon roared.

Sophia and Isaac both groaned, Sophia's face contorting into a painful grimace.

"Do you know anything about her? Do you know how much she suffered because of what you did?" Damon sneered. "It seems you forgot who I am and that I have a grudge against you. I didn't rip your throat out only because Talia convinced me that you could be useful. Instead of expecting my understanding, I suggest you cooperate before I lose my patience."

"Don't.", Talia said as her hand landed on his forearm. "She is not worth it."

Talia stood up next to Damon and spoke to Sophia. "I want that necklace and anything else my father left behind."

"I will make sure it happens.", Axel said, and Talia looked at him gratefully.

Axel ushered his parents out of the study, and Talia said, "Take Keith and Liam with you." They were in the hallway, standing guard.

Axel wanted to say how that won't be necessary. His parents were powerless, and he was more than capable of taking them down if they attacked him, but Talia was the Alpha and contradicting her would be a sign of disrespect. Besides, Damon's eyes were out of focus, and Axel knew that he was already min-linking Keith and Liam to follow them.

Axel bowed a little. "Yes, Alpha Talia. It will be as you said."

It was a common greeting, yet both Sophia and Isaac felt like those words were directed at them as a reminder of who was in charge.

"Bow to the Alpha!" Axel said sternly when Sophia and Isaac were at the door.

The duo turned stiffly, and it was unpleasant to watch them bow, their movements were stiff like someone was pushing them down against their will, but no one interrupted their insincere sign of respect.

Talia wondered why Axel was going to such lengths, but then she guessed that he probably had his set of grievances, so she didn't want to question him.

The moment the door closed behind Axel, Damon pulled Talia into his embrace.

She buried her face in his chest and took a deep breath of her favorite scent.

"How are you holding?" Damon asked.

Talia looked up to meet his eyes. "My parents loved me."

Damon's heart cracked from the sadness and happiness that intermingled and poured into him through their mate bond.

"Let's figure out what happened to your parents, kitten.", Damon said.

"How?"

Chapter 650 Family's secrets (7)

Damon thought for a moment before explaining his idea related to figuring out what happened to Talia's parents.

"We will start by investigating shady organizations that were active two decades ago. Your father was the future Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack who found his mate, and that means he awakened his ability. In addition to that, Sophia described him as a formidable warrior with a solid head on his shoulders. If someone could harm him, his mate, and their guards, they were not random rogues, and I would assume that it took more than a few people to scare him into leaving you in the Midnight Guardians pack. The more people were involved, the bigger will be the chances of us finding something."

Damon saw that Talia's face was full of anticipation, so he added, "Max's shelters are accepting all kinds of people, and there is a good chance someone knows something. Also, Cristian has his connections in the black market."

Talia understood that Damon used this while investigating the death of his parents. But Talia had her own sources that could prove valuable. "We can also ask witches to help. Maybe they have a crystal ball or some spell that can give us hints." And while at it, they can ask witches to help find clues about who was behind the death of Alpha Jacob and Luna Violet.

Damon smiled when he felt that Talia's mood had improved. She needed a goal to focus on so that the darkness won't consume her again.

"I don't want to raise your hopes, kitten, but without seeing a body, we can't be sure they are dead."

Talia blinked. "Do you think my parents are alive?"

Damon pressed his lips on her forehead. "I promise that I won't stop searching until I find out what happened."

Talia could feel his sincerity, and she knew that this was close to his heart. His parents died, and he never found the culprits, and now he wanted to help Talia find closure. She was determined to help him in return.

Talia didn't dare to hope her parents were alive, but she wished to find answers to why her father was set on hiding her, who her mother was, and how she died.

"Thank you, Damon." She really meant it.

...

Axel, Sophia, and Isaac returned to the study with the necklace, and Talia stared at the delicate piece of jewelry, barely hearing Axel as he was telling her that he will prepare documents related to Valerian Moonrider and their grandparents, so that she can learn about her heritage.

The necklace had a simple silver chain with a pendant that resembled a shiny flower with a pearly-white drop below it. The flower was made out of crystal-clear diamonds that formed six petals with a yellow diamond in the middle. At the bottom of the flower was a tear-shaped white pearl.

Talia craved to find out more about her father, and she hoped to find some information about her mother. Somehow, she knew they loved each other. Would they be a happy family?

Talia wished to experience a reality where her parents were alive and well, and she grew up with them. Her father would be the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack, her mother would be the Luna, and Talia would be the pack princess. Would she have siblings? Would her mother hold her hand while running through the forest? Would her father put her to sit on his shoulders? Would she crawl into their bed in the morning on weekends? Would they make crowns of flowers for each other and attend fairs together? She could see her father throwing rings on moving pins and winning the biggest teddy bear for her that was nearly as big as she was, but Talia would carry it proudly while walking through the crowd with her parents holding each other behind her. Oh, how glorious that would be!

Damon was pleased that Talia didn't shut him down completely and the myriad of emotions pouring into him through their mate bond told him that Talia was sorting her thoughts. He hoped that his presence would give her comfort, and he reached to wipe the lone tear that escaped her eye.

Talia blinked herself into reality to find herself in a silent study with Damon, Axel, Sophia, and Isaac, all four looking at her.

Talia clutched the necklace in her palm and cleared her throat. "Right. Let's discuss the next point. The Guardians."

Sophia was visibly alerted. "What about them?"

"I want to hear everything you know about them. And I mean, everything.", Talia demanded.

To Talia's disappointment, Sophia and Isaac didn't know much about the Guardians other than how they were mysterious and that one shouldn't offend them. That was general knowledge every werewolf knew. As Alphas, they were familiar with the protocols of how to contact the Guardians in the case the Council of Alpha needed to be assembled, and that was it.

Sophia defended her ignorance with the lack of historical documentation and the story of how her brother got all the teachings while she was still young.

Talia wondered if Maddox and Cristian would have more information on the Guardians. What about James?

Axel confirmed that the archives of the Midnight Guardians pack were a mess. Their ancestors didn't bother writing down stuff as most of the things were on a need-to-know basis. It was common that the current Alpha would talk to his parents (or grandparents) when he needed information on something that happened before his time, similarly to how Axel and Talia were now asking Sophia and Isaac for information. Unfortunately, Sophia and Isaac were not useful.

Axel said how he was spending his free time reading and sorting out stuff, but it was a slow process.

Talia told Axel that he should involve Betas and Gammas in those efforts. Also, Tyler is good with technology, and he should make electronic copies of everything.

Sophia and Isaac disagreed, with an argument how it would increase the possibility of information leaks. Their enemies can get their hands on delicate secrets, and if their pack members find out about the dangers, they might start to panic.

Talia disapproved of Sophia's approach to keeping pack members safe. How Talia saw this, they were all grownups, able to decide for themselves. But unless they knew exactly what was on the other side of the portal, they were just blindly walking into danger. It was obvious that unmated members craved to



find their other half, and if they knew that someone out there will hunt them, they would organize themselves to minimize risks.

"You think that it's better to lull them in a fake sense of security?" Talia asked Sophia. "Now I understand why pack members who escaped never come back. They believed you were obstructing them from finding their mates, and by the time they realized what was out there, it was too late. Your so-called protection was endangering everyone."

Sophia lowered her head at that point. Not because she didn't have anything to say, but because Talia used her aura to keep the ex-Alpha quiet. Talia was unwilling to hear any more nonsense.

Just as they didn't have much information on the Guardians, Sophia and Isaac were not useful when they talked about portals either, so Talia dismissed them as free to return to their quarters.