

Alphas Bride 711

### **Chapter 711 Leaving the realm of witches**

After thinking about Axel's words, Talia thought about how it was logical. Why would witches take all information about the portals from the archives? Considering they were witches, and how Feya made specific information from the Catalogue fly out and appear on a different paper, there must be some copying spell they could use.

However, one thing didn't make sense. "Why would Evanora lie about that?", Talia asked Axel.

"Because she wanted to conceal her incompetence. Someone sneaked into their precious archive on Evanora's watch. It's a matter of Evanora choosing to save her reputation instead of telling us the truth."

Axel knew about this because his parents would twist the facts so that they look good.

Talia understood the point about Evanora caring for her image more than about the truth. However, she remembered one thing that drilled a gaping hole in Axel's theory.

"We found information about the portals in the Midnight Guardians pack." Talia reminded him.

Axel shook his head. "Whatever we got was hidden in the safe of my parents' study and in Cornelia's quarters. When Yasmin told me how they had a lot of portals in their realm, I went to our archives wondering if I will find some similarities, but I didn't find anything. I thought how that was odd because there were several books describing draught from five centuries ago, yet there was nothing about portals. Nothing. Now that I've seen the same thing here, I can't help but think that those two were connected."

Talia stared at Axel while information sank in. "You are saying that someone came to this Coven and to the Midnight Guardians pack and removed information that was related to the portals."

Axel touched his nose with his index finger, indicating to Talia that she was spot on.

Talia pressed her lips into a line. This was more than just getting access to archives and taking things. This was about someone going to both realms, and entering those areas without being exposed. Talia had no idea what to do with this information, but somehow... she had a feeling it was important.

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James was lying on his side and observing the sleeping chocolate-colored Goddess by his side. Her breathtaking features looked amazing under the rays of the morning sun that sneaked in through the windows.

James knew that Cornelia was his soulmate, mated, marked, his, yet he had difficulty adjusting to that reality.

He never imagined that having a mate would be so fulfilling.

How could his father sleep around if having a mate fills one's heart to the brim? Or was that because Alpha Edward and Luna Layla were not fated mates? James was not sure, but he knew that he will never-ever do anything to betray Cornelia because betraying her meant going against himself.

With Cornelia by his side, it seemed that all problems in the world faded and James hoped that this bliss will continue for many years to come.

Cornelia took a deep breath and her lips lifted into a smile before she opened her eyes.

"Good morning, Jay", she said lazily.

James' insides trembled from the joy that swelled within him. She smiled and greeted him and the whole world brightened.

"Good morning, Cora", he responded.

Her brows came together. "Is it time to go?"

James didn't know the time, but he could hear the footsteps and voices from the hallway. Since he marked Cora, his senses intensified.

"Not yet. I will wake you up for breakfast.", he said.

He took her hand into his and kissed the inside of her palm, that gentle action made her eyes flutter open.

"I'm awake", Cornelia said, and her smile reflected in her eyes.

James stared at her, dazed by her beauty and emotions that poured into him through their mate bond that was solid now. James feared that Cornelia won't come with him, or that she will change her mind at the last moment, yet he could feel her love and devotion and he knew that she didn't want to leave his side.

James' eyebrows shot up when he felt Cornelia's dainty fingers tracing the grooves of his abdominal muscles.

Since the ceremony, the two of them were naked, mostly in bed, making love, and he thought that his witch won't be able to keep up, but it seemed that her libido was matching his. Was that one of the effects of his mark on her?

He licked his lips and inched closer to kiss his mark on her neck.

Cornelia's body trembled upon contact, and her breath splashed against his ear, "Oh, James..."

James growled, her sultry voice was like oil splashing on an already raging fire, and he knew that only Cornelia could make him feel sated.

They were on the bed, facing each other. James lifted her right leg and he loved that she not only cooperated but also dug her heel into his ass in an attempt to get him closer to her.

His groan mixed with her moan, and they were back at it.

This mate bond was fantastic!

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Just like the last time when Axel and Talia left the realm of witches, they were escorted to the portal by many members of the Silver Flame Coven.

There were no ceremonies, and the atmosphere was relaxed, but Talia was wary of everyone and the closer they were to the portal, the faster her heart was beating.

Two healers and Calla went through the portal first. As members of the Midnight Guardians pack, their task was to alert the guards on the other side that more people were coming.

The healer called Olive stayed in the realm of witches with her mate, and they promised to visit the Midnight Guardians pack once their solitude as new mates was over.

Talia was nervous until the last person came out on the side of the Midnight Guardians pack.

Other than Talia and Damon, also present were Keith, Axel, Yasmin, Liam, Amelia, Cornelia, James, Cassandra, Calla, two healers from the Midnight Guardians pack, and six witches that came to explore the world on the other side of the portal.

Six witches were divided into three teams of twos, each duo following Yasmin, Amelia, and Cornelia respectively. Their task was to learn and be of help when needed, and after some time, they would return home and share their experiences with their fellow sisters. It was all part of the slow assimilation of witches into other realms.

Talia was pleased that Cornelia agreed to take Cassandra with them without any questions. Cornelia didn't say if she will make Oracle follow her or maybe dissolve the deal, but the important part was that Cassandra left the realm of witches.

Talia looked at the portal, to confirm that no one else will come out.

"Are you expecting someone?", Yasmin asked Talia.

Talia thought that some honesty might be good. "I am surprised that your mother allowed us to leave like that."

"You will be back", Yasmin said right away.

"What?"

"That's what my mother said. That you will be back."

Talia was alerted. "How can she know that?"

"It's because of your situation. Your departure is only postponing finding out answers you need."

Talia knew that Evanora was right. They needed her help. However, dependency on a woman like Evanora was unsettling. Talia didn't see Evanora as an ally, and she definitely didn't trust the witch.

Was Evanora the only one who could give them the answers they were looking for?

### **Chapter 712 An intruder (1)**

"Thank you, Alpha, for bringing me with you", Cassandra said while bowing to Talia.

Instead of responding to Cassandra's pleasantries, Talia spoke to Yasmin. "You said that she can be healed."

"I will work on that.", Yasmin assured her.

Talia could feel uncertainty from Calla who was looking at Cassandra, and she understood that Calla was wondering how Cassandra's return will impact Calla's newly acquired position that she shared with Remi.

"Calla", Talia called. "I hope you and Remi will take advantage of Cassandra's stay here to learn more about the rituals she performed. Don't allow your titles as head healers to prevent you from asking for help and guidance when a person with more experience is around."

Calla bowed her head in order to hide her smile. "Yes, Alpha!"

Talia's words confirmed that Calla and Remi will remain the leaders of healers regardless of Cassandra's presence, and also, there was a possibility that Cassandra's stay in the Midnight Guardians pack was temporary.

"Go now...", Talia said to Calla while waving with her hands toward Cornelia and Yasmin who were examining the teleportation diagram that should take them to the main house of the Midnight Guardians pack. Six visiting witches were also there, and that reminded Talia, "Calla, as the head healer, you will be responsible to ensure that our guests from the realm of witches are comfortable."

"Yes, Alpha. Leave it to me, Alpha!"

Talia felt weird with all the Alpha-this, Alpha-that, but Damon told her how that was important to remind everyone of the hierarchy.

'Alpha, may I have a word?', an unknown male voice sounded in Talia's head, and she turned to seek the source of it. One of the guards that were at the portal was facing her with his head lowered, and Talia guessed that he was the leader.

'You may speak', Talia responded through the mind-link.

'We were instructed by Beta Kai to inform you that we have an intruder.'

Talia's mind was spinning. Did she hear him right? 'An intruder?'

The guard confirmed. 'He disguised himself as one of the Omegas and Gamma Sandy was the one who identified him as an outsider.'

Talia didn't know how Sandy could identify intruders, but the sheer idea of someone coming here sneakily was disturbing. Was their group followed when they came here? Cornelia used a spell to teleport them close to the portal, but they crossed the last stretch on foot and then they entered the portal. Or what if another portal was active? How many intruders were there? What if the person disclosed the location of the portal before he was caught? What if more were coming? What if they were already here?

Talia jolted when Damon's hand landed on her shoulder, and his presence helped her focus. Right. she was the Alpha now, the person people looked at for guidance and she couldn't succumb to insecurities.

Talia took a deep breath to compose herself before asking the guard through the mind-link, 'What were his motives for coming here?'

'I apologize, Alpha, but this is how much I know. Betas and Gammas have more information.'

Talia knew that this was a message left only to notify her that she should head straight to the main house without delays. Besides, just having outsiders here was a problem regardless of their motives. 'I understand. Thank you.'

'Problems?', Damon asked Talia through their private mind-link. He felt Talia's unstable emotions and based on the way the guard was bowing to her, Damon guessed that the guard was reporting something unpleasant.

'I'm not sure. But we have a situation.', Talia responded. 'We will find out more from Kai and Meg. We need to meet with them as soon as possible.'

Talia glanced at Axel whose solemn expression told her that he also got the news.

Next, Talia's eyes landed on James, and she called him to the side.

"It seems that someone came to this realm without authorization", Talia informed James. "I suggest that you stay in your room until we investigate the situation. Or if you wish to leave right now, we can arrange for you to go to the Dark Howlers pack right away. I have no idea who the intruder is, but let's not risk Alpha Edward finding out you are here."

"We will stay here for now.", James said right away. "Without knowing who that person is and his motives, we might be walking into a trap if we leave."

...

Axel, Yasmin, Talia, and Damon went straight to the study to meet with Kai, Meg, Tyler, and Sandy.

Without any delay, Kai told them that Sandy identified a man as an outsider on the previous evening, and he was kept in the dungeon that was specifically made to suppress prisoners from using their abilities.

Tyler passed them folders that had logs with timestamps regarding the intruder, and two pictures that looked nearly identical.

"This one is the intruder", Tyler explained. "And this is Austin, an unmated Omega in our pack."

"How did you know that he is an outsider?", Damon asked Sandy. If someone shuffled those pictures, he wouldn't know which one was the intruder.

The only thing that connects pack members is the mind link. Alphas can feel if someone has a mind-link, and forcibly communicate with their pack members. However, Sandy is not an Alpha.

"The air around him was wrong.", Sandy said.

"Can you explain that?", Talia asked.

"It's my ability", Sandy responded. "If I focus, I can see the aura around people. With Tyler's help, I figured out that the color of the aura I see matches the color of the wolf of the person I'm looking at. In order to improve my control, I am always practicing. I am new here, so I don't know people well, however, when I passed by him in the hallway, I realized that he is an outsider."

"Is something wrong with his wolf?", Axel guessed.

Sandy shrugged. "I don't know, but I remember that for the pack run everyone was amazed by Alpha Damon's black wolf, and Tyler told me that no one in the Midnight Guardians pack has such a dark wolf. The aura of the outsider was black."

"The intruder's disguise went beyond physical", Tyler said. "He knew his way around and even smelled like Austin. Without Sandy, we wouldn't know he was fake."

"What happened to Austin?", Yasmin asked.

"Austin is fine", Meg assured Yasmin. "We found him in his room sleeping. We couldn't wake him up, and healers confirmed that he was drugged. He woke up in the morning, not remembering how he got into his room after dinner."

"Do we know why the intruder came here?", Axel asked, and Kai, Meg, Tyler, and Sandy were shaking their heads.

Talia listened to all this and her frown was deepening. It all sounded like a guy walked in, got caught, and no one got hurt, but how can someone just walk in here? He was probably dangerous, and he choose not to harm anyone. Or did he have a specific target?

"There is no point in sitting here and guessing. Let's go and meet with the guy", Damon said.

Talia raised her hand. "No."

"No?" Damon looked at Talia like she said something silly. "How are you going to find out why he sneaked in here if you don't talk to him?"

"I will talk to him. You won't.", Talia deadpanned, seeing that Damon's frown was deepening, Talia quickly explained, "We didn't announce our relationship, Damon. People outside our small circle don't know that I am your mate, and they believe that Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack and Luna of the Dark Howlers pack are two different persons."

### **Chapter 713 An intruder (2)**

Damon's frown eased a bit, but he didn't want to give in easily. "You announced me as your mate when we arrived here. If the impostor talked with anyone from this pack, he will know we are mates."

"Let's not assume how much he knows. Didn't you teach me to not reveal more than necessary?", Talia retorted. "Please, Damon. Axel will be with me, and we will tell you everything. It won't be too late for you to talk with the guy some other time."

"I will be there also", Yasmin chimed in.

"I disagree", Talia said curtly.

Yasmin was not willing to be left behind. "It's not a secret that I am Axel's mate."

"True. However, no one knows you are a witch. The guy had the means to disguise himself and reach the center of the Midnight Guardians pack. Who knows what else he can do?", Talia ended with a question and glanced at Axel who was nodding in agreement.

Axel didn't want Yasmin to get in a situation where she could be harmed, and this was about facing a spy who wanted who-knows-what.

"Sit this one out, love", Axel told Yasmin. "Do it for our pups."

At the mention of their babies, Yasmin gave in.

With this being settled, Kai thought of reminding them. "We got a camera there so everyone can see the interrogation. Should we talk to Austin first?"

Talia refused. "No need."

She didn't have much information, but she needed to meet with the intruder. The implications of people knowing about the portal to the Midnight Guardians pack would be catastrophic, and Talia wondered if Damon would be OK to provide military assistance if this realm was in danger of being invaded. Or maybe it would be better if everyone moved to the Dark Howlers pack. None of those was a good solution because Damon couldn't give many of his soldiers to protect another pack, and if he gives only a handful, it would be useless. On the other hand, they still didn't prepare people to meet with the members of the Midnight Guardians pack and if they rush into it, it could end badly without anyone invading.

Talia took a deep breath to stabilize her emotions. She just told Damon confidently that she will handle this and if she falls apart now, she will only prove that she was not ready. Well, ready or not, the crisis was here, and she needed to rise to the occasion or risk putting her pack in danger.

"What did you get from the intruder so far?", Axel asked Betas.

Kai shook his head. "The guy is not talking. He didn't expect to be caught, and he had no weapons on him. We didn't want to try anything drastic before you come and see for yourself. We were planning on sending a messenger today about this, but you returned before that happened."

"Good call.", Axel praised Kai, and then he turned to Talia. "Shall we?"

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On their way to the dungeon, Axel and Talia walked in front with Kai and Meg behind them.

Axel noticed that Talia was tense, and he thought of offering encouragement. "It will be OK."

"Will it? You said that the guy didn't expect to be caught, but what if he got caught on purpose?"

"Who would want to end up in the dungeon?"

"The one who can escape at will.", Talia responded.

"How can that be? He is held by silver chains, given a non-lethal dose of wolfsbane, and the runes in the dungeon won't allow him to use his abilities."

Talia shook her head. Everything Axel said would be perfect to restrain a werewolf from the Midnight Guardians pack, but this guy was not one of those. Was she being too paranoid again? No, she wasn't. "You are talking like we didn't just return from a trip where we discussed creatures that can open portals at will. Your mother-in-law wanted to keep me and my mate behind as guineapigs because our reaction to her ceremony was outside her expectations. Don't assume that restrictions for one will work on everyone."

Axel realized that she was right, but... "If he is so powerful, what was the point of coming here and getting caught?"

Talia didn't have answers to this, but she hoped she will find them out soon.

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Talia and Axel entered the cell to see a man sitting on a chair. He had short brown hair and brown eyes, just like Austin she saw in the photo from the file.

"Alpha", he called in a shivering voice while looking at Talia. "I didn't do anything wrong. Why am I here?"

'He has no wolf', Liseli said.

Talia's insides tightened at the thought that he was not even a rogue. Could a human come here undetected? Talia focused on keeping a stern expression and not imagining what kind of a creature she was facing. "You can drop the act."

He raised his hands toward Talia, exposing his wrists that were chained in thick silver chains. "What did I do to deserve this? This is not an act, Alpha..."

"You don't belong to my pack.", Talia cut him off. "Who are you? Why are you here?" And how did he get here?

His expression froze and then he relaxed in the chair. "If you know that I'm not from your pack, why don't you make me admit the rest?"

His sudden confidence made Talia nervous, but she straightened her posture. Meg and Kai are outside the door, and Damon was watching through the video feed, and she couldn't show how anxious she was about this.

'Liseli? What is he?'

'I don't know', Liseli responded honestly. 'It seems he used some ability to alter his appearance.'

'Can we undo it?'

'We can try.'

Talia pointed her finger at the man and a streak of silvery light shot toward him.



He frowned at the sight and stared at his chest where light disappeared. One second, two, three... His lips lifted into a smile when he realized that nothing happened.

"Is that all you've got?", he asked with a smirk. "I guess I wasted my time waiting to meet with you in person."

Axel stared at Talia like she was growing a second head. Did she use her abilities? How was that possible in this cell?

The man in the chair saw that Talia's eyes were lit up with a silvery glow, but he was confident that she can't do anything to him. After all, he was not a member of the Midnight Guardians pack, nor a werewolf. To him, they were like lower species, someone not worthy to bother with.

He entered the Midnight Guardians pack more than once and he was confident that no one can see through his disguise. That's why he moved freely, believing that he had the whole night until the real Austin woke up, and Sandy calling him out was unexpected. He could flee right then and there, but he decided to stick around and see what else this pack had to offer for temporary entertainment.

Talia focused on her sight, and she could see the image of the man in front of her flickering as the familiar face of Austin was disappearing to be replaced with another one.

Talia's anxiety shot through the roof when she recognized him, and she extended her hand in front of Axel protectively.

'Talia?', Axel called through their mind-link in confusion when he realized that Talia was pushing him back, away from the man in the chair, and Talia's expression was not good.

Talia wanted to tell Axel to leave, but there was no time to explain things. After all, even if Axel saw what Talia could see, he wouldn't understand because he was not at the Council of the Alpha where she saw this man.

"Vin?", Talia called. "What is a Guardian doing here?"

### **Chapter 714 An intruder (3) [Bonus chapter]**

Axel froze at Talia's words. Did she say that the Austin-looking person in the chair was a Guardian? He never met a Guardian in person, but he heard stories about them. They were supposed to be neutral and powerful and... why was one of them impersonating an Omega?

Axel wanted to step in front of Talia, but her presence radiated caution and danger, and Axel was unable to move.

Vincent didn't hide his surprise that Talia recognized him. "You can see my true appearance?"

"Why are you here?", Talia asked.

"What else can you do?", Vincent asked with an excited expression, like he was not a prisoner chained to a chair.

"Who sent you?"

Ignoring Talia's questions, Vincent asked, "Is this because you are the Alpha? Who is the female that can see through my disguise?"

"How did you get here?"

"I've seen your members' eyes light up, but that trick with the light shooting out of your finger was new. Is that your ability? How can you use your ability in this room? Was that light supposed to do something, or was it a prerequisite for you to see my true appearance?"

Talia couldn't believe this. "Will you answer my questions?"

"Why would I answer yours if you won't answer mine?", he retorted.

Talia gestured toward the chains. "It should be obvious who between the two of us is in the position to ask questions."

Vincent cocked an eyebrow and smirked in an obvious challenge of her words.

Talia was unsettled that Vincent was relaxed, and she also noticed that he didn't look at Axel at all, which made her realize that Vincent didn't think of Axel as important.

It was the same at the Council of the Alpha. After her performance with the sphere of power, the Guardians barely looked at any other Alpha.

"Axel", Talia called. "Leave us."

"No!", Axel protested. Seeing Talia's stern gaze, Axel continued through their mind-link, 'Do you think that your mate will let me live if I exit this room?'

'Let me worry about Damon, Axel.' Didn't he know how dangerous Guardians were? Besides... 'He won't hurt me, but I can't guarantee that he won't use you to blackmail me.'

Axel couldn't believe that he was the weak link among the three. He had Alpha bloodline, he trained most of his life and he even had abilities, damn it! But his abilities didn't work unless he touched something, and even if he grabbed the man who smiled at him mockingly, Axel was too upset to focus.

However, no matter how useless he was, Axel was unwilling to leave Talia on her own. "I will stay here and watch your back."

"Ha-ha-ha", Vincent laughed exaggeratedly. "Your Alpha is telling you to leave because she is protecting you. I suggest you listen."

"I will be fine.", Talia assured Axel and continued through the mind-link, 'Stay on the other side of the door. There is a camera so you will be able to see and hear what's going on here.'

With this, Axel nodded stiffly and left the cell.

'Damon', Talia called through their mind-link.

'I know. You've got this', Damon said before she did. 'Don't get too close, kitten. Those chains might be nothing for him. If he tries anything funny, I will rip his head off.'

Talia smiled as she could feel that Damon's concern for her was genuine, just like his threat to Vincent.

"You look confident", Vincent said while eyeing Talia from top to bottom.

"So do you", Talia responded to Vincent.

Was she confident? Not really. But Damon's encouragement made her brave and she knew that if she can't face this Guardian, no one else can. Was there a point in being afraid?

Vincent was obviously underestimating her, and Talia wondered how can she use that to her advantage.

"The way you disguised yourself, is that your ability?" Talia started with a question.

Vincent smirked. "Why ask if you know the answer?"

"Maybe I'm trying to see how open to cooperation you are."

He looked at her like she said something silly. "Strong ones take what they want. For cooperation, two sides need to be equal. Do you consider yourself my equal, Alpha Talia?"

Talia was irritated by his condescending tone. If he was so high and mighty, why did he come here like a thief? "Isn't that why you sneaked in here? To get me to accept your invitation to meet with the Guardians?"

Vincent didn't show any visible reaction as he stared at her which made Talia wonder if he was here with a different motive. After all, if that was his reason for coming here, what was the point of not confirming it? She thought of poking there a bit more.

"I got Julian's messages, but as the new Alpha, I was busy. I didn't want to respond without giving him a timeline of when we can meet. If I knew you were this impatient, I would tell you that I need more time. I didn't think that he will send you here, which brings me to the point: how did you get in here?"

Talia thought about another possibility. What if the Guardians had people from the Midnight Guardians pack to help them? She regretted not talking to Austin first. If she knew how Vincent approached him, she might get clues into who else was involved. What if Austin was the mole and he took the sleeping drugs to cover up his involvement?

"Vin", Talia called sternly. "I am giving you the benefit of doubt that you didn't come here with hostile intentions, but I am losing my patience. You will talk or I will make you."

"I would like to see that happen.", Vincent challenged her.

'He won't talk willingly', Liseli's voice sounded in Talia's mind.

'Can you force him?'

'He has no wolf, and your Alpha aura won't have an effect on him.'

'But you can get into his mind. Right?', Talia asked, and she could sense Liseli's excitement at this idea.

No matter how eager Liseli was to crack open Vincent's mind and uncover his secrets, she thought of giving a warning to Talia, 'Remember that I can damage his mind.'

Talia's mind was replaying numerous conversations she had with Damon in the last few weeks.

Damon told her that mercy to an enemy is just giving him another opportunity to attack, and what did she do so far?

Since she met Damon, Talia's position in the society of werewolves was rising from an unknown she-wolf who was hiding in the attic to Damon's mate, Luna of the Dark Howlers pack, and the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack. During this time, she either ignored dangers or forgave perpetrators, while her troubles were increasing.

Just as Talia's troubles were escalating, her enemies were following that trend, with Vincent coming up at the top of that bunch. He intruded into this realm and was not apologetic about it. Actually, Vincent was acting like he belonged here, and how can Talia assure her pack that she will protect them if sketchy characters were strolling in their own backyard?

Talia steeled her resolve and said to Liseli, 'His presence here is suspicious and he is acting like we can't touch him. Without his cooperation or desire to explain, we can assume that he has no good intentions. I don't want to harm anyone, but sometimes we must do what needs to be done to protect our loved ones. Let's do this.'

'OK!', Liseli responded enthusiastically.

#### **Chapter 715 An intruder (4)**

'What are we looking for?', Liseli asked Talia.

'I want to know why he came here. How did he get into this realm? Who else is involved? What are his abilities? What are the Guardians? Why are they insistent for me to join them?'

'How about I find out where their base is so we can sneak in there and destroy it from within?'

Talia thought how that would be handy, but... 'Didn't you say that the longer time you spend in his mind, the bigger are chances of him becoming a vegetable?'

Liseli snorted. 'Are you going back to thinking how we can let him go and be friends? Even if he pledges loyalty, there is no way to predict what he will do once he is out of here. He can go back on his words or find a way around them and we won't have any way to confirm that. We don't know about his powers or abilities, but we know that he is underestimating us. Let's use this to get into his mind and find out what we can.'

Talia was aware that Liseli had a point, and even though she was not completely on board with getting information at any cost, Talia also didn't see any other option.

'Are you chickening out?', Liseli asked Talia. 'As an Alpha, you need to take care of your pack. This person knows how to get into this realm, and he is obviously not willing to cooperate. Can you let him go? Are you confident that you can keep him here and he won't escape?'

Talia was tired of secrets and people treating her like she was trash or a trophy to be won based on their limited knowledge about her.

"I am Natalia Moonrider", Talia said in an official tone. "I am the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack, and you will give me the answers I am looking for."

Vincent smirked at Talia whose eyes were lit up in silvery light now, and his smile faltered when her hair started changing color.

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Talia was exhausted when she exited the cell.

Axel, Meg, and Kai were in the hallway, looking at Talia expectantly.

They saw what happened in the cell through the video feed.

Talia said how she will make the Guardian talk, and then she glowed to turn into silver Goddess-mode, and then... nothing.

For a few long minutes, there was nothing. No one moved a muscle and people watching the feed were not breathing, knowing that there was an intense battle ongoing, a battle no one could see, but the energies emanating were nearly tangible.

Eventually, Talia turned into her normal self, Vincent sat limply on his chair, and Talia walked out of the cell and here they were.

"No one should enter his cell without authorization", Talia said. She really wanted some time for herself, or preferably with Damon, but she knew that everyone wanted answers. "Let's meet in the study."

Talia met Damon in the next hallway; he was rushing toward her from the moment she exited the cell. Talia told him to stay on the side and wait, but he was unable to wait any longer. He could feel that her emotions were unstable and that she needed him.

While Talia was glowing, Damon was unsettled and he wanted to go there and support her or beat up that Guardian into pulp, but Sapa was reminding him that Talia and Liseli should handle this. Damon knew that Sapa was right. The Guardians were powerful, and their biggest flaw was that they were underestimating Talia; not only her power, but her allies as well, and that were cards that shouldn't be revealed until absolutely necessary.

But now that interrogation was over, and Talia was out, Damon was free to shower her with his affection.

Talia looked at Damon and her eyes shook with uncertainty due to conflicting emotions that clashed within her.

She hurt a person. That guy was chained to a chair, and even though Talia knew he was not weak nor helpless, and she guessed that his intentions were bad, he was unable to retaliate, he didn't actually do any harm, yet she hurt him. Did she turn into a monster?

Before Talia said anything, Damon picked her up princess style.

"Rest, kitten", Damon said while pressing his lips on her forehead. "I've got you."

Talia leaned on him and let him carry her. She even closed her eyes to enjoy the comfort Damon's presence provided.

In the study, Damon sat in the chair with Talia on his lap. He had no intention of releasing her from his hold and she appreciated it.

Axel, Yasmin, Kai, Meg, Tyler, Sandy, Keith, James, and Cornelia were there, all anxiously looking at Talia.

Talia took a deep breath and started talking.

"Just as we suspected, Guardians are not werewolves and they are not witches either. I don't know what exactly they are, but I know that Alphas are respecting them for a reason."

"How are their powers when compared to witches'?", Cornelia asked.

"I don't know", Talia said honestly. "You are welcome to try the effectiveness of your spells after he wakes up but keep in mind that will expose you. At this point, he is not aware of the Silver Flame Coven or that we have a portal that connects us."

Talia looked at Sandy and continued, "You saw through him only because he was not expecting it. If he knew about your ability, he would either avoid you or find a way to counter you."

"Are they so powerful?", Axel asked.

"Guardians' strength and speed are on par with Alpha's. On top of that, they have abilities. Their source of power is different from ours. It's not from the moon nor are those energies of nature. It's almost like they are coming from the Earth itself. Vincent's ability is to disguise himself, appearance and scent, and it's not limited only to humanoid creatures. He can turn into an animal, a vase, or a rock. Just by using sight, scent, and touch, no one would be able to tell a difference."

Everyone in the study was visibly uncomfortable with this.

Damon noticed another piece of information. "How do you know his name?" While talking with the prisoner, Talia addressed him as Vin, and now she called him Vincent.

Talia realized that she said Vincent's name. "He was one of the Guardians present at the Council of the Alphas. He introduced himself as Vin. I know, this prisoner looks nothing like that guy, but that only proves how good his ability is to disguise himself."

Talia turned to talk to others. "I can force my way into seeing a person's memories. He was resisting so I used quite a bit of my energy and will need to rest for some time. After he awakens, we will need to assess his mental state as I can't predict what consequences he suffered because of what I did."

Talia wondered if they will think of her as a monster, but Axel slapped his thigh excitedly with, "I knew that you can do much more than healing."

Meg's eyes were shining with admiration while looking at Talia. "You are cool! What else can you do?"

Talia shook her head helplessly. This was not the time for fangirling but she was relieved to see that people accepted her.

### **Chapter 716 An intruder (5)**

Everyone was curious to know how the Guardian managed to get into the heart of the Midnight Guardians pack, so Talia explained, "Vincent used his ability to come through the same portal as we did."

He pretended that he is a member of the scouting group that left for the human realm and said to the guards that he had something important to report to the Alpha. He would leave with the same identity and a story that he was heading to reunite with his group."

Axel, Tyler, and Kai exchanged glances at this, and Damon had to say, "All this is telling us that the Guardian knew about your protocols, and it was not his first time here."

Talia confirmed. "Vincent would come here and take on the identity of one of the pack members so that he can gather information related to current happenings or gossip circulating. He didn't ask questions and he avoided crowded places like the cafeteria in order to avoid being exposed."

"I will re-shuffle warriors on guard duty", Kai said.

Axel felt that was not enough. "Let's come up with ways to create layers in information."

"Let's pick a few people who will know who gets in and out of the portal, and we should add codewords to confirm identity.", Tyler added.

Yasmin was trying to brighten up the mood. "It's a good thing that Guardians don't have another portal."

"I wouldn't be so quick to celebrate.", Talia said dryly, and everyone looked at her in panic while wondering what that means. "I am confident that not so long ago, Guardians used a different way to enter this realm. Something happened, and that passage was closed, so now they are using this portal."

"Is that why this Guardian was here? To find a way to reopen that passage?", Axel asked.

"No. He was here with the goal to approach your parents in order to gather information about me.", Talia said flatly without mincing her words.

"My parents? Do they know each other from before? Are my parents aware that he is an outsider?", Axel asked in disbelief.

"That, I don't know", Talia said. "I am hoping that Sophia and Isaac can be honest about this because it impacts the security of this pack."

Talia saw in Vincent's memories scenes with Sophia and Isaac, but the images were fragmented and she was not sure if Vincent interacted with them.

Axel was troubled. After being stripped of their abilities and positions, Sophia and Isaac retreated into a separate dwelling and Axel had people watching them. What if his parents managed to get those people to look the other way while they worked against Talia?

Talia decided to share more information she got from Vincent. "How much Vincent knows; he is the only Guardian in this realm. Other Guardians are aware of this realm and how to get here, but only Vincent is allowed to come with the assumption that he won't be caught because of his ability to disguise himself."

"If they are so powerful, why are they hiding?", Yasmin asked Talia.

"The Guardians fear that if we know about them using this portal, we will close it."

"If you close it, the whole pack will be trapped.", Damon said. "Guardians don't know that you can re-open the portal."

"True, but...", Talia hesitated. "The Guardians are aware that unmated members of the Midnight Guardians pack have dormant powers. They are keeping an eye on the portal while waiting for people who are escaping from here."

"Why?", Sandy asked.

"Do you remember the stories about powerful females being coveted because of the offspring they can produce?", Talia responded with a question and the whole study descended into a tense silence.

Meg was the first one to speak, "Are you saying that the Guardians are capturing pack members who escaped through the portal and are taking them away for experimenting and breeding?"

Talia's troubled expression was confirmation no one wanted to hear.

Axel rubbed his face forcibly. If things were like this, no wonder why no one who left came back.

"Are members of the Midnight Guardians pack held by the Guardians against their will?", Tyler asked while rage rippled through him. One of his friends left the Midnight Guardians pack in search of his mate. Was he in some dungeon, or in a lab? If that was true, they were facing formidable opponents. How are they supposed to fight against them?

"The Guardians see themselves as superior compared to other creatures.", Talia said. "How much I've seen in Vincent's memories, they are not using force, but there are other ways to persuade a person."

They all stared at Talia while imagining what those 'ways of persuasion' might be.

Damon's hold on Talia tightened. "You said that the Guardian came here to get information on you. Why?" Were they planning to capture Talia for that breeding monstrosity? She was mated, so she definitely won't accept it willingly, but what if they make her not feel the bond? What if they erase her memories of him? What if they make her believe that she loves one of them?

Talia could sense Damon's fury and anguish swelling and she was quick to put her palms on his cheeks and make him look at her.

"His instructions were to come here and find out whatever he can about me from ex-Alphas."

Talia cursed herself for bringing up how powerful females were coveted without thinking that it can apply to her as well. Now Damon was sizzling with rage, and he was in danger of blowing up, and Talia couldn't blame him because she would be the same if she was not so exhausted.

Talia wanted to change the topic. "Last night, Vincent overheard that Damon and I are mates, and that I'm powerful, but that's as far as he went. It doesn't matter if the Guardians know that Damon is my mate, because everyone will know about it soon." She turned to Yasmin and Cornelia. "No one spoke about witches, and he didn't ask because he didn't know about it. Your identity is safe."

"For now.", Axel said stiffly.

They were all unsettled.

"What are we going to do about the Guardian?", Kai asked.

"We can't kill him, and we can't keep him here either.", Talia said, making everyone look at her.



"You suggest that we let him go?", Sandy asked with disbelief obvious in her voice.

Damon released a low growl that made Sandy lower her head right away in submission.

"Your Alpha is not suggesting. She is giving orders.", Damon said.

Talia's hand quickly patted Damon's back in an attempt to pacify him. Everyone was tense and infighting won't help anyone.

So far silent James spoke for everyone to understand, "Alpha Talia doesn't want to release the prisoner, but she has to. If he doesn't return in time, other Guardians will come to investigate. We all heard that they have abilities, and can suppress Alpha's aura, and we can assume that there is more than that. Just the fact that Alphas treat Guardians with respect should be a warning not to take them lightly. We might be able to handle one or two of them, but what if a dozen of Guardians appear, each with a different ability?"

### **Chapter 717 An intruder (6)**

James spoke to Talia. "We can turn this to our advantage. By providing him with selected information before letting him go, and making it look natural, the Guardians will believe whatever we serve them. The most effective is if we mix in deception with the truth."

Every time James spoke, Talia was more impressed. How come Alpha Edward was not aware of James' brilliance that was right under his nose? Out of all the mistakes Alpha Edward committed, Talia was confident that neglecting James was the worst one.

"I can plant a tracking spell on him", Cornelia volunteered. "They know how to get here, so it will be fair for us to know where they are hiding." Cornelia heard about the Guardians from James. They were without designated territory, but they definitely had a base where they gathered.

"Thank you, Cornelia", Talia said, and she really meant it.

"No need to thank me", Cornelia responded sternly. "This male came here, and he is a threat to all of us. It wouldn't be right if I just sit on the side while my mate participates actively."

James looked at Cornelia with hearts in his eyes. She said that they are mates for so many ears to hear! His chocolate-colored Goddess was fantastic, and they will get to work together, and his eyes fell on his mark on her neck, and he was getting hard again.

Talia was happy that James and Cornelia offered their assistance with handling the Guardian. She wanted to talk about this more, but her energy levels were low, and she desperately needed rest.

"We will wait for results after assessing his condition.", Talia said and turned to Meg. "Can you get a few healers to work on this? Make sure they are not alone with the Guardian. He might be faking weakness."

Meg confirmed and Talia spoke to Axel, "Someone should talk to Sophia and Isaac and find out how much they know about this."

Axel was aware that Talia was giving him another chance to deal with his parents. He wanted to say how Sophia and Isaac had nothing to do with this, and he really wished that everything was a big

misunderstanding and that they can be a happy family, Talia included, but he also knew that those were dreams that will never come true.

The facts were that Sophia and Isaac acted against Talia and Damon, and it was their luck that they were not in the dungeon or executed for what they did. Axel was not sure to what degree Damon will pursue what happened, but he knew that Damon could start a war at any moment, and the consequences would be catastrophic. The only reason why the Midnight Guardians pack was not wiped off and put under the control of the Dark Howlers pack was because Talia was Damon's mate.

"I suggest that Beta Meg and Gamma Sandy talk with ex-Alphas.", Axel said and when everyone looked at him questionably, he explained, "Meg and Sandy are new to the pack, and they are not hostile nor loyal toward them. I believe that Meg and Sandy will be able to talk to ex-Alphas without bias. Without their abilities, my parents are just like regular werewolves, so they won't be a threat to ranked members."

With this, Axel distanced himself from his parents and people won't think that they got an easy way out because of Axel.

"Keith should join them as well", Damon said. "He is familiar with interrogation techniques."

Keith agreed right away, happy that he got something to do. So far, his duties were to hold a candle for Talia and Damon, to avoid nearly-naked horny witches, and to be painfully aware of how single he was while the woman he had feelings for was with her mate.

Axel cringed at the thought of his parents being interrogated like hostile individuals, but he didn't say anything. If they actually dared to work against Talia, that would be against the Midnight Guardians pack also, and that would classify them as traitors. Axel wouldn't have the heart to make such a judgment, so letting others handle it would be the best.

Seeing that no one objected to Keith joining Meg and Sandy, and that they addressed major points, Damon stood up with Talia in his arms. "I will take Talia to rest. Don't disturb us unless there is an emergency."

"I will send you some food.", Yasmin said.

Damon approved. "Leave it at the door."

Damon didn't release Talia from his arms until they reached their bedroom and he put her to lay on the bed. He loved that her little hand was clutching his shirt, unwilling to let go.

Damon laid next to Talia and wrapped his arms around her.

He was aware that Talia was resisting succumbing to sleep, and he was proud that she managed to attend that meeting, give updates, and issue orders like the true Alpha she is.

"How is Liseli?", Damon asked.

"She is resting. Vincent was rejecting our attempts to get into his mind, and that drained her."

Damon hated that Talia did all the work and he got to sit on the side, and Sapa echoed those sentiments. The two of them came to an agreement to get stronger so that their beautiful mates don't need to work this hard.

"You should also rest", Damon said while running his fingers through Talia's hair, knowing that she loved those small tugs on her scalp which helped her relax.

"I don't know if I can rest after harming a person on purpose, for no good reason.", Talia said.

Damon could feel her conflicting emotions and he didn't want her to feel bad because of what she did.

"He came here with an intention to harm you and your pack. His presence alone is proof of his malicious intentions, and you had every right to act against him."

"What if he became a vegetable?"

"That would be proof of your strength and his weakness."

"He didn't think I could do it."

"And that would be a part of his weakness as well. If he dared to come here and snoop around, he was supposed to know what he was getting himself into. He was arrogant for underestimating you and that's not your fault. Now, if you are not going to rest, instead of beating yourself over doing what you needed to do, how about you tell me what else you found out about the Guardians?"

"How do you know there is more?", Talia asked.

Damon smirked smugly. "How can I not know my mate? Those little breaks between topics told me that you were filtering out what to say."

Talia had to admit that Damon was right. She didn't want to keep secrets from people who were in the study, but some parts just didn't make sense. Sharing those bits would spark unnecessary discussions as they tried to piece them together, and she wanted to avoid coming to the wrong conclusions. However, Damon was different. She wanted him to know everything, fragments included.

Talia snuggled closer into Damon. His proximity was providing comfort and charging her with the positivity she desperately needed, and she started talking...

### **Chapter 718 Vincent's memories**

"I saw a lot of images, but he was resisting so anything more than a day old was choppy. On top of that, I can't say with certainty how far in the past those memories belong. I am confident that Dex is high in their hierarchy, maybe even their leader. No, he is not the leader...", Talia's voice trailed as she was switching between talking and sending Damon mental images.

"There was a scene of Dex telling Vincent how their leader is sending him to find out about me, so there is definitely at least one person above Dex. And Dex's name is Declyn. Only a handful of them are staying in a castle, while most of the Guardians are living among humans..."

Damon was pleasantly surprised that Talia found out so much information and he was glad that she kept it to share with him first. It made him feel important, above others.

"If they are living among humans, that would explain why we can't locate their bases. I'm not familiar with that castle, but I'm not exactly an expert in that area. Elder Agatha is vested in studying history, so maybe she will have a clue."

"Assuming that the castle is in the human realm.", Talia said.

Damon agreed with this. The possibility of Guardians having their base in a separate realm was something they had to consider.

"What else?", Damon asked.

"Vincent loves to drink. He is mourning the loss of his lover."

"Do Guardians have mates?"

Talia was not sure. "I don't know if they were mates, but I know that he loved her. Based on the clothes she wore in his memories, it's been a long time since she died. She was pregnant and he never saw his child."

Talia's heart tightened while thinking about it. Those were some of the clearest memories she could see from Vincent. It was a woman with long blonde hair and almond-shaped green eyes. He loved her deeply, and he was elated when her belly started showing, and then she was gone, and everything after that was an agony that he tried to numb with alcohol.

The problem with accessing someone's memories was that Talia was transported there to sense everything that the memory preserved, the pain of losing a loved one included.

Damon pursed his lips while thinking. "Right there is a way for you to get this Guardian on our side."

"Really?", Talia snapped to look at Damon with interest. If they could sway Guardians to support them, that would be fantastic! "Tell me more."

"You need to find him a mate."

Talia's face fell. Was this really the time for jokes?

Damon chuckled. "Use your Malia powers and find him a mate. If she is someone from our packs or a witch, he will be on our side."

"You are forgetting one important thing.", Talia said dryly.

"Which one?"

"There is no such thing as Malia powers."

Damon inched closer and gave her a soft kiss on the lips. "And you, my kitten, are forgetting that there IS such a thing as Malia powers, and I can prove it by reminding you how all unmated people around you are finding their mates."

Talia was not sure if Damon was serious about her having such powers, but she knew that he was playfully diverting the topic. Damon definitely felt that her mood was dropping while thinking about Vincent's sorrow, and he was helping her bounce back. "Thank you, Damon."

"For?" He had an idea, but he still wanted to hear Talia praising him.

"For being wonderful. For being mine." For accepting me for who I am and not judging me no matter what I do. "You are my home, Damon."

"And you are mine, kitten. And you are mine.", he responded with glee. "Today, you interrogated an enemy like a true Alpha. You started with asking questions he refused to answer, and you did what you needed to do. I know it was hard because it was your first time, but next time it will be easier as you will confirm that these things are necessary and losses are negligible compared to how much you will gain. You have unimaginable powers to protect yourself and your pack. Don't feel guilty about using what's available to you because your strength is what's ensuring the prosperity of your pack. Once outsiders realize you are not a pushover, they will think twice before trespassing and no one will dare to offend you or your pack members."

Talia held her breath while listening to Damon's words. She really needed to hear this, to hear that what she did was not wrong. And it's not that he only said how her actions were OK, but he also praised and encouraged her to keep going. To make it all better, the mate bond allowed her to feel that he meant it. He was really proud of her. Can he be any sweeter?

Talia smiled foolishly while thinking how she didn't need to put pretenses in front of Damon because no matter what she did, he would welcome her with his arms open wide. Damon celebrated her successes, comforted her when she failed, and advised her when needed. Unconditional acceptance. It was a wonderful feeling that caused a pinch in the back of her throat, and she craved an outlet for the emotions that swelled within her.

"I wish that we go to that cave", she said.

Damon didn't need clarifications related to which cave Talia was talking about. "We can go there, as soon as we deal with this Guardian." Damon really wanted to go there and break Vincent until nothing was left of him, but he knew that this was Talia's battle and if he showed his face, it would only make things worse.

Damon's eyebrows shot up when he felt Talia's dainty fingers under his shirt.

"I thought you are tired.", Damon said. His words were a warning that she shouldn't start what she can't finish.

Instead of responding, Talia latched her lips on the left side of his neck, right where her mark was.

A shaky moan formed in Damon's throat as his whole body shook when she started sucking him there. He was on the verge of an orgasm just because she was tending to her mark! Seductress.

"Make love to me, Damon...", Talia's lips moved against his flesh. "I need to feel you. I want to reinforce my mark on you. And I want you to mark me as well." Somehow, she knew that this was important.

Damon growled and, within seconds, their clothes were all over the room.

His kitten demanded carnal pleasures and marking, and how can he say no to that?

Talia could describe her current state as hunger. She was hungry for Damon, consumed in desperate need for his touch and for his presence to envelop her.

Damon wanted to start by sucking on her breasts before burying his face into her sweet pussy to lap at her juices. He loved hearing her cries as she came apart at least once before he gets balls deep into her, but this time Talia's fingers dug into his back as she was not letting him go lower.

Her core was throbbing painfully, seeking Damon's shaft to fill her up and she didn't want to waste time on foreplay.

### **Chapter 719 Double marking [Bonus chapter]**

'Take me, Damon. Take me, now...!', Talia chanted through their private mind-link.

Talia's body shook when he started sucking her neck on the spot where his mark was showing faintly, and her mouth opened in a silent scream when he jabbed himself inside her.

The world stilled for a moment only and then he gripped her hip and started rocking into her with the urgency they both felt.

This was more than making love. The invisible energies converged around them, the closed windows shook, and neither of them noticed the breeze in the room that was picking up in intensity as they were consumed with each other.

Faster. Harder. Every thrust pushed them closer to the goal they were both chasing.

The sound of flesh slapping against flesh was mixed with the hum of the wind as clothes and light items from the room were circling in the air around the bed.

'Now, Damon... together...!', Talia's voice sounded in Damon's mind, and he didn't need to hear more of what she meant because his fangs were already out.

Damon's fangs sank into Talia's flesh bone-deep and the scorching pain in his neck told him that she did the same.

Double marking. At the same time. It was euphoric.

Her insides gripped his cock in rhythmical pulses to perfectly match every squirt of his seed that he released into her depths and they growled into each other flesh.

Damon and Talia marked each other several times, and they shared an abundance of orgasms, but this was on a totally different level.

Their souls and bodies became one as their emotions and thoughts merged completely to the point of being unable to distinguish if they came from Talia or from Damon. Their adoration and love mixed and amplified each other, giving them confirmation that they were meant to be together.

The wind inside the closed room was raging around the bed where Damon and Talia were, and two naked bodies glowed in blinding silvery light, lost in the ecstatic sensation of belonging, unaware of the phenomenon that was not confined to their room. The midday sky outside turned dark, as a heavy storm came out of nowhere and big and small creatures ran for shelter.

In the middle of that chaos, Damon and Talia exchanged last drops of their venom, protected by the impenetrable silvery ethereal bubble of their energies.

Talia was first to retract her fangs, and she licked the spot where she marked Damon. She would laugh at the way his body twitched with every move of her tongue, but Damon was still rocking into her, like he could never get enough of her, and she hoped he never will.

Damon licked a few drops of blood from Talia's neck, and asked through their mind-link, 'Do you think the mark will stick this time?' Somehow, he felt that this marking was different from all previous ones. It felt more complete.

'They both will', Talia said with confidence, and she was happy to respond to his soothing kisses that were deep, gentle, and comforting to her soul.

Damon reminded himself that Talia was tired and that he shouldn't overdo it. Once was enough, for now.

He slipped to the side and smiled when he realized that Talia's body followed him like they were stuck to each other with an invisible magnetic force.

'How do you know that these marks will stick?', he asked and then he observed the mess in the room. It was like an aftermath of a tornado.

He wondered if she knew what happened to the room. How come he didn't hear that big floor lamp breaking?

'Kitten?'

No response.

"Kitten?" This time he called with his voice.

Damon exhaled helplessly when he realized that Talia fell asleep.

She was in a fetal position, and she looked so small and fragile, not the image of a muscular figure one would associate with an Alpha; the most powerful Alpha in their generation... and she was his.

Damon carefully moved to lay behind Talia and he cocooned her in his arms as he curled his body around hers to maximize the addictive skin-to-skin contact that was laced with the sparks of their bond.

"Sleep, kitten...", Damon murmured into Talia's hair. She deserved to rest, and everything else can wait.

Damon closed his eyes and the soothing pitter-patter of rain against the windows lulled him into sleep.

What Damon missed to notice were faint pulses of silvery light that emanated from their bodies. With their every heartbeat, energies flowed through them, and their bond was growing and changing them in ways they were yet to discover.

~ An unknown location ~

Declyn walked through the dark and stuffy hallways of the dungeon that extended below their castle.

He never liked this place, and he didn't understand why Gregory was here. They didn't imprison anyone in decades.

The stone walls were interrupted by areas of iron bars as Declyn approached the unpleasant sound of a whip cracking which guided him to Gregory's location.

"Is Vin back?", Gregory asked Declyn without turning.

Gregory was in a dark cell that had rough moss-covered stones on three sides and rusty iron bars on the fourth one. Declyn couldn't see who was in the cell with Gregory, but the shadow resembled a man crouching on the floor.

"No", Declyn responded. He was late, but it was not unusual since there were cases Vincent would lay in wait for days while waiting for the right moment to infiltrate his destination.

Gregory's hand was raised to deliver another hit, but then he froze halfway and turned to look at Declyn. "Why are you here then?"

"You wanted to know the schedule of Alpha Talia."

"You have it?"

Declyn confirmed. "That's why I'm here."

Gregory's frown eased and he said, "I will break you and you will tell me what I want to know. It's only a matter of time. Why are you prolonging your suffering?"

There was no response, but Declyn guessed that words were directed toward the shadow in the cell.

Gregory scowled. "Fine. We will do it your way. I have all the time in the world."

Gregory walked out of the cell and closed the heavy door. "Let's talk outside."

Declyn couldn't wait to get out of there. The dungeon gave him the creeps.

There was a time when Guardians had numerous prisoners, but now that number was reduced to a few. Humans succumbed to their injuries easily and Gregory refused to remove decomposing corpses, leaving them there to rot as a reminder to others how they will end up if they don't cooperate.

How much Declyn knew, only a handful of prisoners were there breathing and one of them was a Guardian who dared to disobey Gregory by sabotaging the portals that were used to access other realms. They called him Ed.

The stubborn guy was alive only because he was the only expert on portals among the Guardians, and no one else knew how to fix the mess they were facing now. Some of the portals were closed completely and some became unstable, those brave few that stepped into them never returned.

Gregory was obsessed with reopening the portals and he told Ed that as long as he spills the secrets, he will be let out, but they all knew that Gregory cared about his reputation too much to forgive disobedience. What Ed did was going against Gregory's will and they never confirmed why Ed did it, even though they were guessing that he was protecting something or someone.

Gregory flung the bloodied whip on the side table before they climbed the steps that led outside.



Declyn inhaled a lungful of fresh air greedily. The last body decomposed in the dungeon a decade ago, but the stench from bodily fluids was there.

"What do you have for me?", Gregory asked.

Declyn handed him a sheet of paper. "These are upcoming functions where Alpha Talia confirmed her attendance."

Gregory scanned the list and then he focused on the first item. "Luna's ceremony in the Blue River pack." He liked that it was only a week away because he was impatient. "Did you arrange my access?"

Declyn nodded and handed him another paper.

Gregory grinned. "Staff member. Good work, Declyn." As an Omega, Gregory could move around without being noticed. After all, during these events, Omegas are too busy serving guests, and guests won't pay attention to servers.

With the help of those few corrupted Alphas, Gregory was confident that he will get his chance to approach Talia.

### **Chapter 720 Changes in the air (1)**

~ the Red Moon pack ~

It's been four days since James, Cornelia, George, Dawn, and Nora returned from the Dark Howlers pack.

Two witches from the Silver Flame Coven were supposed to accompany Cornelia, but one of those two found her mate in the Midnight Guardians pack, and Cornelia thought that considering her plan to accompany James while staying hidden, it would be safer if the second one didn't join her. That sparked the conversation about the safety of the witches, so all six newcomers from the Silver Flame Coven ended up staying in the Midnight Guardians pack, for now.

Just as Talia predicted, on the day before Cornelia and James left the Dark Howlers pack, Cornelia called Damon to talk in private and she reminded him of their deal where he will do something for her in exchange for her performing the chants that removed the dark magic from him. Cornelia asked for Damon to aid James when needed, to which Damon agreed with a clause that as long as it's not unreasonable or puts the Dark Howlers pack in danger, he will do it. Cornelia was fine with that.

Talia promised Dawn and Cornelia that they are welcome at the Dark Howlers pack and at the Midnight Guardians pack at any time (this offer extended to their mates also).

The moment they arrived at the Red Moon pack, George and James went to confront the wrath of Alpha Edward. The old guy was simmering in his anger since Marcy disappeared.

No one got a beating, but there was a lot of shouting, name-calling, and questioning by Alpha Edward.

Other than James and George, Nora was also kneeling on the floor of the study with her head lowered. This time, the three of them were in the same pickle.

Nora got out of the dungeon of the Dark Howlers pack only after taking a blood oath that she won't disclose to Alpha Edward anything that could harm George, James, Damon, or Talia.

James explained to Nora that she needed to keep quiet about Marcy, Talia, and anything else that happened at the Dark Howlers pack because if Alpha Edward suspects anything fishy, they will all be on the chopping block. The safest thing was for everyone to say how Marcy tricked them and no one saw it coming. Nora agreed to roll with it. She was desperate to stay in Alpha Edward's good books. Besides, Alpha Edward knew that Nora was in the dungeon, so her story how she didn't know anything sounded legit. As a bonus, she used that to get pity, and Alpha Edward not only bought her a new wardrobe, but she got extra care during the nights from him.

As for Dawn, she was nervous about coming to the Red Moon pack. Luckily, Dawn immediately saw Estelle as a mother figure who reminded her of Stephanie, and Dawn had a feeling that Estelle will take care of all of them.

As part of the deal for Cornelia to come to the Red Moon pack, Cornelia (and James) got a room on the second floor of George's villa where the newly mated couple spent their nights. During the day, James kept busy with his usual schedule, while Cornelia was in the Dark Howlers pack with Amelia, researching the portals.

Gideon and Mindy would join the witches occasionally, curious to find out more about all the mystical things they were doing there.

So far, three out of four times Dawn came to the Dark Howlers pack with Cornelia. The teleportation magic was handy to move between the packs in a flash. George had his duties, so Dawn spent her day with Zina.

It was just before dinnertime when Dawn and Cornelia appeared in the bedroom on the second floor of George's villa.

George and James still didn't return from their day, so Cornelia went to shower, and Dawn headed to the kitchen to see if she can help Estelle with meal preparations.

It was usual for George to come late. He was always the last one on the training grounds, and even though he tried to come as early as possible, he couldn't break his character and ditch the training. He still didn't announce that Dawn was his mate. George had a plan to make a big deal out of it, but after he heard about the possibility of Alpha Edward setting him up with random women, George thought of waiting a bit before revealing Dawn's existence. If Alpha Edward found out that George had a mate, he will be curious and George wanted to keep Dawn away from that power-hungry lecherous man as long as possible, preferably forever.

George wanted to issue an Alpha challenge right away and be done with it, but he also couldn't rush it as a few more things needed to fall in place.

The situation in the Red Moon pack seemed as usual, but those who paid attention could sense changes in the air that were announcing big changes to come.

While Cornelia was in the shower, James was in the study of the packhouse with his father.

"You are aware of the upcoming Luna ceremony in the Blue River pack", Alpha Edward said.

James confirmed. "Do you have instructions for me while you are away for that function?"

"You are coming with me."

James paused. So far, Alpha Edward didn't mention that James needed to come, so he assumed that only Alpha and Luna will go. Normally, Marcy would accompany them as well (or maybe go as Damon's future Luna), but things didn't turn that way.

Marcy aside, James would often skip these external functions. He was aware that taking Cornelia with him would be dangerous, and he didn't want to leave her behind. Minutes without her were torturous, yet now his father was asking him to attend an event that will last a few days.

James took a moment to calm down his restless wolf before asking calmly, "Is my presence there necessary?"

"Yes.", Alpha Edward said with finality.

James had to try. "It's just a party. Wouldn't I be better off staying to train? What if something happens in the pack? Rogues will know that you are away."

"If something happens, my Beta will handle it.", Alpha Edward said. "You are not a child, and you need to show your face or people will forget I have an heir."

James was not willing, but if he resisted, it will be against his persona of an obedient son. He needed a plan, but he didn't have time to come up with one, so the only thing he could do was to agree. "I understand. Anything else?"

"Yes. I want you to study these."

James frowned when he opened the folder his father gave him. It had three sheets of paper, each with information on a young woman with photos attached.

"What is this?"

"If you are going to philander, you might as well pick from these.", Alpha Edward said.

James couldn't believe this. His father was always talking about how Alphas need to show their proves on the battlefield and in the bedroom, but he never gave him files like this in advance.

James looked up to see Alpha Edward smirking at him.

"Do you think I don't know you are spending nights outside the packhouse?"