

Alphas Bride 731

Chapter 731 The missing groomsman

In the room where females were getting ready...

Cornelia was among the women who wore fluffy bathrobes. They were all sitting patiently while Mario and a small army of hairdressers and makeup artists were fussing around them.

How much Cornelia understood, Mario was the main stylist and everyone (except Tatiana) listened to him.

When Cornelia accepted to be a bridesmaid, she was happy that she got not one, but two dresses; one for the ceremony, and another for the after-party. Cornelia had no idea that the bridesmaid business included a whole afternoon of dolling up and staying inside with all these people. This was a completely new human experience that baffled her.

Was there a need for facials, manicures, pedicures, and massages? But it felt good, her skin was never so soft, it was relaxing, and she smelled great, so she didn't object.

Tatiana was going for the element of surprise when she and her twelve bridesmaids walk outside, so her female entourage was locked into that room with only a few Omegas allowed to get in and out of that room in order to replenish drinks and snacks.

After Daria bailed (because she met her mate, aka Pierce), Tatiana was upset, but then Cornelia stepped in to maintain the magical number thirteen.

Unfortunately, then Lidia met Jordan, so Tatiana was (again!) one bridesmaid short. Since the time was running short and everything had to be perfect, Tatiana picked one of her designers to step in, so they were back to thirteen females total.

The afternoon was trickling away, and Tatiana was back to nervously looking at the time.

Talia had big rollers in her hair, and she wanted to ask if Tatiana was having second thoughts about this ceremony, but then she counted the bridesmaids. There were eleven. One was missing.

"Who is the twelfth bridesmaid?", Talia asked Kalina in a whisper.

"I'm not sure", Kalina responded honestly. "It's someone that Max invited, and it seems they are running late."

"They?"

Kalina nodded. "That woman was supposed to come with two other guys. They are big business partners to the River Construction. The last thing I heard was that their flight was delayed. That was at lunchtime. They thought that everyone will be here in time, but it seems that won't happen."

Kalina looked at Tatiana with concern. Tatiana was a perfectionist which helped launch the "Dama T" brand into the world of elite fashion, but in day-to-day life, being a perfectionist usually meant a lot of stress, and Tatiana was visibly anxious.

At this point, it was obvious that Tatiana heard Talia and Kalina whispering because her Alpha aura was leaking. Humans broke into a cold sweat while most of the she-wolves in the room bowed in submission.

"Tanya!", Talia called. She was not affected, but others were. "You need to calm down."

Tatiana looked at Talia with an expression of a furious toddler who was wronged. "Calm down? How can I calm down? I planned for this, I was looking forward to this... everything is falling apart right in front of my eyes and there is nothing I can do about it."

"Don't panic!" Mario said while making his way behind Tatiana and he started massaging her shoulders. "Relax. Breathe, my dear. Breathe. We faced bigger crises than this one. Do you remember when due to traffic we didn't get any matching shoes for the show? And then there was the case of mismatched fabric. No matter what came at us, we came on top. You can't think straight because this is your event, and you want it to be perfect. And it will be perfect, but first, you need to calm down. Breathe. Breathe... that's it. In and out... Happy thoughts..."

Talia had to acknowledge that Mario had a strange calming effect on Tatiana. It was a combination of words and tone and that massage, and Talia wondered if Mario would be able to keep his hands if Maddox saw him kneading Tatiana's shoulders like that.

Everyone in the room thought that Tatiana's furry sizzled away, but then she snapped. "How can I have happy thoughts when I'm missing bridesmaids?"

"Does it need to be those exact people?", Varya asked.

"It should be someone important", Tatiana said. Seeing strange looks directed her way, Tatiana realized that it sounded shallow, so she explained, "This is a high-profile event not only for me but for Maddox and our extended family as well." The she-wolves in the room knew that 'extended family' was a codeword for the 'pack'. "By having high-profile people in my wedding entourage, it also lifts the status of our family."

"What about Michelle?", Talia asked, reminding them of the Luna of the Spring Leaf pack.

Kalina thought that was a great idea. "Alpha Cristian is on good terms with Max, and I'm sure they will agree to be part of this ceremony. He can fill in for one of the missing groomsmen."

"We can also invite Yasmin", Meg suggested. "She has a way to come here... quickly. And I know she would be over the moon if she could participate."

Maya disapproved. "But she is pregnant. Can she travel in her state?"

Talia also got an idea. "If you lower your requirements on status of people, guards that came from the Dark Howlers pack are available. Keith, Caleb, and Lulu. That's two males and one female."

Tatiana nodded in acknowledgment of this information and waved her hand impatiently. She needed more candidates! "Who else?"

Ten minutes later...

They had twelve solid bridesmaids and two as backups, but they were still lacking one groomsman that would be important enough.

Talia looked at the list of twelve females and eleven males, each with a line indicating who will be whose walking couple during the ceremony. Talia was pleased to see that she will be paired up with Damon, and Kalina with Tony... and Talia's eyes widened when an invisible lightbulb went on above her head.

"Wait! I need to make a call. I think I know the perfect candidate!", Talia exclaimed.

The moment Tatiana nodded, Talia grabbed her phone and went to the bathroom.

A minute later, Talia exited the bathroom with a victorious smile on her face. "Twelfth groomsman is secured, and you will be pleased that he has a high status. Damon and Tony agreed to teach him the procedure for the ceremony."

"We are back on!", Mario exclaimed, and Tatiana relaxed visibly.

Tatiana's phone beeped and she checked to see that it was a message from Talia:

[Set the last groomsman as Cornelia's walking partner. Put his name as X.]

Tatiana had no objections and she called Mario to handle the matchings.

Talia couldn't suppress her smile. She was eager to see how tonight's ceremony will unfold.

...

In the garden, Alpha Edward was mingling with Luna Layla attached to his arm.

With the main ceremony getting closer, guests were coming to join the party, and the garden was getting crowded.

Without any warning, Alpha Edward's mood worsened visibly.

'Did something happen?', Luna Layla asked through her mind-link.

'James is not coming.'

Luna Layla didn't understand. 'Why? Is he unwell?' She wanted to ask if he got himself into any trouble, but James was not a boy who gets in trouble, and no one would dare to provoke him, considering his status.

'He said that he will participate in the ceremony', Alpha Edward responded.

'Isn't that a good thing?'

Alpha Edward was irritated. He liked when things went his way, and James was supposed to obediently come down and represent their pack and also... 'What kind of a role could he have?' For a normal Luna ceremony, the only people important were Alpha, Luna, and the Shaman. Others either served or were guests. Did James accept to serve drinks and food, as an Omega?

Ever since James returned from the Dark Howlers pack, Alpha Edward noticed changes in James' behavior. Alpha Edward couldn't put his finger on it, but something was different, and he didn't like it.

Luna Layla was not so skeptical. 'Didn't you send James to the Dark Howlers pack to establish connections? Alpha Maddox was there as well, and they trained together. Is it unusual to think that our

James made an impression? Besides, even the Dark Howlers pack needs to curry favors with us, and how does the Blue River pack compare to them? They will definitely want to include James as a way to get closer to our pack. In any case, they won't dare to embarrass us.'

At the mention of their status, Alpha Edward relaxed. It was natural for the lowly ones to suck up to them.

Chapter 732 The missing groomsman (cont.)

The tension was rising as the ceremony was approaching.

News leaked that Alpha Damon came to attend this event without his Luna, and people wondered why he would leave her behind. It was unusual. Other than their relationship being fresh, there was also the point of werewolves not leaving their mates after marking because they didn't know when the heat will strike.

A she-wolf might go into heat days or weeks after marking. Her body would get flushed as hormones go out of whack, stimulated by the venom of her mate. A she-wolf in heat would get aroused to the point of her mind getting clouded with the need to copulate, and only after a male ejaculated inside her, her heat would subside temporarily, and then the urge will return in a cycle that can last for several days.

Freshly mated werewolves would be hostile toward other males because pheromones from a she-wolf in heat will make any unmated male go crazy to the point of forgetting about hierarchy, friendships, and blood relationships when facing the primal call to extend their species. The only ones spared from that effect were mated werewolves as the mate bond would block inviting scents from any female that's not their mate.

Because Damon showed up without his Luna, people speculated if she already had her heat and was now at home, pregnant with his pups. But that didn't make sense, because an Alpha wouldn't separate from a female who was pregnant with his pups. He would either bring her with him or stay home with her. And that ignited another round of rumors that included the option of Alpha Damon abandoning his mate. Considering his lively past of womanizing, it was not impossible.

Maya warned Talia that people will twist her absence as Damon's Luna into something bad, but Talia thought that it was more important to lure the enemies than to save some face. Besides, she already confronted Damon's ugly past (more than once), and she survived. How bad can this be? Soon, they will reveal the truth, and everyone will shut up, and until then, Talia wanted to take advantage of people's ignorance.

Talia believed that other than the power-hungry Alphas, there were also Guardians lurking in the shadows and if they knew that she was Damon's Luna and the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack, they would act with caution.

Mates would protect each other regardless of the dangers, and if people don't know that the most powerful Alpha of their generation was the one guarding her, they will be more relaxed, and Talia hoped that they will be reckless enough to make a move and expose their evil intentions.

In the room with bridesmaids...

Mario was the final checker, walking among twelve females that wore matching blue dresses with golden details. He would touch the hair, tug a hem, and make a lot of 'hmm-hm' sounds no one understood.

Talia craned her neck to see her left side. The makeup artist applied concealer over Damon's mark, so now it was almost invisible. If anyone paid close attention, they would notice small grooves, but that would be it. She was pleased with this outcome, and she hoped that Damon was able to conceal her mark with equal success.

Talia's attention was drawn toward the witch by her side.

"Are you alright?", Talia asked Cornelia in a whisper.

Cornelia was staring at her high-heeled sandals like they were her mortal enemy. "How am I supposed to walk in these?"

"Can you use some magic?", Talia asked.

"Do you want me to fly?"

"No, no. Just to make yourself more... stable.", Talia said.

"Sorry, but I'm not aware of such a spell.", Cornelia said bitterly.

"Don't worry about that", Mario startled them both because his head was now between Talia's and Cornelia's as he approached them from behind. He heard them talking about magic and spells, but he assumed it was just a codeword for making it happen.

Mario pointed at Cornelia's sandals. "This is just until downstairs, and then you can lean on your walking partner as you go hand-in-hand. After the ceremony is over, you can change sandals for flats."

Cornelia looked at golden flat sandals and she really wanted to put them on right now, but she knew that was not an option. She asked already and Mario had a mini mental breakdown.

While thinking about leaning on some male, Cornelia had another concern. With the whole afternoon being crazy, Mario took away their phones. He said that was to ensure no one takes photos and sends them to spoil the big a-ha entrance Tatiana was going for, but that also meant Cornelia had no way of contacting James.

Was he at the party already? She took a few peeks through the window to see the crowd gathering in the garden, and even though she didn't spot James, she guessed that he should be there.

Was he thinking about her? She was not sure.

What if he was surrounded by slutty females? Just by thinking about it, Cornelia was on the verge of blowing this place up.

...

In the room with guys...

James was checking the time every few seconds.

He was wearing a blue suit with golden details, just like other groomsmen. It was a bit tight in the shoulders, but it was bearable.

James couldn't wait to get out there and see his chocolate-colored Goddess. Will she be happy to see him? He surely hoped so.

When he got a text from Talia asking him if he wanted to join the groomsmen, he accepted immediately because it would give him the perfect excuse to postpone going down there where the crowd was with three females he should pay attention to.

When he reached into that room, James saw Alpha Maddox, Alpha Damon, Alpha Cristian, Beta Oliver, Alpha Anthony, Beta Caden, Shaman Gideon... it was quite an impressive lineup.

James' mood worsened when they told him that he will need to walk down the flowery aisle while holding a female's hand, and he was about to refuse, but then Damon pulled him to the side and told him that Cornelia will be his walking partner and James wondered if his ears malfunctioned.

"Wait... wait...", James spoke breathily to Damon while balling his hands into fists repeatedly due to anxiety. "Are you saying that my Cora is here, part of the ceremony, a bridesmaid?"

"Yes", Damon confirmed. "She came here in the role of Alpha Natalia's special advisor. Due to unforeseen circumstances, one bridesmaid couldn't make it, and Cornelia agreed to take her spot."

James felt like the sun emerged from behind the clouds and the world got colors, and he was finally able to breathe. Really breathe... and his brain was working again!

This was fantastic!

Cornelia had the status of a special advisor to the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack. James knew that his father was itchy to get close to Alpha Natalia, so James can definitely spin this in his favor. He can stick close to Cornelia with an excuse that he is establishing that highly coveted connection to the Midnight Guardians pack.

And the fact that they were walking partners for the ceremony could serve as a not-suspicious way for them to meet.

James was nearly bouncing from excitement. The best part was that Cornelia didn't know that he will be part of the ceremony, and he really hoped she will like this surprise.

Chapter 733 Maddox's best friend [Bonus chapter]

All groomsmen had royal blue suits with golden embroidery on lapels. Maddox's suit was white with royal blue lapels and golden embroidery on it. They were all matching, yet Maddox was standing out.

People in the room were chatting in a good mood, and there was plenty of expensive liquor going around.

Caden, Kai, and Oliver chatted as Betas of their respective packs, Cristian was talking with Tony, James was checking his phone every few seconds, a few humans discussed business collaboration, and Gideon was in an especially good mood as he was grinning at his reflection in the full-length mirror.

The Shaman looked good in his well-fitted outfit, but his expression was still exaggerated and Damon guessed that Gideon's talk with in-laws went well otherwise, the old guy would be sulking. Damon wanted to ask if Mindy's parents commented on the Shaman's age, but he decided to keep that for later, or maybe he could ask Talia to talk to Mindy and get more details.

Maddox was standing in the corner with his hands in his pockets, and his intense expression directed at the carpet gave him the appearance of someone deep in thoughts. Maddox was an Alpha, and they always had important things to handle, so no one disturbed him. No one, except for Damon.

"Is there a crisis only you know about?" Damon asked while approaching Maddox with two glasses of amber-colored liquor.

Maddox accepted the glass and downed it in one go without a word spoken.

Damon's hand with the second glass was left hanging in the air. He was going for a toast, but Maddox drank his drink immediately.

"Do you want this one?" Damon asked jokingly.

To Damon's silent outrage, Maddox took the second glass and gulped the contents like a parched man drinking water.

Damon was not worried that Maddox would get drunk. The two were drinking buddies, and Damon knew that Maddox had an enviable capacity, but this behavior was unusual.

"What's wrong?" Damon asked.

Maddox snapped to look at Damon. "What could be wrong?"

Damon shrugged. "I don't know. You tell me."

Maddox looked at other people in the room, and then his eyes settled on Damon.

"I..." Maddox started and paused. He puffed his cheeks and ran his hand through his hair. He leaned closer to Damon and spoke in a hushed voice, "What if this doesn't make her happy? What if I don't make her happy?"

Tatiana had a very good life before she met Maddox. She was a successful designer with a top-notch company, surrounded by luxury and all the good things in life while many people were sucking up to her. And now, she was making drastic changes in order to accommodate him. She left her life in Europe, moved her company, she will be tasked to act as a Luna by his side, and her business will start from scratch in the US.

And what did he do?

Maddox had a feeling that when compared to Tatiana's sacrifices, he was lacking, and Tatiana knew it. Of course, she knew it. Tatiana was brilliant and had a very sharp business-oriented mind; she was definitely aware that accepting Maddox as her mate came at a loss for her, yet she still went with it. Sure, he could feel Tatiana's emotions through their mate bond, and he was confident that she wanted this, and she was happy, but what if she regrets it later?

Damon needed a moment to process this. Was the mighty Alpha Maddox insecure? It looked like it.

Damon would make fun of Maddox if the groom didn't look like he was about to hyperventilate. Damon couldn't allow that to happen because this was important to Talia. Talia was over the moon that she got a role in the ceremony, and Damon had no intention of allowing Maddox to ruin it by passing out, canceling the thing, or running away because of what-if scenarios that probably won't happen.

"You are fated mates. Being with you will make her happy.", Damon said with confidence.

Maddox scoffed. "That would be valid if Tanya is a regular woman."

Damon rolled his eyes. If Maddox knew how special Talia was, he wouldn't mention any other woman, but Damon couldn't disclose Talia's amazingness, so he had to focus on Tatiana.

"What makes Tanya special? Does she have a dick between her legs? Or three boobs?"

Maddox's expression darkened, and he released a low growl. He knew that Damon was joking, but this was no time for jokes.

Besides, there was no dick involved. Tatiana was 110% woman, a hot one that smelled and tasted of strawberries! And Maddox wouldn't mind another boob to play with. Two were fun, and three would be even better.

"Relax, man," Damon said while patting roughly Maddox's shoulder. "It's just your insecurities acting out. Our mates love us more than what we deserve." This time, Damon was serious.

Maddox looked at Damon hopefully. "You think so?"

"I know so," Damon said smugly. "And you should know as well."

"I should?"

Damon nodded confidently before reminding him, "I remember that when you met Tatiana, you were so badly smitten that you were a complete klutz, and you forgot about two she-wolves in your room."

Maddox's nostrils flared in anger. Did Damon need to remind him of that blunder that nearly cost him his mate? He put so much effort into winning her back, his own mate... That was unheard of! And Tatiana almost drowned in that wretched kelp forest while searching for non-existing mermaids at the bottom of a lake.

Damon saw that Maddox was about to snap, so he quickly continued, "My point is that she forgave you. You messed up, big time, and she forgave you. That should tell you how much Tanya is into you. Don't doubt the mate bond. The Moon Goddess is never wrong, she gives us what we need. You need Tanya, and she needs you, and that won't change unless one of you is stupid to sever the bond. Your Luna is many things, but stupid is not one of them."

Maddox realized that Damon was right.

"Thanks. I needed to hear that", Maddox said.

Damon frowned at Maddox's silly grin. It didn't suit him.

"Remember who you are, Max. You are the Alpha of the Blue River pack. We move with confidence, and we crush our enemies. That wussy expression should be left for when it's just you and your mate. She will appreciate you showing your soft side, but everyone else will use it against you."

Maddox released a sharp breath and composed himself. "I'm not going to say you are wrong, but I will say that it's easy for you to talk as an outsider. When your mate has Luna ceremony, I will be standing on the side and laughing while you bounce off the walls."

"That won't happen," Damon snapped.

Maddox chuckled with, "We will see," and waved his hand on the side. A second later, an Omega was there with two glasses of amber liquid. Maddox took them both and gave one to Damon.

"Thank you for being here, Damon," Maddox said seriously, and he meant it.

Damon was the only Alpha with whom Maddox could hold a conversation without fearing that Damon would backstab him for power. For shits and giggles, yes, but not for power.

"I wouldn't miss this for anything in the world," Damon responded, and they clinked glasses before downing them.

Chapter 734 Tanya's Luna ceremony (1)

"IT IS TIME!" An enthusiastic Mario shouted from the door, getting attention from Maddox, groomsmen, and all the stylists in the room.

Mario ran from the room where Tatiana and the bridesmaids were to inform the guys they should move.

There were people in charge of the groom's entourage, but as the main event organizer, designer, and stylist, Mario came in person to do the final checks before people stepped out.

The ceremony included Maddox going to the podium where he will wait for Tatiana, and between Maddox and Tatiana reaching there, all groomsmen and bridesmaids will walk on the aisle that was covered with flower petals.

They planned paths, so groomsmen and bridesmaids don't meet until the final moment.

They will take separate side exits and come from around the packhouse, and then pass through the tunnel made of green foliage and white flowers that matched the overall décor and seamlessly blend into the surroundings while providing secrecy so that no one sees the wedding party until they step onto the terrace that overlooks the garden.

Maddox took a few deep breaths and checked himself in the mirror. He was about to move to the door when Mario stepped in front of him.

Maddox gritted his teeth while Mario was patting his lapels, and he endured when Mario's hands ran over his biceps, lingering there more than necessary and giving him a squeeze. Did Mario make a whinnying sound?

Mario didn't like that his muse (aka Tatiana) found a man who muddled her to the point of rushing with this wedding. Didn't they meet less than two months ago? But Mario couldn't deny that Maddox looked

good. His ripped body was the cause of many wet dreams, Mario's included. And the best thing about Maddox was that he had a bunch of friends whose physique was equally impressive.

Mario could do fittings for these guys all day and not get bored of it.

Maddox chanted internally to stay calm. If he bites the head of the skinny human, Tatiana won't approve.

Maddox knew that Tatiana was relying on Mario, and she had a special place in her heart for that human. Mario was competent as an assistant, but he was too much into touching and Maddox hoped that Mario was not so handsy with Tatiana. This was important to Tatiana, so Maddox didn't want to make a scene, but he took a mental note to explain to the human that no one touches an Alpha or his Luna. No one!

Since Damon was next to Maddox, Mario approached him next, ready to adjust the suit jacket and the necktie, and Mario's hands froze an inch from Damon's chest when Damon growled at him.

Mario swallowed hard and retracted his hands. Even as a human, his instincts screamed that if he got too close to Damon, it won't end well. And he was not wrong.

Mario made a circle around Damon and nodded how everything was fine before moving to his next victim... cough-cough... the next groomsman.

"Why are you letting him touch you like that?" Damon grumbled at Maddox.

Maddox made a dejected face. "Tanya likes the guy. If I end him now, it will spoil the party."

"The more she likes him, the more you have reasons to end him. Besides, we can stash the body, and say he was unwell and went to rest. With so many guests, Tanya won't have time to check on him until the party is over. We can make it so that no one ever finds the body."

Maddox had to agree that Damon had a point. But what will happen after the party? Tatiana will definitely suspect him. What if Tatiana doesn't forgive him? Maddox needed to think about this.

...

When Mario returned to the room where Tatiana was with her bridesmaids and stylists, Tatiana was hyper from excitement. Mario offered her a drink, but she waved him away.

Tatiana wanted to keep her head clear. Drinking can come later when the ceremony is completed.

Tatiana's parents were there. Her father had a stern expression, but his eyes were full of pride, while Tatiana's mother was tearing up.

For the Wilkow parents, this was more than just Tatiana being a Luna of a pack. They arrived that afternoon to hear that Lidia and Daria had found their mates. They were happy that their daughters found their fated mates and things went smoothly, upset about this timing right before the ceremony where Tatiana needed them, and shocked how it all happened so suddenly.

For twenty years, all five of their daughters were unmated, and within two months, four out of five were mated. It was a sudden change they needed to adapt to, mainly because all four daughters found their

mates in the US, which meant that the whole Ocean will separate them. Will they be able to see each other for the holidays? It didn't look like it.

'CLAP-CLAP!'

Mario clapped loudly, ending all chatter and making everyone focus on him.

He turned to Tatiana. "Do you have something old?"

"My earrings," Tatiana's mother responded.

"Something new?" Mario asked, and then he bobbed his head. "Dress and shoes are new. Something borrowed?"

"My garter," Varya said.

Mario nodded in approval and then asked his last question. "Something blue?"

"Lingerie," Tatiana responded with a straight face while gesturing at herself, indicating that she was wearing it.

"OK! The bride is ready!" Mario announced and looked at Tatiana with tears in his eyes. "You are getting married."

"Yes," Tatiana confirmed. "And thanks to you, it will all be perfect."

Mario wiped the tears and made a face. "Instead of thanks, you can give me a raise."

Tatiana rolled her eyes. She was already paying him a small fortune!

Without waiting for Tatiana's response, Mario called the bridesmaids to line up, and he arranged them in the order they should walk out while doing final checks on their hair, makeup, dresses, and shoes. Everything needed to be perfect!

Tatiana smiled at her assistant gratefully. Mario was loud and a handful, but she could always rely on him to get the job done.

"Miss Cornelia," Mario called impatiently to the bridesmaid who was still getting ready.

Cornelia was in front of a mirror with a makeup stylist who was fervently working on her neck to conceal James' mark.

Humans didn't understand why Cornelia was set on hiding her tattoo; it looked cool. However, Cornelia thought about it and decided to cover it up. After all, if James was down there mingling with females as an unmated prince of the Red Moon pack, Cornelia had no intention of going there as someone who was claimed.

"Does she know what she is doing?" Maya asked Talia in a whisper.

Every she-wolf carried her mark with pride, and there was no reason to cover it up, but then there was Talia with a lot of concealer over Damon's mark, and Maya realized that she had asked the wrong person. Or maybe the right one.

"She is fighting for her mate," Talia responded.

In a way, Talia admired Cornelia. Cornelia was a witch, who didn't know much about this realm, humans, or werewolves, and she risked a lot by coming here.

If Cornelia uses her powers, she will expose herself as a witch, and if she doesn't use her powers, she will appear to be a weak human regardless of the weight that the title of special advisor to Alpha Natalia carried. No matter how it went, Cornelia was at a disadvantage, yet she still came here to fight for her mate. How could Talia not admire this tenacious witch?

Chapter 735 Tanya's Luna ceremony (2)

The guests were seated to watch the ceremony.

A long royal-blue carpet that was covered in white rose petals extended from the terrace that started at the packhouse. The blue fabric made a straight line through the garden and it ended at the podium where Maddox was with the Shaman of the Blue River pack.

The air was filled with a delicate aroma from flower arrangements of coronations and roses.

White and blue streamers and balloons hung above the guests. The venue was bathed in orange and golden hues due to the setting sun, which created long shadows, making it look mystical.

Several reporters were tirelessly taking photos because the guests were all important people, and the event was live streamed for everyone to see.

The music changed, and the guests quieted as they turned toward the packhouse. They were all expecting people to come from there, but Gideon came from the right, and Mindy from the left side of the terrace, emerging from the green foliage that had white blooms to match the rest of the decorations.

Mindy and Gideon met in the middle, and the sparkle in Gideon's eyes told her he approved.

"You are stunning," he said, and her smile widened.

Mindy hooked her arm with Gideon's as they turned to walk over the blue carpet that was covered in white rose petals.

Murmurs swelled among the crowd how those were Alpha Maddox's sister and the Shaman of the Dark Howlers pack. They all knew who Mindy was because she was active in society while being the face of charities that supported the causes for providing for less fortunate ones, but Gideon kept a low profile, and not many knew him outside the Dark Howlers pack. Well, that will change after tonight.

Gideon was happy to be the one walking next to his pumpkin-infused princess, and he loved the way she held onto him firmly, but he feared that she will make him dance. He was NOT into dancing!

Next were Tony and Kalina, and people quickly recognized them as Alpha and Luna of the Lightclaw pack.

After the couple from the Lightclaw pack went Varya (Tatiana's sister) and Oliver (Maddox's Beta).

Talia knew that she should pay attention to the music before stepping outside, but her eyes were locked with her handsome mate, who looked especially dashing in his blue suit that had golden embroidery on the lapels. She loved that their outfits matched because her sleeveless dress, which reached her knees, had a golden waist and a golden hem at the bottom.

Damon stared at Talia as possessed, and he really wanted to go there and kiss her senselessly and do much more than kiss, but then he reminded himself how they were putting on a show where Talia was not his mate, she was his ally, Alpha Natalia Moonrider, and people were not ready to find out that she was also Talia Blake. His Talia. His kitten.

She had more makeup than usually, but she was equally breathtaking.

Damon's heart ached at the thought of how for a long time he didn't give her the acknowledgment she deserved, and now he was about to repeat the same, albeit per her request. Was this her way of punishing him by not allowing him to claim her publicly as his? Everyone will want to get close to her, either because of her position, her power, or because she was absolutely stunning, yet he will need to pretend they were friends. Will he be able to pull it off without blowing a fuse? Damon doubted it.

Talia moved toward Damon, and he moved toward her, and they met in the middle.

'It will be alright, love,' Talia's voice sounded in his head, and he smiled a little.

She could feel his emotions and she knew that this was not easy for him.

Talia wanted to pretend, they had a plan, but it was difficult to conceal the maddening attraction and resist the pull. In the end, they could stop this play and tell everyone the truth. But before giving up on it, Talia wanted to try.

'Your hand,' Talia instructed through their private mind-link, and he extended his arm automatically.

Talia placed her hand on his. 'Now we walk.'

He moved per command, and Talia struggled to keep a straight face. Damon was like a robot. A handsome and super-hot robot. And hers.

Damon snapped to his senses when he picked up whispers, "Alpha Damon... Alpha Natalia".

Well, at least no one recognized Talia as his Luna, and that should be a good thing, but why was he feeling so uneasy? Seeing all eager gazes directed at Talia, Damon wanted to pull her into his embrace and to shout how she was his and others should fuck off, but he knew that Talia wouldn't approve, so he suppressed that urge.

One by one, couples moved through the passage that hid them from the guests until it was their time to show up, and James eagerly looked in front, waiting to see his chocolate-colored Goddess.

And there she was... beautiful in a blue dress with a heart neckline that hugged her two girls while giving them a push up, a golden waistline was there to make her hips more alluring, and she was peeking through the wall made of green foliage while looking at the audience, searching for someone.

James' eyebrows shot up when he realized that she was looking for him. He chuckled in amusement. If she only looked in the way she was moving, she would see him right there, waiting for her.

Cornelia reached the end of the green wall and released a long breath. There was no sign of James, her legs were wobbly, and she was sure that those sandals were a type of torturing device, yet she needed to walk all the way there, and that podium looked like several continents away.

"Ahh!" a suppressed cry escaped Cornelia's lips when her leg got twisted, and she lost her balance.

A fleeting thought passed through her mind while considering whether she should allow herself to fall and make a fool of herself or use magic to expose herself. None of those seemed good, and she cursed silently for coming here. If she could have a do-over, she would spend three days at the Dark Howlers pack and watch the live stream while cursing all sluts that dared to come close to James.

Cornelia closed her eyes to prepare herself for the impact, and then she found herself in a pair of strong arms.

The crowd observed all this, and they saw Cornelia coming out and losing her balance, and then James crossed the distance between them like a flash to catch her, making the people erupt in 'Ohs' and 'Ahs' because he did it swiftly and elegantly, the scene was like it came from a fairytale where a knight saves a damsel in distress.

"Careful, my lady," James said, and Cornelia opened her eyes in disbelief while wondering if she had imagined it.

Her heart was beating wildly, threatening to jump out of her chest and confirm how that was not her imagination. That was James. Her James. It was really him, right there, helping her straighten up. No wonder she couldn't spot him in the crowd, but how did he end up being a groomsman? Cornelia had many questions, but she knew this was not the time to voice them.

James could literally hear Cornelia's heartbeats, and the mate bond allowed him to sense her emotions. Disbelief, relief, joy, love. There was lots of love, and he thought his chest will burst with happiness.

"Are you alright?" James asked while staring into her dark brown eyes and suppressing his desire to kiss her. If they didn't have hundreds of eyes on them, James would pick her up and take her to his room, and they wouldn't come out for days.

Cornelia's eyes darted to his lips, but then she became aware of their audience.

"I am alright. Thank you.", she said, and she was about to step away from him, but he grabbed her hand.

"Please, hold on tightly." James put Cornelia's hand on his forearm and placed his palm over her hand, pressing it there without an intention to let go. "Your leg might be injured. Feel free to lean on me."

Cornelia bit her lower lip, but she was still smiling.

Chapter 736 Tanya's Luna ceremony (3)

'Who is that female?', Alpha Edward's stern voice sounded in James's head as he walked with Cornelia on the royal-blue carpet that was speckled with white rose petals.

James didn't like that his father pulled him out of his lovey-dovey mood, but he was also surprised that this question didn't come the moment James saved Cornelia from planting her face on the terrace.

'Give me a minute', James responded coolly.

James gave Cornelia's hand a squeeze before introducing himself officially. "I am James Redmayne, the next Alpha of the Red Moon pack. May I know your name?"

His brows were slightly pulled together, hoping that Cornelia will get the hint that they need to pretend they don't know each other.

"I am Cornelia Silverflame, special advisor to Alpha Natalia from the Midnight Guardians pack." She spoke clearly, aware that many of the guests were eager to hear her response.

James appreciated her official response. She got the hint, of course, she did. His chocolate-colored Goddess was amazing.

James conveyed this information to his father who was too far in the back to hear it himself, and James was not surprised at his father's reaction.

'Make sure you leave a good impression', Alpha Edward spoke with urgency. 'Treat her well and stay close until I get a chance to approach you so you can introduce me.'

James' insides tightened. 'You want to meet her?'

'She can be the connection to Alpha Natalia. Considering that you saved her from embarrassment, she will be grateful and she can repay that favor by saying a few good words to her Alpha.'

James couldn't believe this! His father wanted to curry favor with James' mate to get close to Damon's mate? But Alpha Edward was not aware of Cornelia's and Talia's identity, and James knew that he needed to present himself as ignorant. For now.

'I will do my best, father.'

James glanced at Cornelia and wondered how Alpha Edward would react if he knew that she was a witch, James' mate, James' MARKED mate. They mated and he marked her and she was his. Completely his. The old guy would probably go ballistic.

But James thought how he could work with this. Would it be too much of a stretch to spend the night with Cornelia? Or can he bring her home? Could Cornelia come to the Red Moon pack with her new identity?

They were approaching the podium, and James' mind was filled with images of Cornelia staying in his room on the third floor of the packhouse and them doing all kinds of things during the day together, not caring if anyone would see them. It was a good mental image.

James firmed his resolve to hasten his plans for leaving. It would be glorious to live with Cornelia without hiding, but he couldn't do that in the Red Moon pack. He needed a plan, something foolproof, and he needed it quickly.

Except for a few humans, everyone among the guests knew who James was, the young Alpha of the Red Moon pack. Eligible females looked at him with sparkles in their eyes. James was tall and muscular, and he was also the future Alpha of the Red Moon pack, and his rescue of Cornelia was proof that he was a gentleman. As females saw this, James was the full package.

The information on Cornelia's identity as the special advisor to Alpha Natalia Moonrider spread quicker than a wildfire. Most of the people agreed that the smiles and body language of James and Cornelia were a giveaway they hit it off well.

On the podium, females lined up on the right side, while males formed a line on the right, behind Maddox who was standing there from the beginning.

James was reluctant to let go of Cornelia, his steps were slowing down as they approached the podium. She gave him an encouraging smile and a deep gaze that was reinforced by her feelings of love and admiration she had for him. She was really happy that he was by her side, and not with some random woman, and he felt it, he really felt it.

Meg and Kai were the last bridesmaid-groomsman couple. Originally, they were not planned, but with the unforeseen absences of several key people, Tatiana swiftly decided to make changes and give priority to mated couples. That's how Meg and Kai got their current roles.

Another wave of speculations started as people realized that those two were Betas from the Midnight Guardians pack.

It was not a secret that Alpha Damon and Alpha Maddox were close. They even opened up their borders for their pack members to move about freely between their territories, so it was expected to see Damon, Maya, and Caden as part of the wedding party. Mindy and Gideon were also from the Dark Howlers pack, but Mindy was Maddox's sister, so that couple could be considered like it came from the Dark Howlers pack, or from the groom's side.

However, Talia, Cornelia, Meg, and Kai, came from the Midnight Guardians pack, and the four of them made their pack the most-represented one among participants (without family ties with the groom or the bride).

Why was this interesting for people to speculate about?

The Midnight Guardians pack had a reputation of being neutral. They didn't engage in squabbles with other packs, but they were not particularly close to any packs either, and this was different.

The Midnight Guardians pack was an unknown power in the society of werewolves. No one knew where they were or how big they are, but everyone knew that they were mysterious and they shouldn't be provoked.

If Alpha Maddox managed to create a tight relationship with the Midnight Guardians pack, that would be a serious issue. What if they were forming alliances to take over other territories? Anything was possible.

Nora was sitting among the guests and rolling her eyes at all the uninformed people. If they knew... if only they knew all things she swore to keep to herself... but she couldn't say a peep about Talia or Damon or that James was walking there with his girlfriend! Alpha Natalia's special advisor!?! The only thing special was how stupid all people were!

Nora scowled at the ignorance around her and she cursed her luck because she finally had something huge, something no one knew and everyone would like to know, yet her mouth was sealed. This was pure torture!

As bridesmaids and groomsmen took their places, the music changed, and all guests stood up while looking at the back.

Waves of 'Ohs' and 'Ahs' were heard when Tatiana appeared at the double door of the packhouse that opened to the garden.

Tatiana walked elegantly with her father on her left and her mother on her right. Both Wilkow parents proudly held their heads high while leading their daughter in slow steps toward the podium where Maddox waited with the Shaman and the rest of the wedding party.

Maddox stared at his strawberry-infused Goddess, and he was sure that she was glowing.

Tatiana's hair was braided with small white flowers and lifted in a circular shape to form a crown; the flowers were sprinkled with glitter to give it a shine, like a real crown would have.

Tatiana had an exquisite necklace with sapphires and matching earrings dangled above Maddox's mark that showed clearly on her fair skin.

Maddox smirked as his werewolf-enhanced sight allowed him to see his mark clearly. That was his mark. He did that. And that gorgeous woman walking toward him was his!

Chapter 737 Tanya's Luna ceremony (4)

Tatiana's wedding dress was a masterpiece that came from the studio of the "Dama T". It was a white satin A-line strapless gown with a sweetheart neckline and a snug bodice that shimmered with golden embroidery. The skirt was flowy, and it ended with an inch-wide royal-blue rim that was touching the ground.

Tatiana's chest swelled with pride when she heard comments about the back of her dress. The royal blue fabric followed her spine before spreading along the skirt to meet the rim at the bottom, and the golden embroidery gave it a dose of luxurious sparkle and shine.

The gown was elegant, body-flattering, and not over the top, precisely what "Dama T" stood for. Tatiana was confident that after this fashionable display, she will have a lot of custom orders.

Tatiana was about halfway through their guests when her eyes met Maddox's, and the world faded. His intense gaze was making her stomach tighten, and she could feel his desire to get closer to her, close enough to touch.

Tatiana couldn't stop staring at Maddox, who stood there like a God of sex, and she wondered if he looked so good in the suit or if his image was enhanced by her familiarity with his naked body, or because she knew very well what he could do with his body. Every inch of him was made for carnal pleasures... for her.

She exhaled a long breath, hoping that she won't get aroused more because her parents were right there!

Tatiana already had a ceremony where she became the Luna of the Blue River pack, and this was just for show and to entertain their friends, family, and other guests, but somehow... it felt special as well. Everything about her coffee-infused hunkalicious mate was special.

Tatiana climbed the podium with her parents flanking her, and her father put her hand into Maddox's with, "Take care of my angel, Alpha Maddox."

"I will," Maddox responded without missing a beat. "What's mine is Tanya's, and I will treat her as my equal."

Tatiana's father nodded at Maddox, kissed each of Tatiana's cheeks, and then he took a step back.

"Make her happy," Tatiana's mother said while letting go of Tatiana's hand so that Maddox could hold it.

"I will do my best, Mrs. Wilkow.", Maddox responded in a rare show of respect.

The older woman was pleased to see an Alpha lowering himself to treat them as equals.

The Wilkow parents were worried when they heard that Kalina and Tatiana were mated to Alphas, but little by little, their prejudices were chipping away.

"Mom," she corrected him. "From today, it's mom."

Maddox smiled a little. Behind that firm facade was a woman who was accepting him as part of their family. He didn't really care about being accepted by this woman, but she was Tatiana's mother, and he knew that it meant a lot to Tatiana, which made it important to him as well. He would do anything to put a smile on Tatiana's face.

"Mom.", Maddox said, and he could feel the joy pouring into him from Tatiana.

With Tatiana's parents stepping down to join the audience, Maddox was able to focus on his mate.

'You are beautiful,' Maddox told Tatiana through their mind-link.

'And you are handsome,' she returned the compliment.

He smirked. 'The time you spent on that dress was worth it.'

Tatiana loved when he praised her work.

At first, Tatiana thought of Maddox as a handsome horny airhead, but as she got to know him and the work he does, she realized that he was a capable fighter, a fearless leader, a sharp businessman, and a person who takes care of his pack members and many others who were discarded by society as weak and unwanted. Maddox believed everyone deserved a second chance, and Tatiana admired him for it.

When she compared her fashion business with all the things Maddox was doing, her achievements seemed insignificant, and she felt lucky that such an impressive guy would want her as his mate.

Besides being amazing in every way, Maddox treated her with care and thought about her needs. He visited her office in Europe to see where she worked, and then he secured her a fantastic new business space that was much more compared to what she had before. He helped her transfer the company and her existing employees to the US, and advised her how to handle the move of the ones who were coming, as well as severance packages for those who didn't want to leave Europe.

Since accepting Maddox as her mate, Tatiana realized that she was not alone; her mate was a capable person she could rely on, knowledgeable about the business world, and full of valuable guidance even though he had never worked in fashion.

Maddox encouraged her to continue pursuing her interests, and the only thing he asked for was that they stay together. How could she stick to one thing when Maddox handled many? The least she could do was to be his Luna and help him manage their pack.

Tatiana had no idea how to be a Luna, but she was confident that with Maddox's support, she will do just fine.

'I'm glad you approve,' Tatiana said to Maddox through their mind-link. 'I made this dress while thinking of you.'

It was white because it was a wedding dress, the royal-blue details were because blue color represented the Blue River pack, and the golden embroidery symbolized their status as Alpha and Luna. The dress was not only elegant and well-fitting but full of meaning as well.

'Too bad it will end up in tatters when this ceremony is over. I will fuck you thoroughly until you don't feel sorry for the dress.'

Tatiana felt her insides throbbing. Oh, God! She was getting aroused, right there!

'Is that a promise, Alpha Maddox?'

Maddox gave her a lopsided smile, and she pressed her legs together. It was a promise, one she knew he could fulfill.

The Shaman cleared his throat to get everyone's attention, and then he started chanting in an obscure language no one could understand.

The sun flashed in the last goodbye, and the darkness fell. A moment later, the fairy lights wrapped around the streamers turned on automatically, giving it another splash of magical atmosphere, and guests did more 'Ohs' and 'Ahs' again.

Tatiana could hear Mario sniffing from the front row of the audience. The photosensitive fairy lights were his idea, and she wondered if Mario was crying because everything turned out perfect or because she was getting married. He wouldn't cry because Maddox was taken, right? RIGHT?

Subconsciously, Tatiana scooted closer to Maddox, who quickly put his arm around her waist as they faced the Shaman.

Damon was looking around and taking mental notes while observing Talia's reactions. She loved the fairy lights. He will definitely add those to her Luna ceremony, but there will be more of them. Talia's Luna ceremony needed to be better and bigger than any other!

He wanted to make her feel special because she was special. The best. Damon decided to invite everyone. Their friends will share their joy, and their enemies will drown in sorrow and jealousy when they realize that the two most powerful Alphas in their generation were fated mates, and there was absolutely nothing they could do about it.

Chapter 738 Tanya's Luna ceremony (5)

Damon couldn't look away from Talia. He was confident that he was the luckiest guy in the world. She was beyond beautiful. And under that enchanting facade, Talia was kind and powerful, and he will give her the best Luna ceremony ever! That was something even Sapa agreed on.

Everyone will know who Talia is, and no one will doubt that she is his mate. His only one.

'You are next, kitten,' Damon's voice sounded in Talia's head through their private mind-link.

'That sounded like a threat,' she responded without looking at him.

He cleared his throat to suppress incoming laughter. To think that only weeks ago, this cheeky female was shrinking whenever he talked to her.

'I hope you will think of it as a promise, kitten. I will spend the rest of my life making you happy.'

Her eyes drifted toward him to meet his gaze. 'And I will make you happy, Damon.'

'You are already doing that. By existing, you are giving me a reason to live.'

An immense amount of love flowed into Talia through their mate bond, and Talia's knees shook. She really wanted to kiss him and hold him tightly until the end of time, but they had a lot of eyes on them, and this was about Maddox and Tatiana.

'I know I shouldn't say this, but... I can't wait for this event to be over,' Talia shared her thoughts.

'Me too. Me too', Damon responded in a singing voice.

Talia struggled to peel her eyes off Damon and focus on the ceremony. She was looking forward to this, and it was a one-time thing and it would be a pity to miss something important because she was flirting with Damon.

'Would you like us to have a ceremony like this, princess?' Gideon's voice sounded in Mindy's head. He could see that she looked at Maddox and Tatiana with longing, and for the first time in his life, Gideon disliked his position. If he was an Alpha, he could give her a ceremony and status, and like this...

'How about we celebrate every year on the day we met?' Mindy responded. 'Just the two of us.'

The unspoken promises of carnal pleasures hid behind Mindy's words; Gideon could feel them as the pressure in his groin area increased.

Another guy disliking that he was not an Alpha was James. He looked at Cornelia and regretted that he won't be able to give her a ceremony like this, the one that would include a whole pack looking at them as their leaders. That was reserved for Alphas and their Lunas, and no matter how awesome Cornelia was, she won't be a Luna because he was not an Alpha. Stinky bloodline. If James knew who his real father was, he would give him a beating, but he couldn't snoop around that because if Alpha Edward catches a whiff of how James was not his son... James had no idea what would happen.

Cornelia caught James' gaze and smiled, pleased that he was looking at her.

Actually, all the couples on that podium were looking at each other, and Varya felt like an outsider. She noticed Kalina eyeing Tony, Meg looking at Kai, Maya and Caden were smiling foolishly, and... what about her? Sure, Oliver was handsome and available, but there was nothing more to it, and seeing all these mates, Varya wanted more!

Varya remembered that Kalina said how Talia has the power to attract mates, and Varya decided to stick close to Talia.

...

The moment the ceremony was complete, James rushed to Cornelia's side, offering her his arm to hold on to. Alpha Edward said that James should leave a good impression on Cornelia, treat her well, and stick close to her, and James had every intention of doing so.

After a round of congratulations, James led Cornelia to the tables where bridesmaids and groomsmen were sitting; three tables were set for eight people to accommodate a party of twenty-four. James loved that he will have dinner with his chocolate-colored Goddess. Every seat had a nametag, and his name was next to Cornelia's. Perfect.

Now that James thought about it, he had no idea how he would endure if they ended up sitting at different tables. What if he was stuck with the group from the Red Moon pack? What if Cornelia had another guy as her walking partner? Would that bastard sit next to her? Would he flirt? James' insides shook with rage at that thought.

"Jay... Jay..." Cornelia called, snapping him out of his thoughts. "I think you should stop putting food on my plate."

James' hand paused midair. He was holding a fork with an appetizer stuck on it that was on the way to Cornelia's plate, and there were three pieces on that plate already. Did he put them there? Probably.

Robotically, his hands moved, and he put that appetizer in his mouth. She was right. He needed to focus and not feed her tonight, at least not in front of everyone to see.

"How is your leg?" James asked. "Did you twist your ankle?"

She was not sure if she twisted her ankle, but... "It's fine when I'm sitting."

"Are you sure?" James licked his lips nervously. "If you are in pain, I can help you to your room and get food and..."

Cornelia's eyes flashed in panic. Was he about to talk about sex? They were surrounded by werewolves, and someone was eavesdropping!

"Uhm," she cleared her throat. "I am fine, for now. If it gets worse, I will let you know." It's not that she didn't want privacy with James, but if they left before dinner was served, everyone would notice!

She wanted to change the topic. "How did you become the groomsman?"

James glanced toward Talia, who was standing nearby with Tatiana, Kalina, Varya, Meg, and a few more females. "Someone called and said they are one groomsman short, and I agreed to fill in the spot."

Cornelia quickly put the pieces together, remembering that Talia said she had the perfect groomsman, and James ended up being marked on the list as X. Cornelia loved that James got to be her partner, but she didn't appreciate the surprise factor. So much stress could be avoided if Cornelia knew what Talia was up to!

James leaned closer to Cornelia and spoke in a whisper, "My father will want to meet you."

Cornelia held her breath. His words splashed on her cheek, close to her ear, and she almost turned to kiss him. He was so close, and the temptation was maddening.

"When?" She asked.

James was not sure. "Probably after dinner."

James was not comfortable with Alpha Edward coming close to Cornelia. What if he gets funny ideas about Cornelia? What if he does something that crosses the line? So far, James didn't care what his father did, but now it was different.

"Miss Cornelia," James called in an official tone and stared into her brown eyes seriously. "Whenever your leg or anything else is causing you discomfort, let me know, and I will handle it."

"Alright," Cornelia responded with a smile, knowing that 'anything else' included his father. But Cornelia had no intention of making James do all the work. After all, she came here to help.

Chapter 739 Babies!

Mario sashayed among the crowd with two glasses of champagne in his hands, and he was going straight for Tatiana.

"Aww...", Tatiana gushed at the sight of her trustworthy assistant, the relief she felt now that the ceremony was over, helped her relax. "Here is the man who made this possible."

Mario rolled his eyes exaggeratedly. "You made this possible. I made it fabulous!" He handed one of the glasses to Tatiana. "How about a drink now?"

"Absolutely!" Tatiana exclaimed and grabbed the glass, eager to down it when Talia grabbed her hand.

"I don't think you should.", Talia said. Liseli sneered into Talia's mind that pregnant women shouldn't be drinking, and Talia acted on an impulse.

"Is there something wrong with the drink?" Tatiana asked, and in the next moment, Maddox was next to her and glaring at Mario.

Maddox was standing a few steps away with Damon, Oliver, and a few others, but his attention was on Tatiana.

Talia could see that Maddox's fury was tangible as he was ready to punish Mario for the allegedly spiked drink, so Talia quickly spoke, "No, no! It's just that..." She inched closer to Tatiana and spoke in a whisper. "Should you be drinking in your condition?"

Tatiana didn't get it. "What condition?"

Talia glanced at Tatiana's stomach. "Don't you know?"

Tatiana sucked in a sharp breath when she realized... "Are you saying I'm pregnant?" Her hand instinctively moved to her perfectly flat abdomen.

Meg clapped excitedly. "Talia can sense these things. She told Yasmin that she was pregnant before anyone knew."

Talia smiled nervously. It was not about sensing but about Liseli, but Talia couldn't say that.

Mario covered his mouth with his hand. His expression looked like he was screaming, but no sound came out.

Maddox's jaw fell slack open. Did he hear this right?

Tatiana stared at Talia, silently asking her if she was sure, and wondering if that was the truth. A mother! She will be a mother! But she didn't dare show her emotions. What if Talia was wrong?

Kalina nudged frozen Tatiana with her shoulder. "Why are you so surprised? Didn't you have your heat last week?"

"You had your heat?", Varya asked. "How come Kalina knows about it, and I don't?"

"Why are you making this about you?" Kalina snapped at her sister.

Kalina wouldn't know either if Tatiana didn't call her to say that she will be late from Europe and that Kalina needed to handle some matters related to the preparations for the Luna ceremony. Tatiana thought she was sick because she had a fever, but then it turned out it was the heat, and Maddox was there already, and their flight back in the private jet was eventful.

Varya pouted. Now that Kalina and Tatiana were mated to Alphas in the US, the two sisters became closer compared to the other three, and today Daria and Lidia joined that group also, and Varya felt neglected. Varya wanted to complain about injustice, but to whom can she complain with those arguments?

Maddox was still processing the bomb that Talia threw at them. Was Tatiana really pregnant? With his pup? He will be a father?

Well, of course, he will be a father, he was working hard on planting his seeds into his strawberry-infused Goddess before, during, and after her heat, but he didn't think it would happen right now, so soon. He was not ready! Was he ready?

He stared at Tatiana's stomach like he could see inside.

"Max..." Tatiana called breathily. "Am I really...?"

Before she could finish that question, Maddox scooped her in his arms and walked toward the packhouse.

Maddox's eyes lost focus, and he ignored nearby people who attempted to approach them with congratulations.

People from the side commented how Alpha Maddox can't wait for some privacy with his Luna, but Tatiana knew that this was not about a quicky.

"What's going on?" Tatiana asked Maddox.

"The pack doctor will meet us inside. I want him to check. I want to make sure..." By now, they were in the side room on the first floor, and Maddox lowered Tatiana to sit on the sofa so gently like she might fall apart at the slightest pressure. He kneeled in front of her and leaned his head on her stomach.

Tatiana ran her fingers through his hair as a warm smile spread on her face. She could feel his excitement and happiness, and there was no need for words between them, not at that moment.

Tatiana relished the fact that she could make him happy, which made her happy as well. Now only if the pack doctor could confirm the pregnancy, that would be perfect.

Outside, the news about Tatiana's pregnancy quickly spread among friends who were standing there.

Meg, Mindy, and Maya were bouncing from excitement, and then Meg turned to Talia.

"What about me?" Meg asked.

Talia didn't get it. "What about you?"

Meg glanced at her stomach, and Talia understood.

'Liseli?' Talia called.

Liseli snorted. 'What am I? A pregnancy test?'

'If it's difficult, you can say so,' Talia remarked.

'Pregnant,' Liseli grumbled. 'And before you ask, the other two are not pregnant. The Shaman's mate will be in heat in five days, while the other in about a month.'

Talia understood that the 'other two' were Mindy and Maya, and she was unsure if it was wise to comment on the upcoming heat with so many people listening. She decided to talk to Mindy and Maya later and to focus on her pregnant Beta.

Talia grinned at Meg. "Congratulations, Meg."

"What did you say?" Kai asked breathily from the side.

Meg looked at Kai, and tears filled her eyes. "Baby, Kai. It's a baby."

Kai swayed a bit, and then he snapped to his senses to envelop Meg into his embrace and shower her face with kisses while she giggled.

After some time, Kai stopped and looked at Meg. "Do you want to visit your family?"

Meg glanced at Talia, silently asking for permission.

How can Talia say, no? She knew that Meg didn't see her family since she got mated to Kai, and now they had even a baby on the way. "Be careful. Don't travel alone. After this event, you can join Kalina and Tony to reach the Lightclaw pack."

Meg and Kai both thanked Talia, and then they started chattering if their baby was a boy or a girl.

"Aren't you going to do a test and confirm?", Varya asked the excited couple.

Meg refused. "No need. Our Alpha said that we are expecting, so we are expecting."

Talia was touched by this show of trust, and her eyes instinctively drifted toward Damon.

Damon held his hands in his pants pockets as a reminder that he shouldn't hold onto Talia. When he agreed to keep her real identity a secret, he didn't know it would be this hard to stay away. Well, he was not really staying away; there were no more than a few steps between them at any given moment, but he needed her in the touching distance. The lack of addictive sparks their bond provided was driving him crazy.

'How about we go and sit at the table?' Talia's voice sounded in Damon's mind, and he was quick to agree.

Damon and Talia sat at the same table where James, Cornelia, Meg, and Kai were. Tony and Kalina joined as well.

Damon stared at the food, wondering if it will be OK to put some of it on Talia's plate.

He jolted when he felt a squeeze on his knee, and he glanced under the table to see Talia's hand there, palm up, her fingers wiggling impatiently.

Damon smiled at the memory of how he used to do that to her whenever she was late with handholding.

His hand slid over hers, their fingers interlaced, and his heart was in place.

Chapter 740 Kim Dorsey [Bonus chapter]

In one of the buildings that served as a shelter for single she-wolves...

Marcy was in the common room with a number of other people and watching on the television the live stream from Tatiana's Luna ceremony.

Other than two volunteers from the Blue River pack, the rest were females that had nowhere to go. They were abandoned and abused by family, lovers, friends, strangers, people they trusted, and people they never met before... everyone in that room had a different story to tell, and the common point was that they all came to the Blue River pack in the search for a place to stay. Some of them had a plan and some sought guidance, but they all needed time to prepare for whatever life threw at them next.

At that moment, everyone was focused on what was on the screen. Luna's ceremonies don't happen every day, and this was impacting the Blue River pack, so it was important.

The lively chatter covered commentaries related to people and their outfits, couples recognized, and what they were eating and drinking. It was like a competition who would recognize it first.

Marcy sat in the back and watched scenes on the television with an unreadable expression.

That could be her. That should be her. That WOULD be her if things didn't take the wrong turn.

As the only daughter of the Alpha of the Red Moon pack, Marcy would have a fantastic Luna ceremony, maybe even more glamorous than this one. She was set to be Damon's Luna, the Luna of the largest pack in North America, but then everything collapsed, and she was left with nothing.

Since she came to the Blue River pack, Marcy attended courses for online marketing. She was not interested in it, but everyone who came here had to show a desire to heal and improve.

After experiencing her family using her, Damon discarding her, and James betraying her, Marcy's goal was to become self-sufficient, leave this world of packs and live in a human town.

The courses she took were not challenging, but Marcy was not motivated to keep going. She was lost in depression, and no one could understand what she went through because she didn't dare to reveal her real identity. Marcy cut her hair in a bob and dyed it black, and she became a different person. Here, people knew her as Kim Dorsey, a woman who was abandoned by her family and her lover because she lost her wolf. Well, that was close to the truth.

Other females here were learning how to clean, cook, manage bills, set up the table, and do other things that an Omega could do. Since George accepted her rejection, Marcy lost her wolf, and she couldn't plan her future that included a pack.

Without her wolf, Marcy was no more than a human, and the only reference she had to how a wolf-less she-wolf could live in a pack was that scrawny female that used to stay in the attic of the Red Moon pack. There was no way Marcy would allow such a fate to befall her. Marcy spent a decade in Europe learning various skills, but those were useful for a housekeeper or a maid or a Luna, and she was too old for dancing, so she decided to learn something new, something with the potential to earn her a lot of money, so here she is.

Damn it! None of this would be needed if Damon cooperated and made her his Luna!

Marcy wondered, when did her life start going downhill?

She didn't have many memories of her early childhood, but her teen years in Europe were comfortable. She was the princess of the second largest pack in North America, and money was never lacking. She was wearing branded clothes and was surrounded by friends, and she couldn't understand how quickly it all collapsed.

Did it start when she returned from Europe? How would her life be now if she stayed there? How would her life unfold if, at that time, she told her parents that she didn't want to be Alpha Damon's Luna?

Or did things take the wrong turn when she rejected George? What would happen if she embraced him and faced her parents with, 'This is my mate'? It couldn't be worse than this.

Or was this all Talia's fault? Indeed, without Talia's presence, Damon wouldn't be so adamant about pushing Marcy away. Marcy remembered those brief moments when Damon treated her as his future Luna. It was not super lovey-dovey, but he was not ignoring her either. She remembered that when he visited the Red Moon pack, Damon was quite eager to get into her panties. Ah, if she knew that things would end like this, she wouldn't push him away, their engagement would be set, and she would be Luna of the Dark Howlers pack now. Unfortunately, that boat sailed away without Marcy on it.

And there was Damon, on that television screen, dashing in a royal-blue suit that matched his eyes which were focused on a female next to him. People called her Alpha Natalia Moonrider, and even though Marcy had never heard of that woman, she looked familiar. Was that Talia's twin sister or Talia herself? It didn't matter. Even if that was Talia, Damon's mate, and Marcy said it, people will ask how she knew and demand proof, and Marcy was not in a position to stir waves.

She even saw her parents sitting there, enjoying food, and chatting, like Marcy never existed. Even that slut, Nora, was there. Marcy wondered if her mother knew that Nora was sleeping with Alpha Edward.

As a reminder of her delicate situation, Marcy was warned that her family would be in attendance, and if she could stay in her room, that would be perfect, especially on the next day when delegations from other packs will do the tour of the facilities.

Marcy narrowed her eyes when the camera moved over the tables, and she spotted James sitting next to Cornelia. She thought they were just part of the wedding party, but those three seconds were enough for her to notice how James looked at Cornelia. It was different. And why did that woman look familiar? Where did Marcy see her before? Did their father approve of James socializing with that woman?

Marcy released a dejected sigh. It didn't matter. Her parents, Nora, Damon, Talia, James... none of those mattered.

The only thing Marcy could do was sit and watch her family enjoying the good life.

Marcy thought how her life was pathetic. She lost not one but two Alphas and the position as the princess of the Red Moon pack. That must be some major misfortune. Was there any point in continuing to live?

A slight tug on the sleeve made Marcy snap into a reality where she was Kim Dorsey.

Marcy blinked to focus on the ten years-old orphaned girl who was brought in last week.

The girl was covered in cuts and bruises, and she was malnourished. The girl didn't say a word, so they assumed she was mute. There was nothing wrong with her physically, and the diagnosis was that she didn't speak due to trauma.

The doctors and psychologists working there said that the girl was neglected and abused and that she will communicate when she was ready. Without knowing the girl's name, they called her Jane.

For a reason Marcy couldn't explain, the girl that didn't want to get close to anyone, was sticking to her.

"Yes, Jane?" Marcy asked.

The girl extended her arms toward Marcy, silently asking for a hug.

Marcy released a long breath and pulled the girl to sit on her lap.

Silly girl, Marcy thought. Marcy was unable to fix herself, yet here was this girl, asking Marcy to take care of her. Or maybe the girl sensed Marcy's low mood and came here to comfort her? Anything was possible.

Jane pointed at the television, and Marcy understood that she wanted to understand what was happening there.

"Alpha of the Blue River pack crowned his Luna," Marcy started explaining. "That makes her the queen of this pack, so people are celebrating. There was a ceremony for everyone to see they are mates, and now they are about to serve dinner..."

Jane hopped from Marcy's lap and went to the side table to fetch two meat buns. They were never lacking food here, but today was special, for everyone to celebrate their new Luna.

Marcy accepted the meat bun and let Jane sit back on her lap. They both munched on the dough filled with spiced meat, and Marcy continued her explanations.