

Alphas Bride 791

## Chapter 791: Plans for Grady (2)

"How can rogues use Grady against us?" Talia asked. "He was seen here, and we will take him to the Dark Howlers pack secretly."

James released a long breath. "No offense, Talia, but you are too naive."

Talia frowned. What did he mean by, no offense? It was offensive, alright?

Talia would ask for moral support from Damon, but Damon told her more than once that she was too soft, so she guessed that Damon would probably just agree with James. And even if Damon defended her, he would do it because she is his mate and not because he believed it.

She decided to show some backbone. "What does my personality have to do with Grady?"

"Nothing," James said. "But because you are so kind and inexperienced, you can't see how dirty people can be. Your best quality is also your biggest flaw."

"I am not sure if you are complimenting or insulting me," Talia shared her thoughts.

"Oh, it's a compliment. Trust me," James said. "Consider yourself lucky that Alpha Damon is your mate. If it's any other Alpha..." James shook his head and decided to get back to the topic they discussed. Grady, the rogue.

"When Grady met Tristan and their group, he was stupid enough to believe that rogues are good guys. He was probably so happy that he spilled everything about his life in the human city. Grady said that his mother had passed, but what about his friends? Ex-girlfriends? There are so many ways to blackmail Grady into obedience, and if you think that the blood oath will protect you, I can tell you that you are wrong because there is always a way to go around an obstacle you are aware of."

"That still doesn't explain how rogues can use Grady. Don't they need to approach him first? How will they approach him if they don't know where he is?" Talia asked, feeling proud of herself for thinking of this.

"And that's how we are getting to the point of the Wilkow sister, Varya," James said with a smug smirk like he was waiting for that question.

"What about her?" It was Cornelia who asked. She loved when James displayed his smarts.

James' expression softened as he looked at his chocolate-colored Goddess. "No matter how much they hide Grady, they can't hide a Wilkow sister. Kalina and Tatiana are Lunas and too high profile. After last night's live stream, everyone saw Varya standing among the bridesmaids. And there were also numerous photos taken by reporters. Do you think that she can go into public and not be recognized? Once Tristan hears how a Wilkow sister was clinging onto his man, it won't be difficult to find Grady."

Talia's mood dropped at James' words. She knew he was right, and now that he said it, it sounded logical. Why didn't she think of that herself?

Damon didn't like this. "Are you saying we must stage Grady's death and then hide them? Or should we ask them to wear disguises wherever they go?" If it's for a limited time, it would be feasible. But what if it takes forever? Damon regretted offering Grady to come to the Dark Howlers pack. Killing him would be simpler. Maybe he can make it look like an accident, preferably before Grady and Varya mate.

'Mate won't approve,' Sapa spoke into Damon's mind.

'She won't approve only if she finds out about it.'

'More lies?'

Damon was exasperated. Why was Sapa coming out only to scold him? Praise or two would be nice!

'I have no intention of lying,' Damon grumbled at the ancient wolf spirit. 'I am only trying to keep Talia safe. In case you missed it, the last night's mess was because someone wanted to get his hands on Talia, and we have no idea who that is. What do you suggest I do?'

'Use your position and power to solve the problem without upsetting mate,' Sapa said sternly.

"There is another way," James said mysteriously, pulling Damon out of his mental chat with Sapa.

"What way?" Damon asked.

"Use Grady to your advantage."

Damon didn't get it. "We can use Grady to send misinformation, but I don't see how that would help. Now that we know where Tristan's hideout is, we can just wipe them off."

James shook his head, indicating how that was not what he meant. "It's obvious that a small rogue like Tristan couldn't be behind last night's attack. Someone else organized them, but Grady is too low in the hierarchy of rogues to know anything useful."

Damon thought how that makes sense, but... "Rogues don't keep databases we can hack into, and they don't share their secrets either. What can a newbie like Grady do?"

James thought for a moment before responding. "It's a long shot, but... if Grady could help us get to that Lisa person, he would be useful. As someone who has access to the information from your pack, she is a valuable resource to Tristan, and he will not let her leave his sight."

Damon rubbed his chin while thinking about James' words. If Tristan won't leave Lisa out of his sight, the probability was high that... "Lisa should know who was behind this."

James' eyes flashed in agreement. "If I understood the situation correctly, Lisa still belongs to your pack. Even among rogues, Tristan has a nasty reputation. He has a way with words and a short fuse. The rumors about him involve crippling people, and he doesn't use tools or weapons to achieve that." James lifted his fist, indicating that Tristan beats up people who disobey him. "I am confident that Lisa is not

having an easy time there. You can mind-link her, but in order to make her submit, she needs to come to you. Grady is one of them, and he can help her escape Tristan."

Talia shook her head. "Even if we find a way to get Grady to cooperate, you assume that Lisa wants to escape Tristan. Lisa is a tantrum-throwing person, unable to hold back her grudges, and her mother adores her. The last thing I heard, Stephanie was happily talking about how Lisa finding her mate. Assuming that it's Tristan and he is mistreating Lisa, Lisa is set on hiding it, otherwise, Stephanie would go ballistic."

It was James' turn to pause. "It doesn't matter if Lisa won't or can't escape her abuser. What matters is that her mother won't approve after finding the truth."

Talia's eyes widened. "You want us to use Stephanie to get Lisa out of there?"

James spread his hands, palms up. "I am only telling you that you found the information you can use to get an advantage. How will you use it, it's up to you. Considering Lisa's unique position, if I were you, I would make a solid effort in getting her out of there and into my custody."

Damon ran his hand through his hair. Many things James said made sense, but everything was risky.

"We can storm that place and extract Lisa," Damon said.

James disapproved. "If Tristan knows that Lisa was close to you, and he probably does, he will use her as a hostage. Another thing is that he will know that Lisa is a double-edged sword, and he might eliminate her at the first sign of your attack. In either case, you won't win."

Damon cursed under his breath. James was right. Those were rogues, and they won't flinch when killing.

### **Chapter 792: Buttering up James**

Damon looked at Talia, and he wondered how much he was failing her. He brought her to the Dark Howlers pack with a promise of a home, food, and access to medical care. He got her all that, but it came with a baggage of endless troubles. Just when he thought they resolved one thing, two more would pop up. Damn it!

How could he call himself an Alpha when he couldn't give his Luna a comfortable life? And this was not about a comfortable life. It was about preserving Talia's life.

Just last night, Talia was in the forest, fighting rogues, and he had no idea she was in danger!

What if something happened to her? How could he step in front of his people and expect them to believe he will protect them when he couldn't protect his mate? How could he look into the mirror knowing that Talia was harmed on his watch?

The anguish ripped his heart into pieces at the thought that Talia was nearly kidnapped. What would they do to her? What if he couldn't find her? What if... Damon balled his hands into fists until his knuckles turned white.

Talia didn't know what was on Damon's mind, but she could sense that his mood was off. Actually, he looked a bit murderous.

"Damon? Damon?" She called. "It will be alright. We will figure this out."

Damon stared at Talia blankly. Was she comforting him?

He reached for her and hugged her tightly until there was no space between them.

"Promise you won't leave my side," he said.

Talia nodded right away and asked, "Do you need rest, or can we address some important things?"

Damon released a sharp breath. "I am OK. Let's do this."

He was squeezing her, which told her he was not OK, but James and Cornelia were watching, so she wanted to make this quick.

"Three things. First, we need to find out how much Stephanie knows about the current situation and to confirm if she was the one tipping off Lisa. Second, Grady and Varya will enter our pack in a low-key manner, and we will try to isolate them as much as possible. And third, when we reach home, I want us to meet with Lulu's father personally. Do you think we can do that?"

Damon confirmed. Visiting Lulu's father will be emotionally challenging, but there were no obstacles to make it happen. As for the other two... "Maya will ask Rosa to prepare one side-house for Grady and Varya. I am hoping that Gideon can do the ceremony right away, and with them being a newly-mated couple, they won't come out of the house for days. By then, we will figure out what to do with them. The fastest method to find out who is working with rogues would be to get our hands on Lisa, but she is with Tristan now, and that won't be easy."

Damon rubbed his forehead while thinking about other options. "I can use my aura to force Stephanie and others in the packhouse to confess, but that will tip them off, and the innocents will be offended. We can go with the roundabout tactic by telling a different lie to each person and keeping an eye on Tristan's movements..." Damon's voice trailed, and he turned to look at James.

"Do you have any spies that can keep an eye on rogues?" Damon asked.

James' eyes widened. "You want to spy on rogues?"

Damon confirmed. "I wish to find out about Lisa's situation."

James thought for a moment before responding, "I don't have anyone, but my father might. Give me a second..." It took him a second to think of something. "I will take care of it."

Damon was surprised by James' confidence. "You will?"

"My father expects secretive information since I'm spending time with Alpha Natalia's special advisor. I will tell him I overheard you talking how one of your close friends got mated to Tristan. If I say that she grew up in the packhouse as your sister, I'm confident that my father will not spare resources to investigate that."

"You can also say that Lisa was Tony's girlfriend," Talia said.

Damon's face fell. "That's right. Lisa had information on the Lightclaw pack also. We should warn Tony and Kalina."

"This will make my father more interested in her," James said. "With any luck, my father might try to get his hands on the female so that he can get information from her personally." There was also an option of Alpha Edward and Tristan collaborating, but James didn't want to mention that. Whether they were associated or not, Tristan won't give up on Lisa willingly.

Damon liked James' plan. The boy was a genius. Will it be too early to ask him to join the Dark Howlers pack as a Gamma?

"If you ever consider leaving the Red Moon pack, I might have a position for you," Damon said.

James was surprised by this switch of topics. "What kind of a position?"

"A high-ranking one. You just need to say you are willing."

James shook his head. "I am flattered, but I must ask, are you willing to risk my father starting an open war?"

Damon pursed his lips. He knew that James had a point, but... "You could be my Gamma. That position will grant you liberties and power you don't have now. In the Dark Howlers pack, you and your mate can be together openly. As for the war... my future Gamma is the smartest guy I ever met. I'm sure he will figure out how to make it work."

James was aware that Damon was sweet-talking him into trouble, but hearing Damon praising him felt damn good. His father never did anything like that.

Any good words that left Alpha Edward's lips about James were when he was talking to others, how James was his son, the best future Alpha, and how their pack will prosper. It was just an empty talk Alpha Edward used to make himself look better. It had nothing to do with James.

That was why this was different. There were no witnesses and no benefits, and James knew that Damon meant it. Alpha Damon of the Dark Howlers pack called James the smartest guy he ever met, and that meant a lot.

"Your offer is appealing, Alpha Damon. I will consider it seriously," James said with a little bow.

Talia and Cornelia exchanged smiles, both hoping that this will work.

Talia liked Cornelia from the beginning, and having another high-ranking witch in the Dark Howlers pack would be a bonus.

Cornelia liked that she could move about in the Dark Howlers pack freely, Amelia was there, and it would all be a hundred folds better if James could be with her also. No more hiding.

James cleared his throat and said, "As for the issue with your mole, give me a few days, and I will let you know if my father takes the bait. I recommend that before you take Grady with you, you stage his death.

Make it look like guards beat him to death during interrogation. They can drag his body out of the dungeon for others to see. Regardless of what you do later, Tristan will believe that Grady is dead, so he won't come searching for him."

### **Chapter 793: Creating happy memories (J&C)**

After they finished talking about Lisa and rogues, James asked Damon and Talia if there was any other information they could give him about their packs that was not threatening. Considering how much time he spent away from Alpha Edward, he needed something to prove his worth.

They came up with a few stories that had just enough facts to make them believable yet not useful. James didn't plan on using those unless necessary; they were just in case his father got impatient and tried something crazy.

With that, James and Cornelia left with Cornelia's room as their intended destination.

Now that the official work was over, James was slightly embarrassed about his meltdown where he cried like a baby in front of his mate. That was not manly at all. Did she think less of him because of that?

James was grateful that Cornelia didn't bring it up, and he was happy that she didn't leave his side. She was letting him hold her, and she held onto him as well, like she understood that her proximity made everything better.

James' hand landed on the doorknob, and just as he pushed the door open, his eyes lost focus.

Cornelia noticed. "What is it?"

James looked at her with a complex expression. "My father wants to see me." He didn't want to leave.

"We knew this would happen," Cornelia said, and she pulled him into the room. "Hold me for a minute before you go."

James was quick to wrap his arms around Cornelia, happy that she was clingy. The confirmation that his beautiful mate wanted his proximity was the best thing ever.

He buried his face in the crook of her neck and inhaled her sweet scent of wild berries.

The time was running out, but instead of letting go of Cornelia, his hold on her intensified.

"Jay?" It was getting difficult to breathe.

"I don't want to go."

Cornelia didn't want him to go either, but... "You must. It's part of the play. To be honest, I am surprised he didn't call you earlier."

James realized she was right. During the night, James shut down his mind link. However, after returning to the packhouse in the morning, James was available, yet his father didn't reach out.

It was uncharacteristic, and James could think of only one possibility. "What if my father was part of last night's attack?"

"You don't know that."

James stepped away from Cornelia and rubbed his face while thinking aloud, "Didn't Damon say how my father didn't disturb Talia at the event? I remember how eager he was to get close to Alpha Natalia, the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack. Why would he stay away? Talia was right there, yet he only watched from the side. My father is not the one who will sit on the side and watch unless he has an agenda."

James started pacing around the room. "Should I believe that he was afraid of provoking Alpha Damon? Or that he put his hopes how I will open the door of the Midnight Guardians pack for him? Now that I think about it, it makes sense... he knew someone will try to kidnap Talia. And if he was behind it, it explains why he didn't approach her. It was because he was planning to talk to her later, when she was in his hands." And knowing Alpha Edward, it wouldn't be just talking. "We were thinking of using Lisa for information, yet the one behind it all was my father. How come I didn't see it?"

Cornelia moved to block his path, and he stopped an inch before they collided.

Cornelia poked his chest with her finger. "Stop doing this to yourself, James. No one expects you to know everything or to save the world. Edward Redmayne did many bad things, and you can't be responsible for them. I won't allow it."

James snorted. Saving the world? He was unable to save himself and his mate. How could he save others? Besides... "I did bad things also."

Cornelia cupped his cheeks with her palms. "And I am confident that whatever you did was to survive. I will never blame you for it. You are NOT like that man. He is hurting others for power, for greed. You are doing it to save yourself. There is a big difference between those two, Jay."

James knew she was right but knowing and putting it into practice were two different things.

It was easy to blindly follow Alpha Edward's orders when he didn't know who was impacted. But since he came to the Dark Howlers pack and met Damon, Talia, Maya, Caden, Petra, Erik, Zack, Cornelia, and many others, things changed. James changed.

People like Damon and Talia acknowledged him as a person, not as Alpha Edward's son, and not as the future Alpha of the Red Moon pack, but as a person.

Damon offered him a position of a Gamma in the largest pack in North America. And that would be because of what he, James, can do. And that meant the world.

James wondered, was he worthy of such a position?

What would a good Gamma do? Would he turn a blind eye and pretend that things were alright only so that he could survive?

James knew Lulu, and she was gone now. Even Marcy died, and if Alpha Edward was behind this attack, how can James move on like it had nothing to do with him?

But retaliation meant punishment, and probably more, and James now had to worry about himself and Cornelia. Putting Cornelia in danger was unacceptable.

James looked at Cornelia, whose deep brown eyes held so much love that he wished to stay in there forever. He didn't want to disappoint her because if she stopped looking at him like that, it would be the end of everything worth fighting for.

"What do you expect me to do?" James asked.

Cornelia's eyebrows shot up. If it were up to her, they would get rid of all problems with a spell, or maybe with a potion. They didn't need to kill anyone. Turning them into imbeciles would be enough. But she guessed that things couldn't be that simple. "You are asking me?"

"Yes. Should I come clean and face my father's wrath? With any luck, I might survive, and everything will be over. Or should we run? With different identities, they won't find us if we are careful. Or..."

"Kiss me."

James paused. It's not that he didn't want to, but how will that solve anything? "What?"

"You don't expect me to make a life-altering decision without thinking it through? I hear you want my input, and I will think about it. Once I come up with something, I will let you know, and until then... kiss me."

James smiled a bit and leaned to peck her lips, fearing that if he did more than that, he would drag her to bed, and then Alpha Edward would go ballistic because he had to wait.

The kiss was brief, too brief, and they stared at each other in silence because it was too soon for him to leave.

"Jay, there is no solution that will guarantee a happy future."

"So, what do you suggest?"

"We need to ensure a happy present. Plan for the future, but not to the point of freezing in fear because you don't see a way out now. No one can predict what the future will bring. However, if we do our best to enjoy the present, we will create happy memories which will help us stay strong when the times get tough."

James' eyes widened as he processed Cornelia's words.

"Ah! What are you doing?" She squeaked when he scooped her in his arms without any warning.

James lowered her to the bed. "Creating happy memories."

Cornelia opened her mouth to say something, but the words failed her when James' lips latched around his mark on her neck, and he started sucking.

The sensation was electrifying like someone rewired every cell in her body to be able to think about only one thing.



Her hands moved frantically to pull his shirt up, craving for that skin-to-skin contact that will relieve the throbbing need which swelled in her core, and James didn't resist as she undressed him with urgency.

No matter what Alpha Edward wanted and how long he waited, every minute without Cornelia was torturous, and James was set on creating happy memories that will help him stay strong until the next time they could be together.

#### **Chapter 794: Talia's rest**

Since James and Cornelia left, Damon showed no intention of releasing Talia from his hold.

Both of them were aware that this was not the time to idle, but they were finally alone, this was their moment of peace, and every second counted.

Talia marveled at the way how his arms circled her protectively. It was like he erected an invisible barrier that didn't allow anything to go through, isolating her from the trouble and noise around them.

Talia pressed her ear to Damon's chest and listened to his strong heartbeat that had the power to pacify her demons, and she wished they could stay like that forever.

His scent of the forest and the dark chocolate filled her existence a long time ago, yet it still felt fresh and soothing, like it was on the first day they met. Damon's scent urged her to get closer and stay there because only when they were together she could be at peace. He was her other half, her safe harbor, her home.

Talia felt herself sinking into Damon's embrace as the lack of energy hit her hard, but she couldn't give in to the fatigue because they had so many things to deal with.

"Damon?"

"Hmm?"

"Since we will be heading to the Dark Howlers pack today, I was thinking of telling Meg and Kai they can visit her parents. Without me around, they are not needed here, and I'm sure that Meg would rather spend two extra days with her family than stick around here."

Damon had no objections, but... "What about their safety? Tony and Kalina will stay until the end. Actually, with this mess from rogues, they might stay longer."

Talia remembered that Meg should travel with additional security. Now that her Beta was pregnant, shifting into wolf form or using powers was not allowed, which made Meg an easy target.

Talia got an idea. "I can ask Cornelia to teleport them."

While on the topic of Cornelia, Damon had to ask, "How long will the witch stay here?"

"Probably until James leaves. She can say that I had to deal with something in the pack, so she stayed behind as my representative. Considering that Cornelia can teleport, I'm not concerned about her."

"We should still not leave her on her own. What if someone provokes her, and she blasts them with her magic?"

Talia didn't think of this before, but now that Damon mentioned it, Talia could imagine Alpha Edward or one of his associates sneakily getting close to Cornelia when James is not around. With Cornelia's prideful nature and short temper, that won't end well. "We can ask Tanya and Max to assign a few Omegas to keep an eye on Cora when James is not around. No matter what someone is planning, they won't do it in front of witnesses."

Damon hummed in agreement with this.

"Can you handle Grady's fake death without me?" Talia asked Damon.

"Do you want to rest?" Damon guessed. "I can take care of that and ask Cornelia about teleporting Meg and Kai. Maya confirmed that Gideon can perform the ceremony whenever I am ready, and I can handle that also."

"Don't forget the blood oath." Talia reminded him.

Damon was pleased to hear that Talia was not opposed to making Grady and Varya take the blood oath. "I thought of doing that part together with you."

Talia didn't think it was important. "Just get them to pledge loyalty to you. I am your mate. Betraying me means betraying you."

Damon smiled. "Alright. While I deal with those things, you should be able to get at least two hours of sleep. I will join you when I'm done."

Talia was exhausted, but she was fairly confident that she won't be able to fall asleep. Especially not without Damon. And it didn't sound right to sleep when everyone else was so busy.

"I was thinking of going to visit Lulu. Caleb and Keith are there, and they could use a break."

"No." Damon refused sternly. He didn't want Talia to go there and break down again. "I want you to rest."

"I can't rest, Damon. I need to do something."

"Sure. Do whatever you want as long as it doesn't involve dead bodies or putting yourself in danger," Damon said sternly, and then his expression softened. "I am worried about you, kitten. I know you can't sleep, but I want you to rest. Do something relaxing. For me."

"I can help Tanya."

"No," Damon rejected that idea. How was that relaxing? "Now it's daytime, and she has plenty of people helping her." He could imagine that skinny assistant guy in flashy outfits buzzing around Tatiana. What if he gets close to Talia? Damon would slap him back to Europe. "If you are so energetic, you can come with me."

After Damon mentioned dead bodies, Talia realized she didn't want to be close to death, even if it was fake.

Talia decided to go with her next option. "I could use some time alone in nature."

Damon couldn't believe this. Did she learn anything last night?

"Alone? Nature?" He asked stiffly.

"Just to feel the unspoiled grass under my feet. You said to do something relaxing. Being in nature is what I always do to relax. I will find a spot in the shade and listen to the birds and not get into trouble. It's daytime, and I won't go far. What can happen?"

What can happen? Plenty!

Damon wanted to say no, but he held back. There must be a solution so Talia can do what she wants and do it safely.

"You can go to the edge of the forest," Damon said. "If the packhouse is not in your visual range, you ventured too far. Keith and Caleb will keep an eye on you from a distance. This is non-negotiable." And he will ask Maddox to assign some warriors to be in the area also. One could never be too careful because Talia was too precious, and she had a knack for getting herself into trouble.

...

Gregory moved between the tables that Omegas cleaned after a group of people finished eating.

He was there as help, but he had no intention of helping.

On the previous day, Gregory arrived later than planned because he found Vincent wandering around the Guardians' castle.

Vincent was supposed to bring information on Alpha Natalia and recent changes in the Midnight Guardians pack, but Vincent was disoriented and couldn't remember why he was there or anything related to the Midnight Guardians pack.

Gregory was running late, so he didn't have much time to check Vincent's condition, but Gregory guessed that Talia had to do something with it. After all, even Alphas couldn't touch them, and considering Talia's impressive performance with the sphere of power, she was the only suspect. That made Gregory even more curious about Talia.

Last night was wasted as he didn't get a chance to get close to Alpha Natalia. He saw her from a distance, with Alpha Damon hovering around her, but cameras and reporters were everywhere, and Gregory couldn't risk being caught by those lenses. Erasing a person is not a big deal, but if his face goes viral for thousands to see, it would be a problem.

However, the previous night was not a total waste. Thanks to the stupid rogues attacking, Gregory managed to pick up Talia's unique energy signature.

They used devices that messed with his perception, and due to the crowded forest, he didn't get too close, but it was close enough to know that Talia was surrounded, and she came out unscathed even though she couldn't use her Alpha aura. To say that Gregory was curious was an understatement.

Gregory was brimming with the excitement of getting closer to Alpha Natalia, and he finally got his chance.

Her presence was moving away from the packhouse, and it didn't take him long to catch up.

Gregory watched as Talia, Keith, and Caleb reached the outskirts of the forest. The trio exchanged words, and then Keith and Caleb moved away, and she sat on the ground with her back leaning against the trunk of a tree.

Gregory also noticed six more presences, but he knew they were not obstacles, so he focused on a female that looked so delicate, but he could sense she was formidable.

His palms were sweating.

Gregory had been thinking about Alpha Natalia ever since the Council of the Alphas, and there she was... alone under the tree, removing the fabric that was around her neck and she put it over her face. Was she about to take a nap? He would be stupid to pass this chance.

### **Chapter 795: Talk with a Guardian (1)**

Talia was sitting on the grass feeling guilty that she left Damon to deal with so many things on his own, and that she refused Keith's and Caleb's offer for a chit-chat.

But she really needed rest. Mentally.

She couldn't imagine talking with Keith and Caleb about anything that was not Lulu-related and that would only make things worse.

Last night was turbulent and emotional and now that things settled down, Talia was not sure if she was more disturbed by the fact that Lulu died while protecting her, or because Talia killed people.

She didn't mean to kill anyone. It was a moment of anger and anguish and her energy exploded, blasting all rogues in the area, and... they died.

The most unsettling was that it was so easy.

Talia was unable to save Lulu who bled out in a matter of seconds, and Talia harvested lives like a grim reaper who does service in bulk.

Was she the calamity that Sophia and Isaac spoke about?

Talia removed the scarf that was around her neck. It was silky and soft, but it suffocated her, and she needed air.

Talia stopped caring if anyone will see Damon's mark there.

All her previous worries paled in comparison to her killing without trying. She was a murderer.

What if she does it again?

What if she gets upset and people die?

How can she be close to anyone and not worry that she might kill accidentally?

What if Damon came a minute earlier than he did last night? Would she blast him away also? Would she kill her own mate?

Talia took deep breaths to calm down because she didn't want Damon to pick up her emotions. He will think that someone attacked her and come rushing to her rescue.

Talia put the scarf over her face and closed her eyes.

If anyone attacks her, she didn't want anyone to rescue her because when her emotions flare she will kill indiscriminately, like last night.

'You are not a murderer,' Liseli spoke into Talia's mind. 'If you didn't kill them, they would get you. They were the bad guys. You only defended yourself. If they didn't come, if they left you alone, if they didn't try to kidnap you, they wouldn't be dead now. This was NOT your fault.'

'Thanks, Lis. I needed to hear this.' She really did.

Now only to repeat that a million times until it gets engraved into Talia's way of thinking, and she stops feeling guilty about it.

Talia released a slow breath and sank her fingers into the grass on her sides. The sensation of soft blades caressing her gently should be soothing, but this time it didn't achieve the desired effect. Something was wrong.

Her eyes snapped open.

'What's going on?' Liseli asked, feeling that Talia's anxiety swelled.

'Birds.'

'What about them?'

'They are not singing.'

It was broad daylight, and considering that there was forest everywhere, Talia expected to hear the birds sing, and other creatures moving about, but it was completely silent. It reminded her of last night.

Forest creatures acted on their instincts alone, and this quiet usually meant that a predator was around. Danger.

Without thinking, Talia called through the mind-link, 'Damon?'

'Yes, kitten?'

Talia exhaled. What was she doing? Didn't she just say that even if anyone attacked, she didn't want to be rescued?

'Nothing. I just wanted to check what's going on at your end.' Was she getting paranoid?

'Do you miss me?' He asked with amusement in his voice.

'Always,' she replied without missing a beat.

Damon chuckled. 'It's good to hear your voice. Cornelia is preparing a teleportation diagram for Kai and Meg, they will be in the Lightclaw pack soon, just as you planned. Ivy and Lily will also go with them. They agreed to wear blindfolds, but it seems that Kalina told them that Yasmin is different, so Ivy and Lily have an idea about witches. Gideon is preparing for the ceremonies. Right now, I'm figuring out what to do with Grady. He doesn't like the idea of letting the guards beat him up for real, so we will need to improvise.'

Damon spoke quickly even for the mind-link, and Talia needed a moment to process all that information. Did they part ways only about half an hour ago? He did so many things, yet she just came to the forest to sit.

'Kitten, unless you have something urgent, I will focus on what's going on here,' Damon said before Talia could respond. 'Varya is on the verge of biting someone, and Max and Kalina left me to deal with this mess, so I am the only Alpha here. Maya and Caden can't deal with her because they don't want to offend Kalina and Tatiana.'

'Sure, sure. You focus there, I will focus on my relaxation. We will talk when you are done.'

Damon didn't ask about her status, so Talia guessed that Damon was in contact with Caleb and Keith.

Without chatter with Damon, Talia focused on the forest. Everything seemed fine, except that it was quiet. It was like the wind itself stopped.

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Talia's attention snapped at the shadow that moved from behind one tree and her eyes widened when she realized it was a man. She didn't sense him. What about Keith and Caleb?

Their eyes met and he raised his arms up, indicating that he means no harm.

"I didn't mean to startle you, Alpha Natalia," he said in a soft voice, but she heard him clearly.

Talia glanced around and didn't see anyone.

"I am alone. I mean no harm," he said while advancing slowly toward her.

Talia frowned. Yes, she was checking if he was alone, but she was also checking where Keith and Caleb were. For some reason, her sensing ability was acting out, like someone was suppressing it and Talia

wondered if that was because of her anxiety. In order to sense her surroundings, she needed to be calm and focused, and she was unable to do that in her current situation.

When he was about five steps away from her, the man squatted, facing Talia. "I only want to talk."

"Who are you?"

"A staff member," he responded. "I came to check how are you doing and if you need anything."

She was confident that she didn't meet him before, but somehow... he was familiar.

'Careful, girl...' Liseli growled in Talia's mind. 'That man has no wolf.'

Talia swallowed hard and her eyes widened when she realized from where he looked familiar. She saw him in Vincent's memories!

'That's a Guardian, Lis.'

'Yes, it is. And this one is more powerful than the one we found in the Midnight Guardians pack.'

Talia quickly glanced around, this time hoping that Keith and Caleb won't come.

Seeing that no one was in visual range, Talia guessed that he did something. Should she pretend not to notice? Should she pretend that she doesn't know who he is?

She was sick of playing games and falling into traps.

Talia acknowledged that she underestimated Guardians, and she decided to take charge of whatever was going on. If she played along, she will only do what he wanted.

Talia was not a scared girl from the attic, she was Alpha Natalia Moonrider, and she will act like it.

Talia's demeanor changed as she steeled her resolve to face this head-on. No more hiding.

"To what do I owe the honor of a Guardian coming to check on me?"

### **Chapter 796: Talk with a Guardian (2)**

Gregory's lips lifted into a smile, and he couldn't hide the surprise from his eyes. "You know who I am?"

Talia lifted her chin confidently. "I know what you are. Now, if you would introduce yourself, I would know your name also."

"You can call me, Gregory."

"Is that your real name?"

His smile widened. He thought that she might run away, attack, or call for reinforcements. Not that any of those would work, but he was pleasantly surprised to see how calm she was.

"You impress me, Alpha Natalia. I am glad we can talk peacefully."

"Last time I checked, people who want peace don't come sneakily while concealing their identity."

He sat on the ground and crossed his legs in the lotus position.

"If I announced to everyone I am a Guardian, people would make a fuss about it."

"And that is why you attend events pretending to be a staff member?"

He shook his head. "I'm not here for the event."

"Why are you here?"

"For you."

"For me?"

He nodded earnestly. "You are ignoring my requests for us to meet, so I came to see you in person."

Well, since they addressed those points, Talia thought of asking one more thing.

"What did you do to my guards?"

"They are unable to respond, but otherwise unharmed. Considering your identity, only Alphas or an army would dare to attack, and that means your guards should be able to defend against those in order to be considered as someone who can protect you. Why do you have such weak guards? Being around you is only putting them in danger."

Talia's insides tightened. Was he talking about Lulu? "Are you responsible for what happened last night?"

He waved his hands. "I had nothing to do with it. I only want to talk."

"That's what the rogues said."

"Did they?"

Talia confirmed. "They said that if I go with them voluntarily, no one will be hurt."

"The last night's event was because they wanted to get you? If it was me, I wouldn't spread my forces so thin and play games. Whoever was behind it didn't think it through. Why make a move at an event full of Alphas? Unless they knew that most of the Alphas will stay in the packhouse."

Gregory looked at Talia eagerly. "But you showed them their place. I couldn't get too close, but I know that you handled them."

His eyes moved over her body. "Your delicate frame wouldn't allow you to emerge unharmed after physically confronting several grown men no matter what technique you were using. How did you do it when you couldn't use your aura?"

The more he spoke, the more Talia was unsettled.

"How do you know about the Alpha aura being blocked?"



"I can sense the effects of the devices they used. Some of my kind were involved in research and production." And they mimicked what Gregory himself could do. Gregory suspected that the devices were made with the goal to deal with him, but he didn't want to reveal that to Talia.

"And you gave them to rogues."

Gregory made a face. "You are so quick to accuse me. I have nothing to do with rogues getting their hands on those. Humans are mass-producing them, thinking that they are making pest control devices." He chuckled. "In a way, they are right." Most of the Alphas are greedy bastards that should be eradicated.

"Why should I believe you?" Talia asked.

He shrugged. "Why would I lie?"

Talia was not sure what to think of this situation. Gregory was too relaxed, talking like he didn't use a filter, and it only made her wary of him. Liseli said that he was stronger than Vincent, but Talia never measured her power against Vincent's so that information didn't serve any purpose other than telling Talia that the man in front of her was dangerous. But she was dangerous as well. Who would win if she attacked him now? What if he attacks? Will she be able to react in time?

However, as much as the man in front of her was a mystery, she was a mystery to him as well, and if she projects confidence, he won't dare to do anything funny.

"Alright," Talia said. "Let's say I believe you. You said you are here to talk to me. What do you want?"

"To be honest, I would be pleased if you accept my invitation to come with me."

"Why?"

"Didn't Julian invite you to join us?"

"So, you came personally to escort me for a tour?"

"I didn't think you will come right away, but if you are willing, we can leave right away."

Talia narrowed her eyes at him. "You won't force me?"

"The invitation is for you to join us as one of us. Not as a prisoner. If I force you to come, you will only try to escape. This is an open invitation. Now or later, it's fine, but I prefer sooner than later."

"What's the rush?"

Gregory clicked his tongue. "Let's say that I waited for a long time for a powerful female to make her appearance." And there was a point that if she found her mate, things will be complicated.

His eyes moved to her neck, and he froze. There was a mark, right there.

Gregory thought of the possibility of Talia having a mate, but considering her strength, he assumed that she would be the one who did the marking, and not the other way around, so he didn't pay attention to her neck. Until now.

Talia realized that he was staring at Damon's mark, and she put her hand to cover it up.

"You are marked," Gregory said under his breath.

Talia guessed that was not a good thing. Did the invitation extend to her mate as well, or did she put Damon in danger now? She thought that she didn't care if people knew she was Damon's mate, but now she regretted that she removed that scarf.

"Yes, so?" She couldn't deny the obvious.

"Who is it?"

There was no way she would say it. "What's it to you?"

"Is it someone from the Midnight Guardians pack?" He asked and then he shook his head. "If there is someone that strong, I would know." He was back to staring at Talia, straight into her eyes, like he could see her thoughts. "Who is your mate, Alpha Natalia?"

Talia frowned. "Don't you think you are crossing the line?"

He ignored her displeasure. "It must be an Alpha, right? But who is..." His expression froze when he realized... "You were last night with Alpha Damon. Everyone said how your two packs are close and forming an alliance, but that's not it. You are mates. He marked you." He shook his head. "How come I didn't think of that sooner? Even at the Council of Alphas, he was with you. The strongest male Alpha and the strongest female Alpha are mates. The world is about to change."

Gregory was talking like a fanatic and Talia got goosebumps.

She stood up. "This talk is over."

He was on her feet and he held her wrist. "Did you have your heat?"

Talia's eyes widened and she yanked her hand out of his hold. "That's none of your business!"

"I will take that as a, no." He said and he was back to staring at her neck. "How long has it been since he marked you? That doesn't look fresh. Considering your strength, it should have happened."

Talia couldn't believe this. What the hell was wrong with this guy? Weirdo.

"What are you doing?" Talia asked when he saw him making hand symbols so quickly that she couldn't follow his movements.

It lasted only a second and then he spread his palms toward her.

Talia moved to dodge whatever he was doing, but it was too late as she felt a breeze on her skin.

"What did you do to me?" She asked in panic, and it took her a moment to realize that nothing was happening. Other than Talia's anxiety shooting through the roof, everything else seemed normal. Or was it?

'Talia...' Liseli spoke in a strained voice.

Talia ran her hand over her forehead, confirming that she was sweating. 'What's going on, Lis?'

'I think... You are going into heat.'

As Liseli said that, Talia felt a wave of warmth swelling in her abdomen, and spreading through her body. It was like she got a fever.

She licked her lips which were already dry.

"What did you...?"

Before she could finish her question, Talia collapsed on the grass.

### **Chapter 797: Sudden heat [Bonus chapter]**

Keith struggled against invisible restraints that shackled him on the spot. He couldn't move a muscle. Even his lips were sealed! What the hell was going on?

'Caleb?' He called. 'Caleb!' Nothing.

Anger swelled within him. Last night Talia was fighting with rogues, and they lost Lulu, and now this!? He didn't know what was happening, but he knew it was not good. He felt useless. How was he deserving to be Talia's guard?

Ignoring his hurt pride, Keith decided to alarm Damon. Damon will punish them all for this slip-up in security, but no punishment will be harsh enough if Talia gets hurt on his watch.

'Alpha! Alpha Damon!' Keith called.

Nothing.

'Alpha! Maya! Caden!'

Silence.

Why did this remind him of last night when their mind-link was dead?

"I didn't mean to startle you, Alpha Natalia," Keith heard a male voice and his anxiety shot up through the roof. There was a man, and Keith couldn't do a thing!

"I am alone. I mean no harm." The man said, and now Keith could see him squatting to face Talia.

Keith cursed in his mind. If that guy meant no harm, how come Keith couldn't move a muscle? And Talia was not moving either. Was she stuck like everyone else? Damn it!

Keith realized that this was a trap. Somehow, that guy trapped him, and probably Caleb and other guards also, and then the guy approached Talia.

That's it. Alpha Damon will skin him alive. This time, for real.

"To what do I owe the honor of a Guardian coming to check on me?" Talia's voice reached Keith and Keith realized that she could move, but that didn't make their situation more optimistic.

A Guardian!

Even Alphas can't fight against Guardians. What can one Keith do? And what about Talia!?

Fuck! Was he stuck standing there, watching that Guardian talking to Talia while plotting who knows what?

Keith struggled with all his might against invisible shackles, and after a lot of struggles, he could move his fingers.

'Great!' Keith thought sarcastically. 'At this rate, in about a month I will be able to walk!'

"Did you have your heat?" The Guardian asked and Keith realized he was running out of time.

Why would the Guardian care about Talia's heat, unless... Keith didn't want to think about it, but he continued struggling, veins popping on his forehead from strain, and he was already drenched in sweat.

"What did you do to me?" Talia asked and Keith could hear the panic in her voice. Shit! That guy was up to no good and Keith was stuck watching!

Keith's heart stopped beating when he saw Talia falling to the ground.

The guy crouched above her observing her. "This is unbelievable..." He reached to move the hair away from her face. The guy burst into maniacal laughter.

Keith felt something snapping around his neck and a cooling sensation filled his body.

Was that the necklace the Oracle gave him? Keith kept the necklace in his pocket, but after last night's incident, Keith thought it can't hurt to wear it around his neck.

Without any warning, he fell on his face. His nose hurt, but he didn't care. The only thing important was that he was able to move.

Keith dashed with all his might and tackled the Guardian who was crouching above Talia.

Their bodies stopped rolling after two rotations, and Keith found himself on top of Gregory.

'POW!' Keith punched Gregory in the face.

"You bastard! What did you do to her!?"

Gregory's nose was bleeding, and he ignored the stinging pain which told him that something was broken.

He was staring at Keith in disbelief. Where did this guy come from?

Gregory performed a heat-inducing ritual that would impact only females that have the bloodline of Guardians.

When he saw that she was marked, Gregory was angry because he was too late, but then he realized that Talia's mark was not fresh, and she was not pregnant which made him think that she didn't have her heat yet.

Werewolves are creatures that follow natural cycles, and considering that Talia was a strong Alpha, she should be in heat shortly after marking. That made Gregory think that she might be something more than a she-wolf.

It was a long shot, and he couldn't believe that it worked. Talia was one of them. She belonged with them.

Sure, she had a wolf, so her genes were diluted, but she was still much better than just an Alpha.

This explained why she was so powerful. Was one of her parents a Guardian? Or grandparents? Who could it be?

But the more unbelievable was that it worked. For a long time, Guardians had no females, and the last females didn't respond to the ritual at all.

Talia had the bloodline of a Guardian, and she was also able to bear children. She was a treasure. A real treasure!

After centuries without hope, Gregory could see the light. It was Talia.

Gregory imagined Talia as their queen. They would give her anything she wanted, and serve her faithfully, treat her as their Goddess.

She will save their species from extinction!

These lowly werewolves didn't deserve her.

Gregory was about to take Talia with him, but then this guy showed out of nowhere.

"How can you move?" Gregory asked.

"You fucker! How dare you lay your hands on Talia!?"

Keith cursed and started raining punches mercilessly. He thought that Guardians were more than this, but why did this guy seem to be so weak?

Gregory defended his vital points, but Keith was on top of him; Keith already landed a few solid punches which disoriented Gregory, and Keith had no intention of stopping. It was totally one-sided.

Gregory tried his ability, but it seemed that the guy on top of him was immune. Was it possible that he also had a blood of a Guardian? No, it was something else. Even Guardians couldn't defend against Gregory. What the heck was this guy?

Gregory was on the verge of losing consciousness when Keith froze with his bloodied fists in the air.

Keith's nostrils flared and his head snapped to look at Talia. He never smelled anything so good in his life. It was sweet and inviting and it muddled his mind.

"Fuck...", Keith said breathily when he understood what was going on. It was Talia. She was in heat, and the sweet and inviting scent was coming from her pheromones.

Keith was not an expert, but he was confident that heat doesn't peak so quickly. Katya told him that she had about an hour from the first symptoms until pheromones started seeping out of her.

Keith could hear Caleb and a few more males groaning.

"Shit!"

Keith dashed toward Talia and picked her up in his arms.

Without stopping to check on Gregory or anyone else, Keith started running.

If those males were affected by her scent, Keith will need to fight the Guardian and every other unmated male. And there was a problem that he was being affected as well.

Keith looked at the woman in his arms whose face was flushed, and her half-open eyes were glossy.

She smiled at him, and he could feel his arousal swelling to unprecedented levels. The only thing he wanted was to get down and dirty. With Talia.

Who would know? It was just the two of them, in the forest, and she was leaning on him and smiling... she was willing. Right?

Keith bit his lip harshly to snap out of it.

What was he thinking? This was Talia.

They were still too close to the packhouse. Too close to the patrols. He needed to keep running.

Keith was familiar with the maps, and he was quite good at navigating, so he knew which way to go in order to reach deserted places. As long as he finds a cave, no one will find them.

Talia's body was on fire, and she was becoming delirious.

Images flashed in front of her eyes. Gregory, Keith, forest, Keith... what was going on?

Her brain was not working properly, and it was uncomfortable.

Talia started pulling on her dress, wanting to remove it and get a much-needed breather.

Why was everything shaking? Through her haze, Talia realized that Keith was carrying her somewhere.

She blinked while trying to focus, but the effect was the opposite.

The world around her was moving and she was trying to steady herself and find relief, so she leaned on the firm body that was right there.

It didn't smell completely right, but she was feverish, and her senses were muddled.

"Damon...", she called weakly while hugging the muscular torso. "Damon... I don't feel so good."

Keith didn't respond. He tightened his hold on Talia and ran as fast as he could.

**Chapter 798: A way out**

Damon rubbed his face irritably. Varya was objecting to anything that might put a scratch on Grady, and no matter what Caden and Maya said, they couldn't convince her.

If Varya refuses to cooperate, this won't work.

He promised Talia that he would take care of this, and he wanted to make it quick, but this Wilkow sister was testing his temper. The only thing stopping him from using his aura on Varya and Grady was that he knew Talia wouldn't approve.

To make things worse, they already agreed on everything, but then Varya saw a rogue being carried out. The guy was beaten black and blue with cuts and blood oozing everywhere, and she panicked.

"Listen, now..." Damon said impatiently. "Do you know why we are doing this?"

"Why?" Varya asked.

"Because if we don't, his old buddies will come for him and you. Do you know what it means to be captured by a rogue? You will be imprisoned and beaten until you have nothing left to say, and then they will beat you some more."

Varya frowned. "How I see it, you are trying to do the same."

Damon growled and stood up abruptly.

"What are you doing? Where are you taking me?" Varya called anxiously when Damon grabbed her arm and dragged her down the hallway.

Grady stood up to protest, but Caden and Maya blocked him.

Damon took Varya one level down, and then he opened the door and pushed her inside.

The room was chilly.

Damon flicked the switch to turn on the lights, and Varya looked at twenty tables arranged in two rows.

One table was empty, while others had irregular shapes covered in white cloth, and she didn't need an explanation to know that those were bodies.

"Cat got your tongue? Why are you quiet now?" Damon asked icily. "Speak!"

"Are these people from last night?"

"Yes. These are people from the Blue River pack who died last night. Rogues came, attacked, and left this behind. These people had families. They were good soldiers." He approached one table on his right.

"Not all of them were soldiers."

Damon lifted the cloth to reveal a female. It was Marcy. Her face was covered in bruises and cuts that looked garish on her gray skin, and if he didn't know who that was, he wouldn't recognize her.

"You see, Varya, this is what rogues do. They come, kill, and leave. Do you know why?"

She shook her head.

"There are theories that rogues want to belong to a pack. People forgot that previous generations gave them land and resources, yet rogues used what they got and then resumed attacking. Rogues resist hierarchy and are unable to sustain themselves. There is a reason why no one likes rogues, Varya. They are the cancer of our society, one that can't be cured, and we need to remove it. I know you grew up in Europe, but you should be familiar that there are people without a moral compass."

"What do you expect me to do?"

"I want you to understand that I am giving you and Grady a way out. Did you see how people were looking at you? I am the only one who is willing to accept you. If you don't cooperate, you will fall down to rogue status."

"What's wrong with living among humans as loners? I lived like that so far, and Grady did the same."

Damon couldn't believe this. Didn't they already agree that she and Grady will take a blood oath and join the Dark Howlers pack?

"Do you think I will let you leave after what you've seen? Do you believe that people won't hunt your mate? The Blue River pack will want him because he came with the group that caused this." Damon gestured toward tables with corpses. "...and your sister won't be able to stop them. Or do you want to put Tatiana in a situation where she needs to pick between her people and her family?"

Varya pressed her lips into a line, and Damon continued, "Rogues will want Grady because he knows too much about them and about this place. And they will want you because that's how they can control Grady. Wake up, Varya. Your only hope of surviving is to join my pack."

"You talk like you are giving us a way out. But to me, it seems like another cage."

"A cage? I guess that's one way to look at it." Damon shook his head. "I can assure you that the territory of my pack is much larger than a dungeon cell. I am not saying it's forever. Join my pack and follow my rules. You heard Talia; we won't mistreat you. Give it one year. Two, at most. After that, if you still want to leave, I won't stop you. How does that sound?"

Varya looked at Damon warily. "But you want to harm Grady."

"He is a werewolf. He will get a few punches to make it believable, and then they will drag him out while he fakes unconsciousness. Faking blood is not an option because others can smell replacement. Whatever injuries Grady earns, they will be gone within a few days. I would never harm members of my pack unless they acted against the pack."

Varya heard all that already, but who will guarantee that Damon will protect them if they are not members of their pack? "I believe you. I would be more at ease if you let us join your pack first."

Damon rejected the idea. "If we do it in that order, someone might notice Grady is not rogue. When you join my pack, your scent will change."

Varya knew it made sense. And she also knew that Damon went out of his way to talk to her instead of forcing it on them. "I don't mean to be difficult. I am only concerned about my mate."



Damon's expression softened. If anyone wanted to put a finger on Talia, Damon would rip him into pieces, and here they were talking about hitting Grady.

"I will tell the guards not to go further than necessary. If you can't watch, you can wait outside. But prepare to cry and shout how you hate everyone, and you are returning to Europe. Kalina and Tatiana will comfort you and..."

"I know, I know... I will make a scene. Everyone will hear Grady is dead, and I'm leaving, so people think I'm not in the area anymore because my mate is gone." Just saying that made tears swell in Varya's eyes.

"That's good, but save it for later," Damon said while pointing at Varya's red eyes, and then he led the way back to the room where Grady was with Maya and Caden. They needed to pick a few guards who would interrogate Grady and make it look like they killed him.

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Damon and Varya were walking down the hallway when Damon heard a voice in his head. 'Alpha, you need to come quickly.' It was Keith.

Damon froze. 'What's going on?'

Damon felt the air around him stiffening. Unstable emotions came through the mate bond, but why were they so weak?

'KEITH!?'

'Talia is in heat. I am taking her deeper into the forest.'

Damon's mind exploded. What did Keith say? How could Talia be in heat? Doesn't that thing take time to catch up? There should be signs!

It was happening! He will be a father!

Damon's moment of excitement went as fast as it came.

Everyone knew that when pheromones hit, unmated males are drawn like moths to a flame.

Why was Keith taking Talia into the forest instead of where Damon was?! The wretched coach had a death wish! Would he dare lay a finger on Talia?!

And why was Keith struggling to talk? Was he fighting against his urge to mate with Talia? Damn it!

Damon was outside, running toward the area where Talia should be with her guards and anxiety swelled within him.

'WHERE ARE YOU!?' Damon roared at Keith through the mind-link. Keith didn't respond, and rage overtook Damon's senses.

'KEITH! If you touch her, I will rip your body into pieces and send them to Katya in small Ziplocks! DID YOU HEAR ME!?'

Silence.

Damon was unable to focus on forcing the mind-link while running.

He cursed under his breath. 'Old guy! You better start sensing mate, or rivers of blood will flow.'

Damon shifted into his wolf form and followed the pull of the bond.

Faster.

Faster!

### **Chapter 799: Racing against time**

'CADEN!'

Caden was startled to hear Damon's angry voice through the mind-link. 'Yes?'

'Talía is in heat.'

Caden was confused. Wasn't Damon with Varya? Right at that moment, the door opened, and only Varya appeared.

'What? Really? Where are you?'

'I am running to get her. She is... with Keith.'

Caden groaned. They all knew that Keith had an unhealthy infatuation with his Luna. 'Do you think he will...?'

'Don't you dare say that!' Damon cut him off.

'Sure, sure.' Caden quickly said. 'What can I do?' He assumed that there must be a reason why Damon was mind-linking him when he was in a rush to reach Talía.

'I spoke with Varya, and she agreed to cooperate. Make sure she doesn't backtrack again. Talk to Caleb and see what happened exactly for Keith to end up alone with Talía.'

'What about Talía? Can I help there?'

'Tell Max I'm on the run and that patrols should stay out of my way. If anyone dares to stop me, I won't show mercy.'

'Got it. Anything else?'

'Ask Max if there is a place I can take Talía. It needs to have water and...'

'Privacy.' Caden ended for Damon. 'I'm on it.' Caden turned to Maya. "You need to take over for a bit. Damon and Varya worked things out, so get the ball rolling."

"Where are you going?" Maya asked when she saw that Caden was already opening the door to leave.

"I need to find Max." Caden said, and added through their mind-link, 'Talia is in heat.'

Maya's mouth formed an 'O' shape. That should be a good thing, but why was Caden not happy about it?

...

Talia was drifting in and out of her mental haze.

The arousal was causing her body to cry for a release, and she clung to the muscular body by her side, but somehow... it didn't feel right.

Was that Damon? Who else could it be? But the landscape his muscles created felt different.

Her mind was so muddled that she was unable to reach out to him through the mind-link.

She looked up to see Damon, but then his scent was off, making her wonder if that was really him or if she just wanted it to be him.

Talia turned to the only person she could think of, and she focused mightily on the conversation.

'Liseli? Liseli!'

'What?' Liseli responded after some time.

'Can you feel Sapa?'

'No. Why would I feel him in this situation?'

'What do you mean?'

'We are not peepers. Unless you didn't notice your state, you are in heat. Sapa and I never look. And that reminds me that I should retract at the back of your mind also so that you can have your privacy. Enjoy!'

'No! Wait!'

'What now?' Liseli grumbled.

'Can you confirm if that is Damon?'

'Who else would it be?'

'I don't know, Lis, but... somehow... it doesn't feel right.'

'Of course, it will feel different. Heat is messing with your perception.'

Talia suspected that something else was off. 'What about your perception?'

Liseli giggled. 'Busted! You see... heat is impacting me more than you. So, my senses are not worth mentioning.'

'But Lis... there must be a way to confirm if that is Damon.'

'You are barely conscious. What do you think I can do?'

'Can we do something together?'

Liseli groaned. All this was mentally exhausting, and she would be already jumping on the male who was holding them, but Talia was in charge when they were in the human body, diminishing Liseli's control.

Liseli's mind was a mess, and the only thing she could think of was... 'Your power.'

'What about it?'

'If you suspect that's not Damon, blast him.'

'What will that achieve?'

'You can't hurt your mate. If the man holding you is Damon, it will go right through him, and if it's not...'

'I might kill him.'

'Even in this state, I can confirm that he is carrying us somewhere. If that's not mate, he deserves to die. Or would you rather allow a man who is not Damon to touch you? Just as our senses are messed up, he is impacted by your heat, and he won't be able to resist unless he has a mate bond to protect him. I am fairly positive that he is unmated because I am absolutely positive that the thing pressing on your waist is not a banana.'

Talia paused. She was unsure who that was, but other than Damon, two more faces popped into her mind. One was Gregory, the man who was talking to her before her heat, and the second one was Keith. The idea of being intimate with any of them was nauseating, but killing...? And what if that was Keith?

...

Damon was running through the foliage like the wind.

If any patrol spotted him and wanted to stop him, he was out of sight by the time they realized that the black blur was a wolf.

Caden reported that they found Caleb and other guards in a daze in the area where Talia should be.

Caleb said there was an intruder, a Guardian; Talia and the Guardian spoke, and then Keith jumped the guy before taking Talia away. It was not much, but Caden informed Maddox and Tony, and they were all spread in search of that Guardian who left only some blood splatters behind.

Damon left to Caden to deal with handling Gregory, and he focused on following after Keith and Talia.

Damon was losing his mind at the thought of what might happen. Why was Keith not responding to Damon's summons? And Talia was unreachable also!

With Talia in heat, she will be delirious. What if she is aroused to the point of not caring who will provide relief? What if Keith can't stop himself? What if Keith doesn't want to stop himself?

Damon would rip Keith into pieces if he dared to do something unsightly to Talia, but what would be the point of killing him if the damage was already done?

Oh, God! What if Talia ended up with Keith's child!?

'Stop it!' Sapa growled at Damon. 'I can't focus on finding mate!'

'Sorry.' Damon couldn't help it. 'If he dares to touch her...'

'We will kill him together, and we will take our time while doing so,' Sapa said. 'But don't get riled up before you know what's happening. There is a reason why the Moon Goddess made you mates. I finally got Liseli, and I refuse to believe she was mine only so another wolf can touch her!'

'But what if...?' Damon couldn't finish.

'What if!?' Sapa snapped. 'What if that boy takes advantage of the situation? What if mate ends up carrying his pup? Will you discard her? Will you kill him? You are the one who put him as her head guard even though you knew he has feelings for YOUR mate. Even if she doesn't end up pregnant, the fact that another man touched her will create a rift between you. She won't be with him because he is not her mate, and she won't be with you because of the guilt. She will live with eternal shame and anguish, and maybe even sever the mate bond in order to let you free, and it will be all your fault! It's your duty to protect your mate! If anything happens to her, you have no right to blame anyone else!'

Damon felt like someone poured a bucket of cold ice on him, one that was so icy that was preventing him from breathing.

Sapa felt guilty for unloading his anger on Damon, but this was not the time for losing focus.

'Boy!' Sapa shouted. 'Keep yourself together! Our mate needs us. You can freak out later.'

Damon was startled when Sapa stopped suddenly.

'What's going on?' Damon asked. He couldn't pick up anything. Actually, that was the problem.

'I can't sense, mate.' Sapa said.

Damon felt his world collapsing. What did that mean now?

Sapa lifted his head and sniffed the air. Among the scents of the forest, there was a faint citrusy scent of freesia, and Sapa dashed in the direction where Talia's scent led.

Damon's insides tightened. Sapa didn't say anything, but the scent of Talia's arousal was obvious. It was happening, Talia was in heat, and Damon was not by her side. Damn it!

Damon was unsure when they reached the opening to a cave, and he was confident that Talia's scent was coming from there.

'Wait!' Damon shouted at Sapa. He was not sure if he wanted to go in there. If he sees Talia and Keith entangled, it will kill him.

'Did you come here to chicken out?' Sapa barked and walked into the cave.

Chapter 800: Talia's protective barrier

Keith stumbled into the cave with Talia in his arms.

He was forcing his legs to keep moving while tightening his hold on Talia in order to prevent his hands from wandering and touching where it was not appropriate.

But it was hard.

The scent of Talia's arousal was ingrained into his system, stirring his wolf and urging him to do the unspeakable. Her body was on fire, and she was clinging to him, obviously wanting it, right? "Damon..." Talia breathed, snapping Keith out of his daze, even if it was just for a moment.

He looked back to confirm how far they were from the entrance, but it was not far enough. If anyone got closer to the cave, they could pick up the sweet scent Talia's body released. It was like an open invitation, and Keith wanted to make sure it reached no one.

Keith was anxious because he couldn't guarantee they were not followed. Right. Right. Someone might have followed them. In that case, he couldn't just give in. He needed to stay alert and protect Talia, his Luna. What if that Guardian comes back? What if he comes with reinforcements?

Keith found a spot to put Talia down. She grabbed his arm as he pulled back, and her fingers dug into his flesh. Keith froze. After a moment of hesitation, he pushed the hair from her face. She was drenched in sweat, and her face was flushed, making her even more alluring

"It will be OK. Hang in there," Keith said, and she moaned while rubbing her face against his palm.

Damn it!

He needed to get out of there. But how far should he go? Can he leave her side? To make things worse, his wolf was going crazy in the desire to claim the female who was lying on the ground, lost in arousal and pulling him closer, like he was the one who was supposed to help her.

Was the whole Universe set on testing his willpower? er-The only thing preventing him from giving in was the thought that he didn't want Talia to hate him when it was over because it will be over, eventually, no matter what Keith did.

He would live through harsh training and torture, but he couldn't survive if she hated him. Hurting her would be hurting himself and if she stopped smiling at him, he would wither away. Keith was confident that he should get a medal for enduring this much, but Alpha Damon will probably have Keith's head for failing to protect Talia and bringing her here. Damon, right! Keith wondered, did he mind-link Damon, or was he only thinking about it? What if Damon doesn't find them? What if...?

Talia moaned again, and her hand moved over her abdomen, obviously going lower.

Keith closed his eyes and pushed himself away from Talia. Even without looking at her, Keith could feel the heat radiating from Talia's body. She was on fire. Every heartbeat brought him a pulse of her addictive scent, and he swallowed hard.

'SLAP!'

Keith slapped himself harshly, but it didn't do much to snap him to his senses. He was now staring at Talia, whose dress was stuck to her body completely, leaving not a single curve hidden. She was beautiful.

Keith got on all four and crawled closer to Talia. He hovered above her face. Her eyes were closed tightly, her cheeks red, and her lips slightly parted, silently calling him to claim them. "Ahh..." A shaky sigh escaped her lips, and his eyes snapped to see that Talia's hand was between her legs as she rubbed herself over the dress.

The sight of Talia pleasuring herself only added flames to the already burning fire.

Keith remembered that Katya told him how when the heat strikes, no amount of touching will help. Only when a male releases his seed inside the female in heat will she find relief.

Talia needed a man, and Keith was one with so much pressure in his groin area that it was painful.

Was there any point in resisting? Surely, death would be acceptable if he experienced Talia moaning his name as he plowed her insides—0 inch by inch, Keith's gaze moved higher until it reached Talia's face. He froze when he realized that her eyes were flickering in silvery light. What happened next caught him unprepared. A burst of silvery light exploded from Talia's body, propelling him backward with so much force that he got slammed against the wall of the cave, and he blacked out.

"Ugh..." Keith groaned while regaining consciousness, and he was sure he had multiple fractures. The pain all over and the metallic taste in his mouth were proof he had internal injuries.

What the hell happened? Some images flashed in his mind, reminding him why he was in that cave.

Talia!

He panicky looked in the direction where Talia was and relaxed when he saw her there.

It was just the two of them in the cave. No one else came while he was knocked out.

Silvery light didn't disappear. It gathered around Talia like a glowing bubble that pulsed as she breathed, making her look like a princess who was waiting for her prince to kiss the bad things away. A fly was attracted to the light, and the moment it touched the silvery curtain, it exploded in smoke, confirming Keith's theory that the light was not only pretty but also acted like some form of defensive mechanism. Talia moaned softly, her legs rubbed against each other, and Keith cursed under his breath. Even with all this pain assaulting his body, he was still hard as hell and thinking about getting closer to Talia. A black wolf emerged from the entrance into the cave, and Keith stiffened. He recognized Damon, and he was not sure if he was happy or disappointed that Alpha had arrived. 0 Damon stalked toward Talia without acknowledging Keith's presence. The view of Talia was obscure, but Keith could see that Talia's skirt was pulled up, and her hand was rubbing her precious parts over her panties. Keith was sure that Damon will gauge his eyes out for seeing such a thing. Should he pretend to be unconscious?

Damon's heart resumed beating at the sight of Talia lying on the damp ground inside the cave. Keith was nowhere near her, and her panties were in place, giving a huge dose of relief to Damon. Their future was not broken\_

Talia's body was encased in silvery light, and everything smelled of her arousal. It was intoxicating.

'Mate is suffering,' Sapa said. 'Only you can help her. I will leave you alone now.' With that, Sapa retracted at the back of Damon's mind. Damon shifted into his human form when he got close to the silvery light. He sniffed to confirm that Talia's scent was faint, and so was the pull of the bond. Damon guessed that it was because of that silvery light enveloping her. Talia was sweaty and frowning, obviously uncomfortable, and Damon wished for a power to make her distress disappear. Unfortunately, only one thing would help her now, and this was not the right place. Also, Damon was aware of their audience.