

Alphas Bride 81

Chapter 81 - Stay Away From Alphas

To Dawn's and Zina's pleasure, Talia avoided taking dishes into the dining room.

Talia didn't want to meet that intimidating man (aka Alpha Maddox), or other people that were there.

Besides scary guests, there was also the unpredictable Alpha Damon.

Talia was not sure how she would react if Damon tells her to eat with them at the table. Talia didn't feel like she belongs there and sitting at that table with Alphas and their high-ranking members will definitely be uncomfortable. On the other hand, if Damon doesn't invite her, she will feel neglected.

Talia was aware that Alpha Damon and his circle are way out of her league, and that it shouldn't come as a surprise that he ignores her when others are present, but part of her was not willing to be treated differently depending on the audience.

It would be better if Alpha Damon was always indifferent toward her, but during the time they spent together, Talia got to see different sides of Damon, and his episodes of kindness touched her heart.

Talia feared that while the more important people are in the packhouse, Damon will look at her in the same way he did when Cassie accused her of stealing food. If that happens, Talia's heart will shatter into pieces.

Talia was not sure if staying away was the right thing to do, but she was determined to avoid Alpha Damon and the guests, to the best of her abilities.

It's only for a day or two; she will manage. After that, they will return to normal, whatever that 'normal' is.

Stephanie already said that she will eat in the kitchen, and Talia was determined to join her. While they plated food on serving trays, Talia and Stephanie put food on the side for themselves, and Dawn and Zina were packing dinner in containers to carry into their apartments. There was plenty for everyone.

"Aww...nothing this time...", Dawn was deflated as she returned to the kitchen and Zina rolled her eyes dramatically.

"No luck?", Talia asked even though she knew the answer.

"No.", Dawn said dejectedly. "Axel is a looker. He can't be older than twenty-three years old. I really wished that we click."

"He smiled at you.", Zina reminded her.

Dawn cheered up. "Yeah. Maybe I have a chance. I heard that he will stay for three days."

"We are done here, right?", Zina asked Stephanie who confirmed.

"Yes. I will see you at six-thirty in the morning so that we work on breakfast. Don't be late."

Zina and Dawn grabbed containers with food that they previously packed. They got extra and are planning to share with their roommates.

"Talia", Zina called. "Will you come to the Shifters tonight?"

Talia blinked. "Shifters?"

"Ah, she is new.", Dawn reminded Zina and spoke to Talia, "Shifters is the hottest nightclub in the area. It's a bit of a drive, because it's on the border of our territory but it's totally worth it. Everyone will be there. That's a perfect chance to mingle with hot stuff from other packs, and even humans come in large numbers."

Talia didn't want to reject the invitation, even though she had no intention of going. "I will come if I can."

"Great! Come and join us dancing the night away. Treat me well, Talia because you never know, I might be Luna in the morning!" Dawn paused and turned to Stephanie. "Don't worry. Even if that happens, I will be here on time to help with breakfast."

Zina and Talia giggled at Dawn's cheeky remark that was a total contrast to Stephanie's unamused expression.

After saying their goodbyes, Zina and Dawn left, leaving Stephanie and Talia behind who had their own mini-feast spread on the kitchen island.

Stephanie poked a salad and shook her head. "Kids. They will stay away from those Alphas if they know what's good for them."

Talia didn't understand. She heard stories about how women swarm over Alphas. After all, Alphas are the most powerful werewolves, and she-wolves are attracted to power.

Talia thought how if she had more confidence, she would also hope to catch the eye of an Alpha. Or maybe a general. Why did Stephanie talk like that was a bad thing?

"What do you mean?"

Stephanie chewed slowly for some time before responding. "Messing with Alpha who is not your mate will not bring anything good. Do you know that there are two types of bonds between mates?"

"I'm not too familiar with the topic.", Talia admitted.

"In the case where mates are blessed by the Moon Goddess, the bond will strengthen after they mark each other, giving them power boost. This is the bond everyone dreams about. However, there is another one, mates out of choice. In this case, the bond doesn't exist between a couple who marks each

other. After the marking ceremony, the bond will form, but compared to the bond between destined mates, their bond will be weak and it won't bring any increase in power, no matter how much they love each other. For Alphas, power is very important. That's why every Alpha will search for his mate to make her his Luna. Unfortunately, that means whichever girl ends up tangled with those boys, unless they are mates, she will be left behind."

Talia understood the point, but it made her uncomfortable. "Are all Alphas power-hungry?"

"For Alphas, this is beyond the selfish search for power. An Alpha is responsible for his pack members. Alpha can be challenged to a duel. Normally, the challenger will be an Alpha and the defeated one will lose the right to lead his pack, assuming that he survives. Can you imagine how the losing pack members will be treated after being absorbed? Unless you have the strength of a ranked member, you will fall below Omegas."

Talia forgot to chew her food. She knew very well what it means to be below Omegas.

"Did Alpha Damon fight in those duels?", Talia asked after some time.

"Many.", Stephanie said. "When he took over the pack, challengers were coming one after another with the hope to beat him and take over the Dark Howlers pack."

"And?", Talia wanted to hear more.

"As you can see, we are still standing.", Stephanie said with some pride in her voice. "At first, Alpha Damon would just injure challengers and send them back without taking anything from them. He just wanted us to be left alone. But soon they started coming back, and some even used sneaky methods to gain an unfair advantage. Alpha Damon was enraged, and he started taking lives and absorbing packs. He built quite a reputation for himself. That's why no one dares to challenge him, and we are the largest pack on the continent. His parents would be proud."

Stephanie let out a long breath before continuing, "Alpha Damon is a wonderful Alpha. The only thing lacking is for him to find a woman and settle down. It will be nice to see little ones running through this house again."

Talia felt a pang in her chest. A woman to settle down. Damon has many to pick from, and he will probably pick one soon.

Was he waiting to find his mate like other unmated Alphas? Well, princess Marcy and Cassie were proof that he was definitely not waiting idly. And Talia was confident that there are many other women, just like those two.

Somehow, Talia felt sorry for Marcy and Cassie and other girls who are serving Alpha Damon in bed because if they are not Damon's mate (and they probably are not), it means that Damon will not make them his Luna, no matter how desperate they are, yet they are still hoping.

Talia understood that if Dawn gets together with an Alpha who is not her mate, even if they love each other, he will probably not make her his Luna, which means that she will be just a bed warmer, a temporary fun.

Is there a woman who will be happy with a relationship that is doomed for failure? Talia was not sure. But she knew that she was hoping to find her own happy ending, someday. And that happy ending didn't include being discarded when the real mate appears.

Talia's heart ached. How was that different from what she was doing with Alpha Damon? There was only an invisible wall between them because they didn't do anything physically (other than hugging and holding hands), but Talia was painfully aware that Alpha Damon has a space in her heart, no matter how much she was trying to cover up that fact by telling herself how whatever is happening is temporary and it doesn't mean anything. Once he finds his Luna, heartbreak will be inevitable. Her heartbreak.

What Talia didn't know was that when scolding Alphas for romancing while waiting for their Luna, Stephanie was talking about herself, actually, about her daughter, Lisa.

For the last three years (how much Stephanie knows), Lisa is dating Anthony, the future heir of the Lightclaw pack. It's the pack where Lisa is living currently, with Stephanie's sister and brother-in-law.

Anthony is a good boy, and he is treating Lisa well. Unfortunately, he is the only son of Alpha Magnus and is set to inherit his father's position as the Alpha, and that means he will commit to the girl who is his destined mate given by the Moon Goddess.

Why is that a problem? Because Lisa is nineteen years old, and Anthony is one year older, and that means that both of them can recognize their mate, yet Tony didn't acknowledge Lisa as his future Luna.

Of course, Lisa didn't talk about it, but Stephanie is aware that if Tony and Lisa are mates, everyone would know about it because Alpha finding his Luna is a big deal. There is a belief that if Luna is Alpha's destined mate, the pack will prosper, and no one would delay announcing this and throwing a big party to cheer up the pack.

Stephanie is aware that Lisa is waiting for Anthony to announce her as his Luna, but every passing day without that happening confirms that Anthony is waiting (and possibly searching) for his destined mate.

How long will this situation last? How long will Anthony wait for his Luna? Does he have a deadline? No one has answers to these questions.

Some Alphas wait until their mid-thirties before they pick a mate in order to produce an heir.

It's normal for Stephanie to worry about her daughter, but on a few occasions when she tried talking to Lisa about this, Lisa threw a tantrum.

Before her eighteenth birthday, Lisa was convinced that Anthony is her mate, after all, they were crazy about each other. However, now that Lisa's eighteenth birthday passed, Lisa believes that Anthony will choose her, and Stephanie's heart is aching at the thought that Tony might find his destined mate and leave Lisa in shambles.

Of course, there is a chance that Lisa will find her mate, but at this point, Lisa is totally obsessed with Tony.

Chapter 82 - Who Is Qualified To Sit By Damon's Side

"Oh, dear..."

Talia heard Stephanie say through her haze of conflicting emotions.

"Those two girls forgot this side dish. Can you take it to the dining room? Hurry before they finish with their meal..."

Talia was not willing, but she already avoided several rounds of taking food to the dining room and saying 'no' to Stephanie didn't sound like a good option.

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In the dining room...

Maya was in the role of a host because Damon and Caden were still in the study, doing final checks on the security.

Alpha Maddox and future Alpha Axel were at the table with Maya when Mindy entered the dining room.

Mindy was irritated because she planned to make a grand entrance by being moderately late, yet Alpha Damon was still not there, and no one started eating so... she was not late at all.

"Where should I sit?", Mindy asked, and her sight fell on the head of the table that was empty. "Is Alpha Damon sitting there?"

Maya confirmed and Mindy went in that direction.

Alpha Maddox frowned, thinking that Mindy will sit on Damon's seat. Who knows what his prideful sister was thinking? She was complaining before dinner how Alpha Damon was disrespectful for not coming to greet them.

Alpha Maddox let out a breath of relief when he saw that she sat on the chair that will be on Damon's left, but in the next moment, he noticed that Maya's expression flashed with displeasure while looking

at Mindy. Of course, he didn't know that his sister sat on Talia's seat, but he guessed that the spot is reserved for someone.

"Mindy, how about you sit next to me?", Alpha Maddox asked while patting the backrest of the empty chair on his right.

Mindy cocked an eyebrow. "I see you every day, and we came here to expand our network and talk about business. Like this, I can chat with Alpha Damon." She saw that her brother was about to object, and she lifted her chin. "Are you going to tell me that there is someone more qualified than me to sit by Alpha Damon's side?"

They all turned to the door to see a figure standing there. It was Talia.

Alpha Maddox was surprised that he didn't feel Talia's presence until she got into his visual range. And it was the same that afternoon. Naturally, that made him wish to know more about Talia.

Unaware of Alpha Maddox's thoughts, Talia's eyes moved over the table, and she found enough space to place the side dish she was holding.

"Talia...", Maya called when she saw that Talia took a step away from the table, obviously wanting to leave when her hands were free. "Will you join us for a meal?"

Subconsciously, Talia glanced at the spot where Damon would sit. It was empty. But the seat on his left was not empty and Talia's heart tightened at the sight of Mindy who projected confidence.

Mindy was dressed up with her hair and makeup done, and she really looked like she belonged there.

When she reached the door, Talia heard a female saying how there is no one more qualified than her to sit by Damon's side, and now Talia connected that voice with the face, and... she agreed. Mindy looked more put together than Talia ever was.

It shouldn't hurt, Talia knew that this was coming. She was nobody, a temporary entertainment, a person to keep him company until someone else comes... and now that another woman sat in that place, it hurt, and Talia's eyes dimmed as she lowered her head.

"Oh, your Omegas eat at the table with you? How generous", Mindy said to Maya, her words sending needles straight to Talia's already bleeding heart.

While looking blankly at her own feet, Talia answered Maya's question in a small voice. "I'm having my meal in the kitchen. If you excuse me..."

Maya let out a dejected sigh when Talia left the dining room.

Alpha Maddox pinched the roof of his nose, and spoke to Mindy through their mind-link, 'Why can't you keep your mouth shut?'

'Did I say something wrong? Omegas eating with ranked members and guests at the same table is progressive. That was a compliment.'

Maddox shook his head. Yes, it would be a compliment, but Maya's reaction told him that something is off. And this was the second time for his sister to offend Talia.

"Who is that girl?", Alpha Axel asked while his eyes still lingered at the door through which Talia disappeared.

"She just joined recently.", Maya responded with her story ready. "Her name is Talia. She came from the North and was looking for a pack, so we took her in."

Alpha Axel nodded absentmindedly, and Maya saw that Alpha Maddox was also listening intently. Maya wondered if she missed something important because it seemed that both Maddox and Axel showed interest in Talia.

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Damon and Caden entered the room and Damon said without sincerity, "Sorry to keep you waiting."

He really didn't care, but he said it because he noticed that everyone's plates were clean.

Damon was not in a good mood because with all the guests around, they had extra work related to patrols and security, and he was feeling uneasy the whole afternoon and it was only getting worse.

Instead of being with these people, he wanted to go into Talia's room and cuddle until he feels better.

However, Damon ignored his guests for the whole afternoon and if he ditches dinner also, it would be super-rude, so he decided to come, eat quickly, and then join Talia.

Damon reminded himself that he is the host, and this is only a day or two, and he shouldn't be tactless to the point of damaging the relationships between packs.

"It's good to have you here again.", Damon said to Maddox, and he glanced at Mindy and gave her a small nod to acknowledge her presence before turning to Axel with, "Where are your guys?"

"Beta and Gamma are with the rest of my pack members, keeping an eye on them. They are excited about tomorrow's game, and we don't want to risk any incidents."

This was the first time for Damon and Axel to meet in person. So far, they exchanged emails and attended video conferences, and a few times when Damon interacted with the representatives of the Midnight Guardians pack in person, that was with Axel's father, Alpha Isaac.

"Make yourself at home. If you are lacking anything, let me or my Betas know.", Damon said to what Axel nodded in understanding.

In bigger packs, the hierarchy of ranked members is complex with multiple levels, and that would be the case with Dark Howlers also if Damon had more people he trusts.

The Midnight Guardians pack has a pair of Alphas leading them, Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia.

Pair of Alphas means that both mates are equal, in everything. In the Midnight Guardians pack, Alpha Isaac is focusing on external relationships, while Alpha Sophia tends to matters within the pack. Below Alphas are Betas and then Gammas. The other ranked members have specializations like generals (who lead warriors), librarians (in charge of education), etc.

The Midnight Guardians pack is mysterious, and no one knows exactly where their headquarters are or how many pack members they have.

It's an ancient pack, and there are many stories about it, one more fantastic than the other. Some say that many generations ago, the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack was mated to a witch and they have unnaturally long lifespans, and some say that it was a vampire, and there are rumors that they have a fairy bloodline that grants them mystical powers and their eyes glow silvery when they shift into their wolf form.

Damon believes that those stories are rubbish, probably started by the members of the Midnight Guardians pack themselves in order to keep others at bay. After all, the biggest fear is of the unknown, and only a fool would rush to invade territory without knowing who all is guarding it. In a way, Damon admires their strategy.

Damon greeted Mindy officially and sat in his seat. He met Mindy a few times before, but that was years ago when she was a teen, and he was a green Alpha. This was the first time for her to visit the Dark Howlers pack.

"Alpha Damon...", Mindy stated chit-chat while putting food on her plate. Damon doesn't care about protocols, but in many packs, no one will eat before Alpha.

"I see that you are opening up to taking in she-wolves who were abused. That's very admirable.", Mindy was talking about Talia.

Damon didn't understand the cause of that comment, so he gave a generic response. "The Dark Howlers pack was always accepting people in need of help. It's just that some cases are more complex than others and when we feel that we can't handle it, we reach out to the Blue River pack for assistance. Alpha Maddox is an undeniable expert."

Damon nodded toward Alpha Maddox who nodded in return. It was obvious that the two Alphas respect each other and their relationship is good.

"It's good that you can admit that others are more qualified.", Mindy said with a smirk.

Damon paused cutting the meat on his plate and cocked an eyebrow at Mindy. "This is not about pride, but about doing what's best for people in need."

Mindy was saying something, but Maya's voice in Damon's head through the mind-link was much louder, 'Don't you think that something is missing?'

Damon didn't get it. 'What's missing?'

Maya cleared her throat. 'Shouldn't SOMEONE else sit in that place?'

Damon realized that Maya was talking about Talia. 'Isn't she having dinner in her room?'

Talia normally ate food in her room, and he didn't think much about her absence. He was thinking of going to her room after dinner, and he would bring food anyway. He loved to watch her eat.

'Talia was serving us, and Mindy.', Maya emphasized this last part. 'She said that she will not join us at the table, but instead, she will eat in the kitchen. Like an Omega.'

Maya twisted it a bit, but all the facts were there.

Damon had no idea what Maya was trying to say, but he understood that Talia was having her meal in the kitchen.

Chapter 83 - Lifting The Mood

In the kitchen...

Talia was pushing the food on her plate.

She couldn't describe the agonizing feeling that gnawed on her insides.

Talia thought how not so long ago she was stuck in an attic, alone, and hungry, believing that only if she could have a safe place that is clean and comfortable, and some good food, she will be happy. Yet now that she is here, with all this delicious food in front of her, without danger of being bullied, with a comfortable bed upstairs... she was not happy.

And why is that? Is it only because one woman took the place that never belonged to Talia?

No, that didn't sound right.

Over the years, Talia met many who pointed out how they are above Talia while she is nothing, yet it never hurt this much.

Talia wondered if she was greedy. Surely, her current situation is a big upgrade compared to what she had. Why is she nitpicking? Why is her heart aching?

"Is the food not to your liking?", Stephanie asked, and Talia sucked in a breath.

'I need to keep it together or Stephanie will start asking questions to which I don't have answers and I don't want her to misunderstand me.'

Talia was confident that if she tells Stephanie (or anyone else) the reason behind her dejection, they will laugh at her for wishing something that will never be hers.

"No, the food fine. I'm full so I slowed down.", Talia responded with a forced smile.

Stephanie didn't buy it. "You were eating fine before you took that last side dish into the dining room. Did something happen?"

"Nothing happened.", Talia denied it.

Stephanie eyed Talia suspiciously. "Are you sure?"

"Of course." Talia did her best to sound enthusiastic.

"Talia, why are you eating here?", Damon asked from the door stiffly.

Talia looked at Damon and her stomach formed a hundred painful knots as all her insecurities resurfaced.

Why did he look angry? Is he telling her not to eat? Or is this the part where he tells her to scram because he found himself another woman? Only that morning he asked her not to leave him, yet it seems that he forgot about all that.

"Where should she eat?" It was Stephanie who asked.

"In the dining room.", Damon responded without removing his gaze from Talia.

Talia lowered her head and pressed her lips into a line.

Why was Damon telling her to go there?

Will he ask Miss Mindy to move so that Talia can have her usual seat? That was not very likely.

He will probably tell Talia to sit somewhere else.

Will Damon hold Miss Mindy's hand under the table? Is that why he wants Talia to go there? So that she can see how Miss Mindy is the right woman to sit by Alpha Damon's side? After all, no one is more worthy of sitting in that chair than Miss Mindy.

Talia's heart tightened and she felt her eyes stinging. Is she going to cry? Will that make him happy? Will he even care?

"It's fine, Alpha Damon.", Talia responded while focusing mightily to control her voice so that it doesn't shake. "Thank you for your concern, but I'm done with my meal."

Talia took her plate that was still more than half full and placed it in the sink.

"Stephanie, I will clean up later."

Talia moved to leave the kitchen and Damon blocked her path. "Where are you going?"

"To my room, unless you have something that needs to be done, Alpha."

Damon looked into Talia's eyes and the ache in his chest increased. Why did she look at him like he did something wrong? Is it possible that she wants to get away from him?

"Alpha Damon, can we have a word?", Stephanie called, and Talia used this chance to go around Damon and dash upstairs.

"I told you to let her go. Why is Talia still in the packhouse?", Stephanie asked when Talia was out of the earshot.

Damon was irritated. Why did she insist that Talia needs to leave the packhouse?

"And where do you want me to send her?"

"Anywhere is better than here.", Stephanie responded. "And before you snap at me, let me tell you something. Talia was in a good mood before she went to the dining room. Something happened and she returned absentminded and... broken."

"Maya was there. No one would dare to bully her.", Damon responded, unsure if Stephanie was exaggerating.

"Unlike you, Talia is a sensitive child who endured years of abuse. She doesn't need to be hit physically in order to feel the pain."

Damon snorted and moved to leave the kitchen.

"Where are you going?", Stephanie called in a raised voice, just how Damon's mother would when she was reprimanding him.

"After Talia."

"And do, what? Order her to join you for dinner?"

That's exactly what Damon wanted to do. If Talia didn't want to say what was bothering her, Damon would make her stick to him until she talks. Actually, he would rather cuddle but Talia was not in a good mood, and it seems that she didn't eat much, so he would bring her to the dining room and make her eat until he was satisfied. Or maybe it's better if he takes food upstairs.

But he knew that Stephanie would not approve, so he lied. "No." Why did she treat him like he is the bad guy?

Stephanie could see that he lied.

"Unless you have a plan that doesn't include making it more difficult for Talia, I suggest you leave her alone. Or at least give her some time for both of you to calm down."

Damon nodded stiffly and his legs carried him back to the dining room.

He really didn't have a plan other than forcing Talia to eat and talk. Sure, he wouldn't be violent, but he didn't have any soft techniques that would make her spill the beans either.

Damon sat in his chair and stared murderously at the food on his plate, like the food has answers, and refuses to talk.

"My brother told me about the Shifters nightclub.", Mindy said to Damon. "Can we go there tonight?"

"You can go wherever you want.", Damon responded right away.

"You will join us, right?", Mindy asked. "We need to show to our pack members that we are getting along well." She glanced at Alpha Axel. "All of us should go."

Seeing that Axel nodded in agreement, Damon let out a long exhale. He didn't want to go, but he can show up and leave after five minutes. No one can force him to stay longer. "Sure."

'Where is Talia?', Maya's voice sounded in Damon's head through their mind-link.

'In her room. She said that she was done with food.', Damon responded.

'And you believed her?'

Damon lifted his gaze and saw Maya's displeased look directed his way from across the table.

'What happened before I arrived?', Damon asked Maya.

'If you came here on time, or paid more attention to your surroundings and Talia, you would know.', Maya responded and stood up. "I have a few things to do, so if you excuse me..."

"Will you join us at the nightclub tonight?", Mindy asked Maya.

"I wouldn't miss it for the world."

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There was knocking on the door and Talia pushed herself up into a seated position and wiped the tears before responding, "Yes?"

"Can I come in?", Maya asked, and got in before Talia responded.

Maya sat on the bed next to Talia before asking, "How are you doing?"

"Fine."

Maya knew that Talia lied. Her eyes were red and puffy, it was obvious that Talia was crying.

"When a girl feels down, there is only one thing to do."

Talia blinked. "What?"

"Give me a minute...", Maya said and disappeared into Talia's closet.

A minute later, Maya came out with some garments draped over her arm. "Come with me, Talia. I want to give you a makeover."

"Will that lift my mood?"

Maya smiled mischievously. "No. But an evening of drinking and dancing will."

Talia's face fell. Drinking? Dancing? She never did any of those! But Maya was dragging her out of the room, and she followed obediently.

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Damon was getting impatient. He knocked on Talia's door several times and there was no response, and he couldn't pick up her scent either.

He cracked the door open. "Talia?" Nothing.

Damon stuck his head inside and looked around. The light was on, but there was no sign of Talia, so he let himself in.

He kept the plate with food on the coffee table and checked the bathroom and the closet, only to confirm that Talia was not there.

Damon stood in the middle of Talia's room while panic washed over him.

Did she leave? He couldn't breathe. And why was his wolf non-responsive in this moment of crisis?

'MAYA! CADEN!', Damon roared into the mind-link. 'TALIA IS MISSING!'

'Oh. It took you a while to notice.', Maya responded, and Damon saw red.

'WHERE IS TALIA?'

'She is not missing.', Caden responded before Maya could add more oil to the fire. They were in their room with Talia, and Caden wondered if Maya wants to make Damon blow up the whole packhouse while she flat-irons Talia's hair.

'Where is Talia?' Damon was irritated that they are not telling him the location so that he can go and fetch Talia. Should he go to their room?

After a second of silence, Caden responded, 'Talia is safe, having some girl time.'

Damon couldn't believe this. Girl time? What does that even mean?

But she was not missing, and that was a good thing.

'Why are you looking for Talia?', Maya asked. 'Don't you need to go to the Shifters with your guests? Don't tell me that you will push that responsibility also on your Betas. We are slaving the whole day and need time to unwind.'

Damon was happy to get away from the dinner table and arrange a plate of food for Talia.

Talia was upset when she left the kitchen, but Damon gave her time to calm down, and he came with food to placate her. He hoped that will be enough for Talia to see his sincerity.

With all those thoughts about Talia, he forgot about the guests and the nightclub.

Damn it! But he will make it quick. By the time he is back, Talia will be done with her girl time (whatever that is) and available for cuddling.

Chapter 84 - The Shifters Nightclub (1)

~ the Shifters nightclub ~

Talia followed Maya through the dark hallway, and the thumping of the base was getting stronger with every step they took.

The moment a bulky guy opened the door for them, the electro house music assaulted Talia's ears and she winced.

It took her a moment to compose herself and observe the massive area while trailing only a few inches behind Maya, fearing that if they separate, she won't be able to find her in the crowd that was moving with the music.

Talia frowned at the intensity of various scents that entered her system. Perfumes, sweat, alcohol. Even for someone without werewolf-enhanced senses, it was overwhelming.

The space was dark and colorful lights glided over the heads of people who filled the place. Talia couldn't see how big the nightclub is, but she estimated at least several hundred people present. It was very lively.

Everyone was doing their thing, but somehow, people parted to make way for them.

Talia was not aware that Maya was using her Beta aura to notify others of their presence. Werewolves have strong instincts of not blocking the way of someone who is more powerful.

Talia focused mightily not to stumble because this was her first time wearing shoes with a heel, and the fact that her legs were sore after the exercise Keith put her through, didn't help.

Talia didn't feel any discomfort before because she was moving, but during the makeover, she was sitting while Maya did her hair and makeup, and Talia could feel her muscles throbbing more by the minute, and she hoped that it will stop, but so far, it was only getting worse. By the time they were ready to go, Talia's legs were in a bad shape yet Talia didn't dare to say anything to Maya, fearing that it will spoil the mood.

Only when they stopped at the bar, and two people conveniently stood up from the barstools so that Talia and Maya can sit, Talia took mental notes of what others were wearing.

Talia observed several scarcely dressed females and realized that her lack of skin coverage doesn't stand out, but even though her tight-fitting black leather pants and the silvery tank top that ended above her navel covered all the important parts, Talia never felt so exposed before.

When thinking about the image of herself in the mirror before they left, Talia couldn't recognize herself. Her hair was ironed flat neatly, and it looked a few inches longer than usual. Maya applied light makeup, to accentuate Talia's honeyed eyes and full lips, without making them stand out too much. After some blush on the cheeks, and concealer on Talia's arm (to hide the bruise that Cassie left behind), Talia was not sure who was that girl who looked back at her from the mirror.

The styling and clothes gave her confidence and Talia straightened her back. If she didn't know that was her, Talia would imagine a sophisticated young woman who was ready for a night out.

But now the mirror was not there, Talia's insecurities bubbled to the surface, and she wished to become invisible.

Maya noticed that Talia hugged herself to cover up the bare skin of her midsection.

"Don't worry, Talia, you look great. Try to relax and enjoy."

Talia responded with a stiff smile and her eyes gravitated to the moving platform that was suspended above the crowd. It was the DJ station where one guy was standing in front of an array of machines that allowed him to mix the music and set up the mood for the whole club. There were two women dancing behind him.

The current song faded into the next one and DJ raised his arms in the air. As if on cue, most of the crowd raised their arms and they exploded into cheers as various lights spilled over them.

Talia was fascinated.

The party mood was contagious, and Talia felt her insides flutter. If not for her shyness, she would wave her arms in the air also.

"What will you have, ladies?", a voice from the back got Talia's attention and she saw a young woman (aka the bartender) looking at her and Maya questionably. The woman nodded at Maya in acknowledgment. "Beta, it's always nice to see you."

"It's always good to be here, Katya.", Maya responded with a smile. "This is Talia."

Katya gave Talia a friendly smile while waiting to hear their orders.

Katya's hair was raised in a messy bun at the top of her head and several curly strands framed her perfect face and reached her shoulders. Talia thought that Katya looked like an exotic beauty with her sun-kissed skin, mesmerizing eyes, and full lips. She was leaning over the counter of the bar so that they can hear each other with the blaring music going on, but that also gave Talia a marvelous view of the cleavage Katya's ample peeks formed, and there was a nametag that said 'Katya'.

Maya leaned over the bar and whispered something, and Katya nodded before moving away and grabbing a few bottles from below the bar.

The bar was long and packed with patrons, and Talia observed waitresses filling their trays with colorful glasses of various shapes and sizes, before going to serve people seated in booths that were around the massive dance area.

"What do you think about this place?", Maya asked Talia who was taking in her surrounding with her eyes open wide.

Talia was not sure how to respond, other than, "It's a lot to process." Talia spotted several couples. "Is it OK for you to be here without Caden?"

Maya waved, indicating that it's not a problem. "He had some things to take care of and will join us when he is done."

Maya didn't want to say that Caden's task is to make sure Alpha Damon shows up tonight. That was part of her plan.

How will Damon react to see Talia after her makeover or in this place without him? Maya didn't want to upset him, she wanted Damon to know that Talia's life is not on pause when he is not around. That should give him a slap of reality that if he doesn't act properly, he will lose Talia, because she won't be confined to that one room, for meals, or for anything else when he is busy.

Maya was surprised to see how easily Talia interacted with Keith and other people at the gym, it was like they were attracted to her for more than just flirting; they wanted to please Talia and make her comfortable, and Maya thought how that's the real trait of a Luna, making people obey her without using force.

Maya was confident that as long as Talia is in a supportive environment, her true personality will come thru, and hopefully, Talia will get over the traumas she accumulated during her stay at the Red Moon pack.

Katya placed two pinkish cocktails on the bar and winked. "This is on the house."

After Maya's encouraging eyebrow-wiggles, Talia took the cocktail and gave it a sniff. It smelled fruity.

A sip confirmed the fruitiness in the flavor also. It was sweet and yummy, and Talia took a big gulp and licked her lips.

"Can I assume based on your smile that you like it?", Maya asked, and Talia nodded in confirmation. It was delicious.

"Good!", Maya exclaimed and waved toward where Katya was standing. "Give us one more round!"

Talia noticed that other than Katya, there were two more guys behind the long bar that was crowded with patrons. Not many were sitting, as most of the people were waiting for their drinks, and then disappearing into the crowd with their hands full.

Really, this whole nightclub was packed, and Maya told her that it's still early. Talia was not sure how many more people can be crammed in this place.

Talia remembered that Dawn and Zina told her how this is the hottest nightclub in the area, and now Talia understood what they meant. She never saw so many people in one place.

Talia wondered if Dawn and Zina are here; if they are, what are the chances that Talia will see them?

"Well, well... look who is here...", a deep male voice sounded from behind the bar. It was the fourth person Talia didn't notice before because he was in the room behind the bar so far.

Talia smiled when she recognized Keith. She wondered what was he doing there, but before she could ask, Keith leaned closer, took a sniff of Talia's drink, and scrunched his nose in obvious disapproval of her beverage.

"Let me make you something better."

Keith wanted to take Talia's cocktail away, but she held it firmly. "I like it. Can I finish this? I can have more than one drink."

Just as Talia said this, Katya brought in two more cocktails and placed them in front of Talia and Maya.

Katya cocked an eyebrow at Keith. "Are you stealing my customers?"

He grinned at Katya. "If your drinks are so good, you wouldn't need to worry about me stealing them."

Katya rolled her eyes and shook her head. She wanted to bicker with Keith, but several people were waving to get her attention, so she went to serve them. This was her job, after all.

Find in the comments pics of Katya and Talia (after her makeover)

Chapter 85 - The Shifters Nightclub (2)

"How about you, Beta Maya? Can I interest you in one of my specialties?", Keith offered, and Maya refused him while pointing at her drinks, saying how she has enough.

Accepting Keith's offer always comes with the danger of tasting something nasty, and Maya didn't want to risk it tonight.

Talia quickly finished her first cocktail and started sipping her second one while watching Keith who was mixing a concoction with expert moves. He was flinging bottles in the air and rotating them on his palms without spilling a single drop. Talia was impressed.

"You work here?", Talia asked when Keith slowed down his movements. He told her that he is in the gym almost every day, so she assumed that this is where he spends his evenings.

"I stop by to help Katya, but I wouldn't call it a job.", Keith responded.

Talia understood that Keith and Katya are in a relationship.. What kind of relationship? Their banter showed that they are close and now he said that he comes to help. Friends? Definitely more than just friends. Lovers? She was curious, but she was not sure if it's appropriate to ask.

This social setting was new for Talia, and she feared that she might mess it up if she is too nosy.

Keith started small talk, and Maya said that she is going to be back in a bit, leaving Keith and Talia on their own. Keith moved from behind the bar to sit on the barstool where Maya was previously.

Before she realized it, Talia finished her second cocktail and now in front of her was a tall glass with a clear liquid that had an amber hue, pineapple wedge on top, and a slice of lemon inside.

"Why are you still here? Didn't you say you are leaving?", Katya asked Keith grumpily when she approached that area of the bar.

"I was about to leave, but then I saw Talia and thought of giving her company. Instead of looking at what I'm doing, you should focus on the thirsty customers."

Katya glanced at Talia's drink before saying, "Don't let him turn you into his victim. Keith will force his concoctions on you until you get an upset stomach."

"Some of my concoctions are the best selling cocktails here!", Keith shouted after Katya and then turned to Talia. "Don't listen to her, Talia. This is good stuff."

Looking at his expectant expression, Talia wouldn't refuse him no matter what kind of a drink he made, even if it gives her an upset stomach.

Talia took a careful sip and citrusy flavors exploded at the tip of her tongue. It was very different from the fruity cocktail she had previously but no less tasty. Actually, this was very refreshing, and she took another sip before giving her praise, "Very good."

Keith beamed and his smile revealed two dimples, one on each cheek.

Keith directed his smug expression at Katya who was too far to hear him. "See? This girl knows what's good."

He spoke to Talia, "When you finish this one, I will make you something else."

Talia drank the cocktail happily, without realizing at what point she started loosening up. She even started moving with the music, alcohol helped suppress the ache in her muscles that she earned while exercising earlier that day.

Talia had never drunk alcohol before, so her resistance was very low and cocktails were expertly mixed to conceal the bitter taste, so Talia had them like juice.

Talking with Keith came easy, and Talia enjoyed that they were chatting about anything and everything like they are long-term friends.

At some point, Keith noticed that Talia was looking at the people who danced.

"Do you want to dance?", Keith offered.

Talia smiled happily. She was glad that he offered, but she shook her head. "I don't know how."

Keith's eyes flashed with amusement. He stood up and offered Talia his hand, palm up. "As your personal trainer, it is my duty to teach you."

Talia looked around helplessly, hoping to see Maya that could rescue her because Keith seemed determined, but Maya was nowhere in sight.

She wanted to refuse, but then she stared foolishly at his dimples, and her legs moved on their own to follow Keith away from the bar.

Talia noticed that people moved to make way for them. Keith didn't seem surprised by this.

When they were somewhere in the dancing crowd, Keith turned to face Talia and she didn't expect it so she bumped into him. Talia put her arms up to push herself from Keith and took notice of his firm pecs. Are all guy-werewolves so hard?

An image of a different werewolf flashed in front of her eyes, this one had raven-black hair and icy-blue eyes and Talia shook her head, to focus on reality.

Keith took Talia's hands by the wrists and lifted them higher, from his pecs to his shoulders.

"Put your hands here and relax. Follow me and let the music guide you."

As much as alcohol gave her courage, now that she was facing Keith, Talia's will faltered. His hands were on her waist, and she glanced at the people nervously.

Talia's breath hitched when she noticed that not everyone was dancing. Some were grinding on each other, and some were outright making out, and the fact that Keith leaned close so that they can talk without shouting over the music didn't make the situation more comfortable.

Talia thought how this was silly. Why was she so stiff? It doesn't matter what others are doing. Keith and she are here for dancing and there is nothing more to it.

On several occasions, Talia was completely glued to Alpha Damon and that didn't feel awkward. Why can't she relax with Keith?

Objectively speaking, Keith is a good-looking young man, caring, consistent, a gentleman. Keith reminds Talia of a breeze on a warm spring day, while Alpha Damon is overbearing and unpredictable like a hailstorm on a hot summer day.

Why did standing close to Keith feel wrong, while being with Alpha Damon came naturally? Talia wondered if she has self-destructive tendencies.

Keith touched Talia's chin, making her look at him.

"First lesson on dancing, you can focus on the music or on your partner. Preferably both.", Keith said seriously. "Second lesson, you need to have fun and that means you should not think if someone is watching or what they are doing. This is about you and your partner, in this case, me. No one else matters. Got it?"

Talia nodded earnestly.

She repeated in her mind Keith's lessons, and it didn't sit well with her that he said how he is her partner.

She wondered if Alpha Damon would care if he heard Keith's words. Probably not. He must be busy with Miss Mindy. Is he giving her his breathtaking half-smile that goes great with his icy-blue eyes? Is she enjoying his scent of the forest and dark chocolate?

Talia pushed those thoughts to the side. She shouldn't think about Alpha Damon because it can't bring anything good. She needs to forget about him.

Damon found his Luna, or maybe his next toy, and Talia is out of the picture. Even Stephanie confirmed what everyone knows how Alphas are toying with girls until they find their Luna, and Talia was just one more in the lines of girls that brought Damon temporary entertainment. The sooner she accepts it, the faster the pain will subside.

But there was another variable in this whole almost-dancing situation, "Is Katya OK with this?"

Keith cocked an eyebrow with slight confusion on his sun-kissed face. "OK, with what?"

"With us, dancing.", Talia clarified.

"Why wouldn't she be?"

Talia was not sure if she spoke too much. But she knew that werewolves are very possessive and jealous and how can Katya be OK when her important person was dancing with some other girl?

Talia didn't say more, but Keith could guess her thoughts.

"You see, Talia...", he made a dramatic pause and licked his lips that were lifted into a smile by the time he spoke again, "Katya is my sister."

Talia released a breath she was holding. It's not that she had any intention of hitting it off with Keith, but a jealous she-wolf might be a problem and Talia's face fell when she realized that maybe Keith misunderstood her. What if he thought that Talia has romantic thoughts that include Keith?

But how can she explain this without making it more awkward?

Keith was watching her with amusement in his eyes and she had to say something.

"I didn't know Katya is your sister. She is impressive. Do you mind telling me about her?"

Keith's expression softened. "Katya is impressive. When she finished high school, she was eligible for the scholarship, just how I was. I took mine and went to college in human town while Katya asked to convert her scholarship into a loan to buy this place."

Talia blinked. "Katya is the owner?" Well, that explained why everyone made way for him. If he's the owner's brother, he is kind of an owner also.

Keith moved closer so that he can talk to Talia without yelling. They were so close that Talia could feel the heat emanating from his body and the earthy scent of his aftershave.

"Katya bought this place and spruced it up. It was a decent nightclub with previous owners, but since Katya took over, it became the best in the area. I come here when I get a chance to help her out, and she lets me experiment with drinks. My kitchen is well equipped, but I don't have thirty varieties of scotch..."

Talia listened with interest, and she completely missed the fact that her legs were moving how Keith guided her. Compared to the people around them who danced vigorously, they moved much slower, but it was still dancing. It was her first dance and she missed it.

Chapter 86 - The Shifters Nightclub (3)

"Are we interrupting?"

Talia and Keith looked toward the source of the voice and saw Liam and Pierce.

Talia was flustered. Her hands were on Keith's shoulders and they were moving in the middle of the dancing crowd, and she became aware of how close they were. Too close.

Liam grinned at the sight of Talia who moved away from Keith, taking it as a clear sign that Keith didn't seal the deal with Talia. Well, Liam was not sure what Keith's intentions were, but he saw Keith giving attention to Talia at the training center, and now they were awfully close and exchanging whispers while holding each other on the dancefloor. Something was going on. Definitely.

"I was wondering if I can get a dance.", Liam said to Talia while ignoring Keith's glare.

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"Me next!", Pierce exclaimed.

For some reason Keith couldn't explain, he was not willing to let Liam or Pierce dance with Talia.

Talia hesitated and Keith was quick to respond in her place, "We were just planning to go to the bar and grab some drinks."

"Excellent! We will join you.", Liam said.

And just like that, the four of them headed to the bar, and Maya was also there.

Talia sat on the barstool next to Maya, and three guys stood around them protectively.

"Don't drink too much. We have a game in the morning.", Keith grumbled at Liam and Pierce when they ordered their second round of drinks.

"Just one more, coach!", Pierce said while grabbing one of the unclaimed chilled beers that Katya placed on the counter for them.

Liam rolled the sleeves of his shirt high, and Talia stared at his tattoos. There was a cross and some geometric shapes, a sun, and... "Is that a cheetah?", Talia asked and Liam nodded smugly in confirmation.

"Why a cheetah?" She thought that werewolves would rather have wolves (or at least dogs).

"Cheetah is the fastest land animal.", Liam responded smugly. "And why I have it on my skin, you will find out during the game tomorrow."

"Liam is the fastest guy on our team.", Pierce said like it's not a big deal. "But tomorrow you will see that it's not only about the speed. Footwork is what counts."

Talia understood that Pierce is proud of his skills on the field. She squinted while trying to remember what game they will be playing. Soccer?

Liam snorted. "What's the point of the footwork when you can't reach the ball?"

Pierce responded something, and Liam said a few words in return. Talia's mind was getting clouded from the alcohol and she couldn't understand what they were saying, but she knew they were bickering.

Keith placed his hands on Liam's and Pierce's shoulders and gave them a harsh squeeze.

"How about you save that energy for the game?"

At Keith's words, both Pierce and Liam closed their mouths and nodded.

"Talia!", an excited cry came from the side and Talia saw a blonde pixie cut hairstyle that was bobbing through the crowd.

Talia waved at Dawn and Zina, hoping that the newcomers won't notice how buzzed she was, but Talia didn't miss that Dawn and Zina were immediately eyeing Keith, Liam, and Pierce.

Zina and Dawn know who Liam, Pierce, and Keith are, but they are not in the same circles, because Omegas don't mix with warriors and Keith is something like a celebrity trainer who earns an unimaginable amount of money with his line of protein shakes.

Pierce gestured to Katya to add more beers, and soon each of them had one.

After finishing the beer he was holding, Keith excused himself, saying that he has an early start in the morning, and he reminded guys not to stay too long and not to get wasted.

The truth was that Keith didn't want to leave, but he had duties before games start, and as the main coach from the hosting pack, he couldn't mess up and be late, or worse... late and hungover. He was planning to head home when he saw Talia, and that was a long time ago.

"Will you be OK here?", Keith asked Talia to what she confirmed with a nod and a silly grin on her face.

"We will watch over her.", Dawn said while hooking her arm around Talia's neck. "And no one can bully us with Beta Maya here."

Keith looked at Talia with a complex expression for a few long seconds, and then he shouted at Katya, "Don't give them any more drinks! I need them to play a good game tomorrow!"

Talia thought that Keith sounded like a concerned parent.

If Talia knew that Keith really wanted to take her home, maybe she would put up a guard against him, at least a little bit.

"Now that the coach is gone, how about that dance?", Liam asked Talia as soon as Keith was out of sight. Maybe Talia didn't notice, but Pierce and Liam noticed that Keith was hovering around Talia while making sure that no other guy gets too close.

Talia shook her head and swayed a little before leaning on Dawn. "I didn't drink enough to dance."

"Then we should drink some more!", Zina exclaimed, and Pierce and Liam cheered. Katya will not give them drinks, but if the girls place an order, then there will be no obstacles.

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Damon arrived at the Shifters nightclub with Caden, Alpha Maddox, Mindy, and Axel.

They stepped through the doors and stood on the platform that was five steps above the rest of the nightclub.

It was inevitable that Damon's appearance will stir the commotion as people nudged each other to pay attention to the five striking people that entered the nightclub.

She-wolves couldn't help but swoon over Damon while his eyes swept the space with his signature half-frown of a predator who shouldn't be disturbed recklessly.

Damon's hair was slicked back with a few messy strands falling carelessly on his forehead, and the black leather jacket gave him a dangerous biker vibe. Definitely a bad boy.

Damon's appeal was enhanced by the company of four other impressive individuals by his side.

Werewolves have their information network and magazines, and they knew who the newcomers were.

The Werewolf Weekly Magazine (aka the WWM) has a dedicated section for young and upcoming Alphas. Damon, Maddox, and Axel are celebrities, while Mindy is often featured as a young goodwill ambassador who will be an amazing Luna.

Caden was also popular, but after he mated with Maya, they stopped featuring him. After all, available hotties sell the magazine better. The magazine reached to Caden and Maya to be shown as a couple, but they wanted details related to their work as Betas, so Caden and Maya refused because they didn't want to disclose the inner workings of the Dark Howlers pack.

Damon's jaw tightened. The crowd and noise were familiar. This is the place where he came numerous times to pick his company for the night, but now the only thought on his mind was to leave as soon as possible.

Damon reminded himself that he can have one drink before heading back. He will come up with an excuse how there is something he needs to handle. And that something is cuddling with Talia because he was confident that Talia will be done with her girl time.

The Shifters nightclub is in the territory of the Dark Howlers pack and the owner (aka Katya) is a pack member, so naturally, Alpha Damon has his private booth that no one else would dare to use without Damon's approval.

The booth is elevated with a metallic rail separating it from the rest of the nightclub. There are two low tables with one curved sofa where at least ten people can sit without touching each other. That booth is the only area where colorful lights will never hit, giving it privacy in the darkness, while people who are in that booth can clearly see the rest of the nightclub.

Of course, Talia (just like everyone else) noticed a wave of commotion as five people made their way to the VVIP booth.

Damon's booth was on the opposite side from where the bar was, and it was in the dark, but Talia saw Damon climbing up. She would recognize him no matter how far away or how dark it is.

Darkness and distance were not a problem for Talia, and she never realized that others couldn't see clearly when she was able to spot every detail, like it was close up, during daylight.

Subconsciously, Talia held her breath as she soaked in Damon's every move. There was a majestic aura around Damon that projected danger and confidence and he was beyond handsome.

Unfortunately, that good eyesight allowed her to see Mindy walking close behind Damon, and piercing pain in her chest clenched her heart.

Talia didn't get it. Why did she care about Alpha Damon? Yes, they spent some time together, but she was careful not to allow her imagination to run wild, and she repeatedly told herself how Damon's attention doesn't mean anything; she was a temporary entertainment, a pet, a charity project... How did she find herself trapped in a web of fantasies that didn't even form in her mind? It didn't make sense. Nothing made sense.

Talia shook her head, together with any negative emotions that swelled within her. She will not allow him to spoil her mood.

With the corner of her eye, Talia thought that she saw Damon holding his chest just before he disappeared into the darkness, and Mindy moved with haste to support him.

Of course, Mindy will support him.

Talia told herself not to care. If Damon is unwell, Mindy will take care of him, and Talia doesn't have the right to get close to him. Her role in his life is done.

Talia took a big gulp of chilled beer, hoping that it will erase the thoughts and emotions that weighed on her.

Chapter 87 - The Shifters Nightclub (4) [Bonus]

"Well, isn't that a visual treat for us single ladies?", Dawn asked with a sigh while she squinted toward the booth that was hidden in the darkness. "Axel is such an eye candy. I wish I could go there and introduce myself." She eyed Maya not-so-discreetly and Dawn frowned when she saw that Maya ignored her.

Maya got the message, loud and clear. Dawn hoped to get access to that booth, but Maya knew that Axel is one of the rare Alphas-to-be who is not living a licentious lifestyle, and she didn't want to offend him.

The rumor is that members of the Midnight Guardians pack are all waiting for their mates and won't fool around, which is extremely uncommon for werewolves who have high libidos and are exposed to nudity from young age.

Unfortunately for Axel, that same rumor is making him more appealing because many women (and some men) have set as their goal in life to take Axel's first time. Due to that, when in public, Axel has a perpetuate frown that should repel weak-willed hopefuls.

Maya looked at Talia who was drinking her second beer a bit too fast.

"Maybe you should slow down.", Maya advised Talia. Drinking and partying is one thing, but Talia was already swaying on that barstool and if Talia passes out, the makeover and coming here will be for naught.

Talia didn't want to slow down. The ache in her chest was getting unbearable and she welcomed the numbing sensation that alcohol provided. At this point, Talia wanted Maya to leave so that she can drown her sorrows and forget about fantasies that will never come true.

"Why don't you join Caden?", Talia asked Maya while gesturing in the direction of the VVIP booth.

"I came here with you.", Maya said. "It wouldn't be fair to leave you on your own. Of course, if you want to join me there, that's a different thing."

Talia refused. There was no way that she will subject herself to watching Alpha Damon with the woman who will warm his bed tonight, and maybe in the future as well.

Talia was drunk but firm on having fun tonight, and tomorrow she will work on leaving the packhouse... or maybe she will work on that after the festival is over, and Maya and Stephanie have time to talk about Talia's next sleeping arrangements.

"I am not on my own.", Talia responded with the best smile she could muster and gestured toward Dawn, Zina, Liam, and Pierce. "Go and be with your mate. I don't want Caden to hate me later."

Maya glanced at Dawn and Zina. "I will count on you to watch over Talia."

Dawn and Zina nodded earnestly and burst into giggles because they were tipsy. The mood was good. They stiffened when they heard Maya talking to them through the mind-link, 'If anything seems off, mind-link me directly. Don't let anyone bully Talia.'

The energy in the club was positive, but this was a bunch of werewolves with explosive tempers. There were visitors from other packs, and they were drinking. A fight could erupt at the slightest provocation, and it could get nasty at any moment.

Maya leaned closer to Talia, "If you need me, you know where to find me. I won't leave the club without you."

Talia was grateful for this reassurance that reminded her how Maya is a good person.

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Maya made her way through the crowd and climbed the stairs to the elevated booth, finding Caden there who welcomed her with a big smile on his face and arms open wide. Maya returned his smile and sank into his embrace. She relished his scent and soothing touch; it's something that only a mate can provide.

Maya glanced at Damon who was fiddling with his phone, and she wondered if he will notice that Maya is with them and not with Talia. She decided to give him a few minutes, and if he is still passive, she will give him a hint or two.

Axel's gaze was trained on the crowd, and he looked like he was contemplating something seriously, so others didn't want to disturb him.

Alpha Maddox was watching Mindy who downed her drink in one go before standing up abruptly.

"Who wants to dance?", Mindy asked enthusiastically only to face her brother's frown, and Axel and Damon didn't look willing to party either.

Seeing that Axel is grumpy, Mindy moved to stand in front of Damon. "As a host, shouldn't you entertain me?"

Damon lifted his gaze from the phone in his hand and cocked an eyebrow at Mindy. "What do you want?"

"To dance."

"As a host, I came to the club with you, and I'm allowing you to use my booth. If you want to dance...", Damon gestured toward the crowd, telling her silently that he was not interested.

That whole evening, Damon was not feeling well, and occasionally his chest ached like something was really wrong. He tried talking to his wolf, but he got only silence in response which made Damon more irritable. He was NOT in the mood to entertain anyone.

At Damon's rejection to join her on the dancefloor, Mindy rolled her eyes dramatically and went down on her own. Those Alphas were stiff and boring, and she wanted to party.

Mindy's schedule is usually packed with activities related to the Blue River pack and this was one of the rare occasions where she was free to indulge in whatever she wanted. Sitting in a dark booth with her brother and two grouchy guys was not her idea of having fun. Maya and Caden didn't count because they were making out.

"I'm sorry about Mindy being a pain in the ass.", Alpha Maddox said to Damon to what the latter responded with a stiff nod.

He didn't want to talk (or think) about Mindy. She was Alpha Maddox's sister, and that was it.

Damon checked the time and wondered if it was too early to bolt out of the nightclub. Was Talia done with her girly activities? He really wanted to cuddle and to feel the delightful sparks while the sweet citrusy scent of freesia lulls him to sleep.

It took Damon a minute to process that Maya was there. What about Talia? Did they finish their girl time and Maya came to the club? If that's the case, he can go back home right away.

Damon didn't care about interrupting the lovebirds. He did that many times before.

"Are you done with your girl time thing?", Damon asked Maya and when he saw the sparkle in her eyes, unease swelled in his chest.

He knew that look. Maya was up to something. Something he probably won't like.

Other than Stephanie, Maya was also suggesting that Talia leaves the packhouse; actually, Maya said that she will handle Talia's move to a different location.

Damon told himself that Maya wouldn't stage a move for Talia in the middle of the night, but his intuition was telling him to be alert.

"We are not done. It's still ongoing. I came to check on my mate.", Maya responded with a smile while tightening her hold on Caden.

Damon's face darkened when he understood that Talia is nearby, in the club probably. Without Maya. With whom is Talia? On her own or with someone? He was not sure which one of those two was worse.

"Where is she?" Damon didn't say Talia's name because Maya obviously knew who the target of Damon's interest was.

Maya stood up and walked to the metallic rail with Damon one step behind her.

Damon followed Maya's sight and he spotted Talia at the bar.

It was far away, but with his werewolf enhanced sight, Damon could clearly see Talia chatting and laughing and she was beautiful. The clothes fit her well, showcasing her flawless skin just enough to tease without exposing too much, and he wanted to see more. Much more.

Talia's hair was straight, and Damon could feel its silkiness between his fingers because he caressed Talia's hair many times before (mostly while she was sleeping).

After a moment of daze, Damon paid attention to Talia's surroundings and his mind exploded.

Who the hell were those two guys!?

Why were they so close to Talia?

And what was Talia wearing? Why was she so exposed for everyone to see?

Damon noticed that Talia was staring at Liam's arm that was covered in tattoos. He wondered, is Talia into tattoos? Maybe he should get a few.

No, wait! What was he thinking? That's not important now! Who cares about tattoos when Talia stood up from the barstool and she was chummy with two guys that are NOT Damon?

If he had any supernatural abilities, Damon would teleport right there, in front of Talia, and make both Pierce and Liam taste his fists.

Where was Talia going?

Why did she hook her arm with that dark-haired nobody (aka Pierce)?

Damon's frown deepened and he didn't blink as Talia walked with Dawn, Zina, Pierce, and Liam into the dancing crowd. Of course, his mind filtered out Dawn and Zina, showing him only Talia with Pierce and Liam.

Did that scrawny tattooed guy (aka Liam) put his arm around Talia's waist?

WHAT THE FUCK!?

Maya flinched when she heard the sound of metal creaking and she stepped away from Damon when she realized that the source of that sound was Damon gripping the rail.

She swallowed a mouthful of air. Maybe making Damon jealous was not such a good idea.

Chapter 88 - The Shifters Nightclub (5)

Talia was unaware at what point alcohol started clouding her mind and removing inhibitions.

After three sweet cocktails, Talia was only slightly buzzed when she danced with Keith, but by the time she reached the dancefloor the second time, Talia was giggling uncontrollably.

She could see the smiling faces of Dawn, Zina, Pierce, and Liam, coming in and out of focus among many others.

The booze coursed through Talia's system, and there was loud music that shook her insides, and people danced, and the mood was good, and Talia raised her arms in the air and wiggled her hips and jumped like the rest of the crowd. Her legs were wobbly and she would fall down if not for her bumping into people around her.

Maya told her that they will drink and dance to improve her mood and Talia did the drinking part. Now, it was time for dancing.

Talia didn't want to think about Alpha Damon or Miss Mindy or any other Miss who is way above her. She didn't want to be reminded that she is undesirable. Talia also didn't want to think about her independence or anything other than letting loose and dancing until her legs give up completely..

Alcohol helped numb all of Talia's emotions and she was blissfully unaware of the gazes she attracted.

A pair of strong hands landed on Talia's hips from behind, and after a few failed jumping attempts, Talia realized that someone is holding her in place.

Talia turned to face a tall, muscular guy with a head full of black hair and her heart skipped a beat. But that was only for a moment because his eyes were not icy-blue, and his scent was off.

"I see you are having fun, and I thought of joining.", the guy said to Talia, and the strong scent of alcohol splashed on her face. She had cocktails and beer, and this was the scent of hard liquor.

Talia shook her head, trying to dispel the dizziness caused by her drunken condition and to focus on what's happening because no matter how drunk she was, this didn't feel right.

She put her hands over his and tried to pry herself free, but he was much stronger. It was like trying to move a mountain with floppy hands.

"No, thank you. I'm dancing with friends tonight.", Talia said with a slur, thinking that will be enough to deter him.

The guy looked above Talia's head. "I see a lot of people dancing, and no one is bothered that I'm here. You don't mind, do you, sweetheart?"

Talia craned her neck to see behind her, and she couldn't see Liam, or Pierce, or Dawn, or Zina. Of course, the place was packed, and people moved, unless they held each other, it was easy to separate. They could have been only two steps away, but other bodies blocked them from her visual range.

And just as the guy said, no one was bothered that he was there, holding her in place, and for some reason, he wanted to dance with her.

Talia was unaware that Maya was observing the situation from the VVIP booth, and she mind-linked Dawn and Zina to pull Liam and Pierce away from Talia. She didn't want Talia's new friends to be crippled on the same day Talia befriended them.

Talia squinted at the guy who was not willing to let her go, and she wondered, why would he want to dance with her? He was so much taller and wider, and Talia never saw herself as attractive, but she was very familiar with the sensation of being bullied.

Talia put her hands against his hard chest and tried to push him away, only to get chuckles from him in response to her feeble attempts to break free.

"I don't think the girl is willing to be with you.", a gruff voice full of malicious intent came from the side and Talia froze. Why did it sound so familiar? Is her imagination playing tricks on her?

"Why don't you mind your own business?", the guy who was holding Talia asked angrily.

"She IS my business."

And the next thing Talia saw, was a fist flying only inches away from her head, straight into the nose of the guy who was holding her.

Blood. A lot of it.

Before she could react, a black leather jacket fell over her face, and she lost the ground under her feet while screams and commotion around her melded with the loud music from the nightclub.

Talia inhaled sharply, the scent of the forest and dark chocolate from the jacket entered her system, and the swaying of her whole body told her that she was being carried through a noisy crowd, and then she blacked out.

A few minutes ago...

Talia danced like she had no care in the world, and Damon's eyes were observing several guys who were watching her. She is a beauty.

Even from afar, Damon could see that Talia was intoxicated. And she did it without him to protect her. Unacceptable!

Damon thought of letting things roll and to see what happens. Maybe Talia should experience being manhandled so that she knows not to put herself into these situations.

But when he saw a guy actually putting his dirty hands on Talia, Damon couldn't stay on the side.

He suppressed his Alpha aura because he didn't want to attract unwanted attention. There are too many eyes in this club, and he didn't need to make that guy submit because he can just punch some sense into him.

Just as Damon guessed, the guy was drunk stupid, and he dared to ask, "Why don't you mind your own business?"

She is my mate, you asshole!

The guy was not from the Dark Howlers pack, and it was obvious that he didn't recognize Damon.

Damon punched him. That felt good. The guy stumbled backward, hitting people behind him, igniting a massive fight that swelled through the nightclub like a violent tidal wave with Damon at its center.

Damon swiftly wrapped Talia in his jacket, covering her face with determination to take her out of the club. Whatever girl party time she had going on, it was over.

'Caden, I'm out for the night. Maya, I'm taking Talia with me, she is piss-drunk.', Damon spoke into the mind-link angrily and Maya cringed, knowing that she will get a scolding tomorrow.

Damon released a bit of his aura with an intention to keep others at bay, but that didn't produce the desired effect on intoxicated people who were itching for a fight.

Without much space to maneuver and needing at least one hand to block incoming stray limbs, Damon hoisted Talia over his shoulder, with her head falling against his back like a sack of potatoes.

The moment he secured Talia on his shoulder, Damon saw a fist coming his way.

Damon grabbed the fist and applied pressure. Loud music covered the horrid wail of the unfortunate person who didn't see that he was aiming for the Devil himself, and Damon felt the vibrations of bones cracking before letting go of the guy. That will need a medic.

Damon skillfully dodged and blocked hits that were coming his way and he even delivered a few punches before he reached the exit with unscathed Talia as a trophy.

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The moment the fresh breeze hit Damon's face, Talia started struggling.

"You bastard! Let me go!", she shouted while wiggling her legs. Talia would probably punch or slap him, but her upper body was wrapped in his jacket, blocking her sight and obstructing her movements.

"I told you I don't want to dance, and you kidnap me? Wait until Beta Maya finds out! Alpha Damon will break your legs!"

Damon paused when he heard Talia's threat how he will break his own legs. Just how wasted was she?

Damon was facing a dilemma. Letting her down was not an option because a lot of people were watching. He was not ready for others to see the face of the girl he was carrying, not before they talk it out and he explains how important she is, and he needed to be certain that she won't run away.

But Talia was squirming, and if he tightens his hold, he might hurt her, yet if he doesn't, she will fall.

He got an idea.

'SMACK!'

Damon slapped Talia's butt and she let out a soft cry before going limp again.

He spanked her as a warning to stop wiggling, and he didn't think she will pass out.

Damon panicked. Did he hit her too hard?

Damon dashed toward his SUV and put her in the front passenger's seat with haste before removing the jacket just enough to check on her. He released the breath he was holding when he confirmed that her breathing was steady.

He lowered the seat and strapped her in without unwrapping her from his jacket.

Damon started the car and reached for her hand, the delightful sparks eased up his raging emotions a bit and then he drove toward the packhouse.

Only when they were away from the Shifters nightclub, Damon loosened up the jacket to reveal Talia's sleeping face completely.

He shook his head in disapproval. What if this was not him but that other guy?

Damon cursed under his breath.

She was so beautiful and helpless, and he had an urge to go back to the nightclub and beat some more that scoundrel who dared to put his hands on Talia. While at it, he would find those two guys who were sticking to Talia at the bar and use their bodies as punchbags to let out some steam.

Chapter 89 - How Special Is She? [Bonus]

When they reached the packhouse, Damon could see that Talia was still out, and she didn't react when he turned off the engine, or when he nudged her a little while calling her name, or when he carried her upstairs princess style.

He was determined to scold her for her irresponsible behavior. What would happen if he didn't interfere? Why can't she be more careful? What was she thinking?

Doesn't she know how adorable and completely defenseless she is?

But just as he reached the third floor of the packhouse Talia snuggled close to him and nuzzled his neck with her nose as she released a soft moan that shook his insides. To make things worse, Talia's warm breath slipped into his shirt, making him tingly all over, and the pressure in his groin area increased.

He forgot what he was planning to do.

"Damn it!", Damon cursed under his breath. He was supposed to be angry and not horny.

Talia had him wrapped around her little finger and she didn't know it. Silly girl..

Damon stood in the hallway while facing a dilemma, Talia's room or his?

It should be his, but considering Talia's state, he didn't want to add to her confusion in the morning, so he took the door on his left, into Talia's room.

Damon placed Talia on the bed, and he hovered above her while contemplating if he should change her clothes into something more sleep-appropriate. But what if she wakes up halfway and thinks that he is a creep, about to molest her?

He didn't know what to do about Talia's clothes, but he decided to change into something more comfortable before joining her in bed.

No matter how wasted Talia was, Damon was determined to get his cuddles. After seeing her too close to some other guys, Damon needed comforting.

Damon was about to move when he felt Talia holding onto his hand and he froze while looking at her sleepy face questionably.

"Don't leave me, Damon...", she whimpered, her voice barely above a whisper, but he heard her clearly.

In the next moment, Damon was in the bed, cradling Talia in his arms.

Was her request for tonight, or for forever? At that moment, it didn't matter as his forearms rested against the skin of her exposed lower back, charging him with an extra dose of delightful sparks, and she snuggled closer to him, her little hand holding onto his shoulder.

"I won't leave, Talia. I will never leave you...", he murmured, and he meant every word he said.

Damon feared that Talia will leave him, but it seemed that she had the same concerns, and that should be a good thing.

Damon was aware that Talia was drunk, and she won't remember saying those words in the morning, but he will remember them, and he was confident that this was a move in the right direction because now he knew that she needed him at least a little bit.

Talia relaxed against Damon, and her arm moved from his shoulder to his waist, and then she snored softly.

Damon looked at the beautiful woman in his arms, sleeping peacefully, absolutely unaware of the mind-shattering effect she has on him.

Talia's sweet citrusy scent of freesia made him dizzy, and his nerves tingled from amazing sparks of the mate bond, and he buried his face in her hair, taking deep breaths while enjoying Talia's proximity and he wished that they could stay like that forever.

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It was dawn when Keith got out of his room and he followed the scent of breakfast into the kitchen. Eggs, bacon, coffee.

"When will that be done?", he asked Katya who was flipping pancakes.

"By the time you get yourself a coffee, it will be ready.", Katya responded.

"Coffee or milk for you?", Keith asked, confirming if she plans to sleep or stay awake.

Normally, Katya works at night and sleeps during the day, and they see each other in the morning and evening. But today is the festival, so she might stay up longer.

"I will have milk only. After last night, I need some sleep. I will join the events by the time you give out trophies.", Katya responded. "Pour coffee for Oscar also. He is in the shower."

Keith hummed and grabbed three cups.

After finishing college, Keith returned to the pack and he wanted to stay in an apartment, but then Katya offered him a bedroom in a two-story home where Katya is living with her mate, Oscar.

Keith agreed and he moved into the spare guest bedroom on the first floor. Keith doesn't need more than a bedroom with a bathroom because he usually spends his days in the gym, or in the Shifters nightclub. He comes home only to sleep and change clothes, and even that he sometimes does in his office in the training center.

By staying in his sister's house, Keith gets to eat her cooking. If he is on his own, Keith would probably live off granola bars and protein shakes.

"What happened last night?", Keith asked before taking a bite of toast.

Katya groaned. "There was a huge fight. Every time we have other packs visiting there is a scuffle or two, but this time, the whole club was swept away. We had ambulances from the packhouse hospital and from the human hospital. Luckily, Alpha Maddox and Axel were there to calm their people. Beta Caden called several of our patrols to help out, and that's why Oscar is up already. We returned together from the Shifters after cleaning up the mess."

Keith understood that the situation was bad because normally the bouncers from the Shifters are enough to settle down rowdy patrons, and there is no need to call warriors.

While thinking about a violent fight in the nightclub, Keith became restless. "Do you know if Talia was there?"

Katya grinned. "You are worried about her, aren't you?"

He didn't deny it. "So?"

"You like her. And I mean liiiiiikeeee her.", Katya said in a singing voice.

Keith rolled his eyes. "It's not like that. Her wolf is hurt, and she doesn't have the..." His voice trailed when he noticed Katya grinning at him.

"Did she invoke your protective side?"

"Are you saying that it's wrong for me to worry about someone?"

Katya shrugged. "That's not what I said. But I saw you last night. You were trying to impress her. You made a drink especially for her, you danced like a true gentleman, and there was a silly grin on your face while she didn't seem to be lovestruck. With all the girls swooning over my lovely baby brother, there is no need for you to put an effort to get yourself a hookup. There were several dozens of she-wolves who

would accompany you for the night without questions asked, yet you left on your own. How special is she?"

"It's not like that Kat. She is a nice girl. That's all to it." Keith narrowed his eyes at Katya who looked at him mockingly, obviously not believing what he said. He decided to change his tactic. "You never meddled in my life, Kat. I'm here for the food, but if you turn into a nosy older sister, I will move out and live on my own."

Seeing that Katya pressed her lips into a line, Keith knew that she got his message: it was none of her business why he made a drink for Talia, and why he talked and danced with her without trying to pick her up for the night. Besides, even if he wanted to make a move, he knew that Talia was not a girl like that, which is unusual for werewolves, but he interacted with many humans during his college days and he is familiar with those naive eyes that don't see it coming.

Talia was abused, but she was not broken. Her innocence was still there and he found it refreshing.

Keith felt like protecting Talia, and not taking her to bed. But Katya will probably not get that. Actually, even he didn't get it because he classifies women in his life as clients, bed warmers, or non-important, and Talia didn't fit into any of those categories.

"You didn't answer my question.", Keith reminded Katya. "Was Talia hurt last night?"

"She was not in the pile of injured and passed out people, so she either left before the fight started, or she was well enough to leave on her own before Doctor Travis started taking a headcount."

Keith relaxed and put a forkful of eggs into his mouth. He had a number of things that needed to deal with before the games start, and he wondered when Talia will come. She said that she will come in the morning to watch games, and they have lunch plans and exercise in the afternoon, and after that, he will take Talia to the fair and win her a stuffed toy.

Keith didn't want Katya to find out about his plans for the day because she will get more ideas about him and Talia.

She is a nice girl, and there is nothing more to it. Right?

Chapter 90 - Post-party Aches

In the packhouse...

Talia woke up with a muffled groan. Her head felt like it's about to pop, thanks to the fierce hangover she earned after her last night's partying.

She opened her eyes with difficulty and squinted at the blinding sunlight that intensified her headache.

Talia placed her hand over her eyes and took a deep breath that filled her system with the scent of the forest and dark chocolate.

Talia looked around to confirm that she was in her room, in her bed, alone. But Damon's scent filled the bedsheets and the pillows, its concentration telling her that he was there for a while and that he left recently.

She checked herself only to see that she was wearing a silvery top and black leather pants. Ah, right... Maya gave her a makeover and they went to the Shifters nightclub.

Wait! How did she find herself here?

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Talia remembered cocktails, and Katya, Keith, beer, Pierce, Liam, and Dawn and Zina were there, and her legs were wobbly and... Oh, God! Was she dancing? But what happened after that?

For the next few minutes, Talia was focusing mightily while trying to remember how she reached the packhouse, but there was a gap in her memory, and she hoped that she didn't embarrass herself.

The only logical conclusion was that Talia drank too much (fact), and that Maya brought her back (false), and that Damon sneaked into her room later (almost true).

Talia didn't understand one thing... why would Alpha Damon come to her room if he had Miss Mindy to give him company?

Images of Damon coming into the nightclub with Mindy flashed in Talia's mind and this time they were so close that Mindy was almost leaning on Damon before they entered that wretched dark booth which is obviously for only important people... people like Alpha Damon and Miss Mindy and not the ones like Talia.

At the mental image of Mindy sticking to Damon, Talia's heart ached, and when she thought that Damon brought Mindy to his room, Talia felt nauseated.

She decided to focus on something else. There was no point in thinking about Alpha Damon and his women because Talia will leave the packhouse soon and all this will be behind her.

She would talk to Stephanie and Maya about moving right away, but today was Summer Solstice, everyone was busy, and even Talia had plans. Lots of them. But before all that, Talia needed to help Stephanie with breakfast preparations. While at it, Talia will also eat and maybe pack some food to bring along to the festival because she has no money and Talia planned to spend her whole day there.

Talia glanced at the time and frowned in displeasure because it was time to get ready or she will be late to help with breakfast preparation.

"Oww...", Talia cried softly while scooting out of the bed with an intention to start her day with a shower.

Every muscle in her body ached and she remembered that yesterday she exercised, so that would explain the pain, but why did her butt ache the most? What the heck happened last night? Did she fall on her behind?

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While Talia was getting ready for the day, Damon was in his office with Alpha Maddox.

Damon really wanted to wait for Talia to wake up so that they can talk about last night.

It was obvious that Talia can't stay locked in the room and that he can't stick to her all the time, especially when he has these extra duties, so Damon thought of coming up with some rules that will keep her safe and give him a piece of mind.

What kind of rules?

Rule number 1: Talia can't drink unless Damon is present. That rule is non-negotiable.

Rule number 2: Guys (other than Damon) can't get into the touching distance with Talia, unless it's for a handshake. Another non-negotiable rule.

That's as far Damon got with his rules when Caden mind-linked him that Alpha Maddox wants to talk to him urgently.

'We can talk during breakfast.', Damon grumbled. He didn't want to leave the bed.

'It needs to be in private.', Caden responded.

'Fine. Then, we will talk after breakfast.'

'Alpha Maddox said that it's urgent, and that means as soon as possible...'

Damon was not willing. He really wanted to stay longer and cuddle.

Talia was sleeping and clinging onto him and even though he was aroused, and he knew that if he doesn't help himself, his balls will ache, he still enjoyed Talia's proximity profusely.

To make up for the lack of physical intimacy, Damon would daydream about Talia, their first kiss, first intimate touch, first orgasm... there were so many firsts to plan for.

But instead of enjoying his morning of cuddles before the hectic day, Damon had to get out of bed, away from Talia, so that he can talk to Alpha Maddox. He didn't like it, not even a little bit.

However, Damon is Alpha first and guests will leave within a day or two, and they had a number of other guests coming that morning and visiting through the day, and Damon knew that his personal matters will need to take the back seat, for today.

Back to the present...

"You wanted to talk about something?", Damon asked Maddox.

Maddox hummed in confirmation. "We know each other for a long time, so I will skip the intro and go straight to the point. I saw what you did last night in the Shifters nightclub."

Damon knew what Maddox was talking about, but he still asked, "What did you see?"

"I saw you starting a fight and carrying a girl outside of the club. The same girl that brought us snacks and served dinner last night. Your Beta Maya said that the girl's name is Talia."

Damon told himself to play it cool. "Is that the reason why you dragged me out of the bed?"

"Yes."

"Why are you interested in my private life?"

Maddox shook his head. "It's not me, Damon. It's Alpha of the Steelbite pack."

Damon didn't get it. How was Cassie's father involved in this? "What?"

"Alpha Richard is seeking information related to the Omega that is seen in your packhouse and fits Talia's description. Considering that you don't have hundreds of Omegas milling through your packhouse, it's safe to assume he is interested in Talia."

Damon had a bad feeling about this. "What does he want?"

Maddox didn't know the details because Alpha Richard didn't disclose much. "The word is that he will pay for any information, and he also said that the girl is important to you."

Damon pinched the roof of his nose. THIS is why he wanted to hide Talia, yet based on a few hints, they assembled the puzzle which put a target on Talia's back. If he knew it will come to this, instead of chasing Cassie away, Damon would put her in the dungeon and keep her there until she forgets about Talia and him.

Damon decided to share some information with Maddox.

"I ignored Cassie's obnoxious behavior, but Cassie crossed the line when she slapped Talia during one of her tantrums. I kicked Cassie out and told her that she can't come without an invitation. Cassie can't do anything to me, so they are trying to find someone else for Cassie to vent her anger."

Maddox chuckled. "You kicked out Cassie because she slapped Talia. I have nothing against punishing Cassie, she needs to be pulled down by a few notches, but your behavior from last night showed that Talia is more than just an Omega."

Actually, Alpha Maddox knew that Talia was not an Omega. She was not submissive. Talia lowered her head consciously, Omegas do it on an instinct.

Damon didn't want to say that Talia is his mate. She should know that first and he didn't want to risk someone else telling her.

But there were things he could share with Maddox.

"When I found her, Talia was covered in injuries and starving. Currently, Talia is staying in the packhouse, and we are working with a doctor on her nutrition and exercise regimen while keeping track of her physical and mental health. I don't limit Talia from doing what she wants, but last night she drank too much, and I took her home."

Maddox listened with a solemn expression. "That is commendable. However, you kicked out Cassie after she confronted Talia, and now Talia is on the list of people associated with you. A victim of abuse needs a stable and supportive environment in order to bounce back. It's not a secret what Cassie was doing here and that you are facing challenges that go beyond women who are fighting to be your Luna."

Damon didn't like where this was going. "What are you trying to say?"

"It's best if I take Talia to the Blue River pack. You know what we have there. For girls like Talia..."

"No!", Damon snapped.

What was this nonsense about Talia going to a different pack?

Maddox didn't want to argue. "As I said, your efforts are commendable, but I believe that you can think about this rationally and give Talia the best chance to bounce back. She is young and it's not too late for her to become a functioning member of society, but she won't reach there if she is forced to share space with women like Cassie."

Damon rubbed his forehead forcibly. "Cassie is banned from coming here."

"Are you going to ban every woman who treats Talia harshly?"

"If needed, yes!"

Maddox lifted his hands in surrender. "Alright. I see that you need some time to think about it. Until you decide what to do with Talia, I suggest that you stay away from her."

"What!? Why?"

"I'm not the only one who got a message from Alpha Richard. There will be many people at that festival looking for a small and skinny girl with copper-colored hair who is regular in your packhouse and close to you. The more people believe that Talia is important to you, their interest in her will increase..."