

## THE ALPHA'S BRIDE

Chapter 1066 Alpha Violet and Alpha Ashton (7)

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"Did something happen?" Alpha Cristian asked. He didn't miss the awkward atmosphere.

"Nothing, really," Ashton responded. "Mother is scolding us for missing a function and asking for an apology." He turned to his mother. "Who is more important? Me as the future Alpha or a bunch of pencil-pushers?"

"Now, now..." Alpha Cristian said while gesturing to Ashton to calm down. From those few questions, he understood what was happening because Luna Michelle was crying last night and that morning about Ashton not coming with Violet and making them look like fools. They called people saying that Ashton was back with his mate, Alpha Violet Blake, yet the main couple didn't appear.

Some Elders questioned if Ashton was around, and some wondered if he was mated to Violet.

"Of course, you are more important, but you shouldn't offend others," Alpha Cristian said. "Some of those people made great contributions to this pack, and they deserve respect even though they are below you in ranks."

"I didn't organize the party. I didn't invite them. I didn't say I will be here. Why should I apologize?"

Alpha Cristian didn't know how to respond to this. In a way, Ashton was right. But Ashton was not done.

"Things like these make me wonder if it's worth taking over this pack."

Luna Michelle paled. "What are you saying?"

"Alpha should lead and not bow to others."

"No one said you should bow to others," Luna Michelle said.

"You said I should apologize for something that was not my fault."

Luna Michelle shook her head. "Forget I said anything."

"I don't think I can. This got me thinking, should I take over as the Alpha?"

"What?" Luna Michelle asked.

"You heard me," Ashton snapped. "Things are changing, and we must do what's best." Ashton looked at Violet, as he didn't share this with her. "I think it's time to remove this virtual border separating our territories and combine them into one."

Alpha Cristian sucked in a sharp breath. "You want the Dark Howlers pack to absorb our pack."

Ashton nodded, but he didn't remove his gaze from Violet. "I have been thinking about this since I found out you are my mate. It's the logical step. Think about it. The Spring Leaf pack will be a good addition to your pack."

While growing up, Violet didn't think about packs as separate entities. Her parents were leaders of the coalition, and everyone listened to them. Violet was set to inherit their positions, so thinking about only one or two packs would be narrowminded. But if she needed to focus on only two, the Dark Howlers pack was much larger and stronger when compared to the Spring Leaf pack.

Before Violet could voice her agreement, Alpha Cristian waved his hands, indicating to Violet and Ashton to stop talking. "There are Omegas here. Don't talk in the open about such big changes unless you know the details. Rumors can shake even the most solid plans."

"We can talk about that later," Ashton said. "I will take Vi upstairs, so we freshen up before we go to the Dark Howlers pack."

"What about a party here?" Luna Michelle asked.

"Wasn't that last night?" Ashton responded with a question.

"But you didn't show up."

Ashton would ask for Violet's opinion on this, but she already told him he would need to deal with his parents. He had an answer for this.

"We will tell you when we are ready for a party. Both Violet and I have our duties and schedules. As a newly mated couple, we want to spend time with

each other and our families. I am confident that Elders and high-ranking members will understand. If they don't, remind them I am their future Alpha and that five years of solitude made me less forgiving."

Luna Michelle looked at Violet, silently asking for help.

Ashton frowned at his mother. "Don't expect Vi to talk against me, mother. I am your son, but I am also her mate and an Alpha."

"Let it go, dear," Alpha Cristian said.

Luna Michelle was not the one to give up easily. "After you freshen up, can you come to the garden? Some people would like to greet you."

"If we feel like it, we will come down," Ashton said while leading Violet inside. He turned to glance at his mother. "Make sure no one disturbs us. If there is an emergency, use mind-link."

Ashton and Violet didn't talk until they reached Ashton's room.

"How was that?"

Violet cocked an eyebrow at him. "What do you want, a medal?" She made a face. "Sorry. My temper sometimes gets the best of me."

"Your bests and your worsts are my everything, Vi. As long as you are with me, I will take it no matter what it is."

Violet melted on the inside. In front of her was an exquisite male specimen. Tall, muscular, broad shoulders, sexy tattoos, and enchanting eyes she couldn't look away from. And he smelled of carnations. Ashton Pascal was a complete package, and what impacted her the most were his love and insecurities. He was craving her approval, to know that she accepted him.

"Alpha Ashton," Violet called. "That's not how an Alpha should talk." Or feel. What was up with those insecurities?

"No, it's not. This is how a male will talk to his mate, his other half. In front of you, I am not an Alpha. I am just a man who will do anything to make you happy. If I must defeat dragons or extinguish volcanoes, I will do it for you."

Violet pouted. "Sounds like you will do a lot of things to avoid me."

Ashton chuckled. He loved her sarcasm and her sense of humor.

Violet heard some voices from the outside, and she walked to the window, the same window through which she had jumped out the previous day.

Now the garden was set up with tables and chairs. She estimated that at least fifty people could sit there comfortably, and she counted about a dozen males and females, mostly older ones in fancy outfits. Were they hoping to get Ashton's attention? Or hers?

"What are you looking at?" Ashton asked.

"I'm wondering if the party is just starting or if it's over and these people are lingering."

Ashton hummed ambiguously. "Who cares? We are not going there."

Violet's previous hostility disappeared completely and she turned to him. "Are you sure?"

"Positive. The only thing I want is to stay here with you. Actually, anywhere with you will be fine. But here is special."

"And why is that?"

Ashton traced her jaw with his index finger. "I never had a woman in my room, Vi."

She wanted to remind him that his mother was here, but she didn't want to be snarky. "Really?"

"Mhm... you are my first Vi. You will be the first one to sleep in my bed."

"Who said we will be sleeping?"

Ashton chuckled. "I love you, Vi."

She smiled. "I love you too, Ash."

Slowly, really slowly, Ashton lowered his head, and Violet got on her toes to reduce the time she needed to wait until their lips connected.

Violet's arms snapped around Ashton, and she couldn't get him close enough. They had kissed so many times already, yet every time it felt fresh and all-consuming. Not enough. She needed more of Ashton. She needed all of him.

Violet tugged on his shirt with such force that buttons ripped and fell on the floor, but neither of them cared about ruined clothes.

Ashton grabbed Violet's buttocks and lifted her. He loved the way her legs wrapped around his waist, and he walked into the bathroom with her.

After last night's activities, they both needed a shower. It's not that Ashton minded some sweat, but it gave him an excuse to get naked and have sex, and... he wanted to have sex with Violet — all the time.

### *Chapter 1067 Alpha Violet and Alpha Ashton (8)*

~ The Dark Howlers pack ~

Ashton was sitting on an office chair in Violet's room and looking around. Her room was a bit larger than his.

There was a bed, a sitting area with a sofa and two sofa chairs around a coffee table, and a workstation with a desk and an office chair where he sat. Walls were lined up with shelves filled with books, and there were two tall cabinets with pull-out drawers. On top of the cabinets were several dolls that looked worn out from being loved. He smiled while imagining little Violet playing with those.

"What do you think?" Violet asked.

Ashton visited many times, but this was the first time for him in Violet's room. The third floor of the packhouse was always reserved for the Blake family. Just being here was a big deal.

"Why do you have so many books in here?" Ashton asked. He saw light novels, books on history, science, finances, and almost everything. It was like a library.

"This is my room," Violet stated the fact. "I grew up with a bunch of brothers and friends who were invading every part of my life. This room was off-limits."

"Why not store books in electronic form if you didn't want others to take them?" Ashton asked.

"It's not about the books. It's about knowing that others won't touch my things. It's my piece of heaven."

Ashton's brows came together.

"What?" Violet asked.

"This packhouse is so big that I never thought..." That she would consider only this room as hers, and everything else was shared. Normally, werewolves don't mind living in a group setting and sharing, but Alphas are different. They need to have something that's theirs, and Ashton was determined to give her just that – something that's theirs, Violet's and his.

"What is your dream packhouse?" Ashton asked.

Violet was taken aback by that question. "What do you mean?"

"Since we will combine our packs, it doesn't seem fair that we stay in this packhouse or the other one. Let's make OUR packhouse."

Violet gaped at him. She didn't want to live with Luna Michelle and Alpha Cristian, yet asking Ashton to move in here didn't sound right either. The idea of them building their own home was novel, and she liked it.

"Are you sure?"

Ashton nodded. "I want you to think about the number of rooms and their use. How many floors? I always wanted a swimming pool."

Violet's eyes sparkled. They had a lake nearby, but a pool sounded great. She could imagine it... a hot tub, with Ashton.

Before she could respond, there was a knock on the door.

Violet walked there to open and see the triplets, Scarlet, Page, and Robin.

"Can I help you?"

The triplets craned their necks to see behind Violet. "We came to say hi to Ashton."

"You can greet Alpha Ashton when we join others." Violet made sure to emphasize Ashton's title.

Three brunettes were still trying to take a peek at Ashton when suddenly they froze.

"OK. OK," Scarlet groaned. "We are leaving."

"Make sure everyone knows that Ashton is my mate and their future Alpha. If anyone dares to get close or look at him for longer than a second, I will gouge their eyes out. Is that clear?"

Violet retracted her Alpha aura, and the triplets quickly took a few steps back.

Page rubbed her sweaty neck. Her face was pale like a sheet of paper. "Your power. It grew."

And with that, the three sisters left.

Violet smirked and turned to Ashton as she closed the door. "Did you hear that? My power grew."

Violet blinked, and in the next moment, Ashton was in front of her. The only thing that indicated he moved was the wind that whipped around her.

"You forgot to tell them that if anyone dares to look at me, I will take it as a challenge to my position as your mate and I will make them regret being alive," Ashton said and Violet smiled in approval.

He touched the left side of her neck where his mark was. "Look at that. Beautiful."

Violet's mouth opened as she sucked in a breath. "You like your mark?"

"I love my mark on you, Vi. But I said that you are beautiful, not the mark."

Violet's smile reached her eyes. "Keep telling me that I am beautiful, and I will tell you a secret."

"Do I need to tell my Goddess how perfect she is?"

"Sweet-talker."

"Enough to hear the secret?"

Violet got on her toes and whispered close to his ear, "I never had a man in my room. You are my first."

Ashton's eyes darted to her bed. Was that why Damon was glaring at him like he might commit murder? Ashton thought it was just overprotective daddy-Damon. "Never?"

"Why does it sound like you have someone on your mind?"

Ashton shrugged while trying to conceal his uneasiness. There was someone.

"Ash?" Violet raised her eyebrows, silently telling him she was expecting an answer.

"You and Ethan were connected at the hips, so..." He didn't finish that, but he knew Violet understood.

She wrapped her arms around his neck. "Ethan and I are close, but when we hung out, it was in the garden or the common room or on the training grounds. Not on the third floor and not in my room."

Ashton felt like a knot of insecurities around his heart loosened. He always wondered about Ethan and Violet. If anyone asked Ashton during his five years of solitude if there was any man he was worried about, that would be only one - Ethan.

It was not a secret that Violet thought she and Ethan would be mates, and part of Ashton wondered how far Violet would go to test. When Ashton found out that Violet was his mate, one of his concerns was if he would ever be able to be better than Ethan. that.

When Ashton found out that Violet was his mate, one of his concerns was if he would ever be able to be better than Ethan. Sure, Ashton was faster and stronger, and more skilled when compared to Ethan, but none of those changed the fact that Violet was annoyingly close with the young Alpha of the Blue River pack. Ashton imagined many times sneaking in wherever Ethan was and just killing him off. No one would know it was Ashton. He killed stealthily many rogues in their own dens without being noticed.



"What are you thinking about?" Violet asked. She could feel that Ashton's emotions were unstable.

"I am thinking how even before I knew you were my mate, I hated how you smiled at Ethan. And I hated more the way he looked at you."

Violet blinked. "He is like a brother to me. I would never cross the line."

"Unless you confirmed you were mates."

"Oh, Ash. If another female ended up being your mate, you wouldn't be here with me. Don't think about those things because we are mates, and there is no one else. You are my first, and you will be my last."

It was the same for him. "Sorry. I don't know what came over me."

"It's the same thing that came over me when I thought about anyone other than me being on your mind. Our bond is fresh, and our wolves are strong and willful. My wolf urges me to claim you and protect what's mine."

Ashton was glad that she understood how he felt.

*Chapter 1068 Alpha Violet and Alpha Ashton (9)*

Ashton looked at Violet, and he didn't want to sound insecure, but he wanted her to know one thing.

"I'm not saying that you would go to Ethan. But if he dares to get chummy with you..." Ashton ended with a deep growl full of warning that was charged with his Alpha aura. If this were anyone else, they would bow in submission, but this was Violet, and Ashton asserting his dominance turned her on.

His nostrils flared when he picked up the scent of her arousal. They were horny for each other most of the time, but knowing she wanted him just as much, enhanced his confidence that they were meant to be together.

"Ash," Violet called.

"Yes, Vi?"

"My bed never had a man on it. Do you want to be the first?"

Ashton grinned. "And last."

"That toOOOOOO!" Her last word became a shriek when Ashton picked her up in his arms.

She knew where this was going, but the lust that came through their bond still caught her by surprise.

Ashton put her on the bed and started tugging on her clothes.

"Wait. Wait!" Violet cried.

"What?" Why was she stopping him?

"The door. Can you lock it? Just in case..."

Before she could finish that thought, Ashton moved like the wind, locked the door, and he was back on top of her.

"Where were we?" He asked.

Violet smiled coyly. "My mate was about to claim me."

Ashton's insides shook. She knew exactly what he was about to do, and she had no objections. It was more than that because she had the power to fight him for dominance, yet she wanted him to claim her. She was submitting to him willingly. Violet Blake was the perfect female. For him. Only for him.

Ashton was never so happy. Or horny.

...

Officially, the party was supposed to start half an hour ago, but people were gathering for more than two hours.

The high-ranking members of the Dark Howlers and the Midnight Guardians pack were in the event hall. Delegations from several other packs were there as well. The garden and the forest around the packhouse were filled with other pack members sitting on blankets, benches, and chairs they brought themselves. They had picnic tables, and some just sat on the grass and ate from plates they were holding. Several bonfires reached higher than the packhouse, and people danced around them.

Everyone came with food and drinks, and they sat in cheery groups as laughter, singing, and the scent of grilled meat filled the air. Some were wearing fancy clothes, while others came in t-shirts and sweatpants like they just shifted from their wolf forms and were wearing the backup clothes their pack had in strategic locations. The whole mood was casual and festive, and Luna Michelle couldn't believe that they managed to organize all this in only two days.

Luna Michelle and Talia were standing on the terrace overlooking the garden. They could see there were hundreds of people present, but since the forest obstructed her view, there was no way to estimate the number of attendees accurately.

"I thought this would be a small party," Luna Michelle told Talia while looking around.

"What's a small party?" Talia asked.

"Fifty people? A hundred?" A hundred was a lot, in Luna Michelle's opinion.

"We have more than a hundred only in the event hall. People are excited to celebrate their future Alpha finding her mate. I estimate several thousand people outside." And they were still coming.

"Several thousand?" Luna Michelle's eyes were open in surprise.

"You don't know Mindy. She is good as my Beta, but her secret talent is being a party organizer."

Luna Michelle pursed her lips. This whole thing was on a different level than what they had at the Spring Leaf pack. Also, Luna Michelle didn't have her Beta. She had a few Omegas helping her manage the packhouse and matters related to the pack like ensuring everyone had shelter, food, and clothes, but that was it. Alpha Christian had his Beta, but they would deal with warriors and supplies, and not with things like parties. For that, she was on her own. Luna Michelle wanted to ask if Violet could take on such responsibility, but she guessed it would be disrespectful, so she didn't.

"Will Vi have her Betas?" Luna Michelle asked.

"Yes," Talia responded right away. "There is no way she could handle her duties otherwise. She will be the Alpha of the Dark Howlers and the Midnight

Guardians pack and the head of the coalition. As such, she will have the responsibility to deal with matters related to witches, guardians, and humans, and then there are things like this one." Talia spread her arms, gesturing at the party.

Luna Michelle wanted to ask if Violet could take on such responsibility, but she guessed it would be disrespectful, so she moved on to her next question.

"Does she know who her Beta will be?"

"It will be me." A voice came from the side.

Talia smiled at Lavender. "Did Vi confirm it?"

Lavender shrugged. "I am the best candidate. I know it, you know it, and if Vi doesn't know it, she is not as smart as I give her credit for."

Luna Michelle's eyes flashed. "Is that the way to speak about your future Alpha?"

Lavender raised her chin proudly. "A good Beta won't shy from speaking her mind. If I sit in the corner quietly and wait to be picked, noisemakers will get ahead of me." Lavender looked in the direction where Scarlet, Robin, and Page were. "I am the obvious choice."

"Of course, you are, dear," Talia said dotingly. "Are Vi and Ash down yet?"

Lavender shook her head. "Nope."

Luna Michelle turned to Talia. "Should we call them down?"

Talia refused. "We shouldn't disturb the newly mated couple." She was with Damon for two decades, and he would still blow a fuse when someone interrupted their lovey-dovey time.

Luna Michelle thought this was unacceptable, but she couldn't speak openly in front of Talia, so she asked carefully, "Won't guests be upset if Vi and Ash come down late?"

"Upset?" Talia asked. "Who would dare to say anything when Damon is in the house? Besides, they are getting free food and drinks, and look at them having fun without our kids around."

Lavender nodded in agreement. "If Vi and Ash are not ready to mingle, they will be in a bad mood or just stick to each other, and we don't want any of those two." Lavender spotted her cousins from the Blue River pack arriving. "Excuse me, ladies."

"Vi is lucky to have friends like that," Luna Michelle said.

Talia agreed. "Yes, she is."

"Can they be trusted with serious matters?"

Talia smiled. "Their generation is full of talented individuals. They have a lot to learn, but they will figure it out eventually."

Talia will never forget how empty the packhouse was when Damon brought her the first time. He didn't have many people to help him lead the pack, and he didn't trust anyone. She was happy that Violet had her brothers, cousins, and many friends, and Talia knew, without a doubt, that none of them were malicious. Sure, they had their quirks and issues, but that was typical for teenagers who were yet to find their place in society.

Talia came to this packhouse as an insecure female who was not worthy of being an Omega, yet now everyone looked at her and Damon like they were in charge of everything.

She was confident that Violet and her generation were on the right path. As long as they stick together, they will keep each other in check, and none of them will stray into the darkness. That was all it mattered.

#### *Chapter 1069: Alpha Violet and Alpha Ashton (10)*

While spacing out from her conversation with Luna Michelle, Talia's eyes moved to the handsome man who was standing nearby with Alpha Christian, Commander George, and Beta Caden.

Damon was in his late forties, yet he didn't have a single gray hair and his physique was impressive as ever. In less than a second, Damon's icy-blue eyes were directed at her. He could always sense when her attention was on him.

'Yes, kitten?' Damon's deep voice sounded in Talia's mind, making her smile widen.

'I was just thinking how lucky I am to have you.'

He puffed his chest proudly. He didn't know why she said it, but it didn't matter. Talia praising him will never get old. 'The lucky one is me. Without you, none of this would be possible.'

Damon meant it. Thanks to Talia, they had their family, friends, and allies. He remembered clearly the day when he brought the skinny she-wolf without her wolf to his packhouse. He knew Talia was his mate, but he had no idea how her presence would change his life - all for the better. Their story confirmed that the pack prospers when their Alpha devotes himself to his fated mate, the Luna of his pack.

"Stop looking at your mate and greet your guests," Maddox grumbled from the side, and Damon sneered.

"Don't tell me you are jealous that I would rather look at my mate than at you?"

Maddox rolled his eyes, and then they hugged while patting their backs with more force than necessary. With Maddox and Damon, everything was competition. Even hugs.

Talia shook her head at their banter and was relieved that Maddox didn't bring up the destroyed cottage. That would remind Damon who destroyed it and why, and it would probably cause more friction between Damon and Ashton.

Talia turned to see that Luna Michelle was talking to Tatiana and Mindy.

Talia greeted Tatiana and looked behind to see the River siblings trickling into the garden, but one was missing. "Is Ethan not with you?"

"He is," Tatiana responded, and before she could say more, cries from inside were heard.

Talia could feel the disturbance, and she quickly scanned the surroundings to check for her kids. Jacob, Logan, Zeke, and Gabriel were all in the garden with their friends. Other than her kids, who would dare to cause a commotion in the packhouse of the Dark Howlers pack?

She rushed inside to see what was going on.

Talia paused at the sight of Ethan on the ground with his face bloodied and Ashton standing in front of him. Ashton's red fist was proof of what happened, but why...? Talia looked at Violet, who stood behind Ashton with her face etched in worry and uncertainty.

"Travis!" Damon called, and the good doctor was beside his Alpha in a second.

Olivia, Travis's mate, was two steps behind in the crowd that gathered to see what was happening there.

"Yes, Alpha?" Travis asked.

"There is a patient for you to check."

Travis moved swiftly, and Ethan hissed but didn't push the doctor away.

A few seconds later, Travis spoke to Damon. "Young Alpha Ethan's nose looks broken, and he should get his bones set properly before they start healing."

"Jacob," Damon called. "Help Doctor Travis take young Alpha Ethan to the pack hospital."

"I am fine," Ethan squeezed through his teeth while glaring at Ashton.

"I know you are," Damon said. "But Doctor said your nose is broken, and I'm sure you don't want it to heal like that. This is not negotiable."

Maddox and Tatiana stood on the side. They wanted to go to him, but Ethan was a grownup now, and if they babied him, it would make him appear weak.

Maddox turned to Ashton. "I hope there is an explanation for this."

"He was touching my mate," Ashton said icily, and now Damon was glaring at Ethan also.

Ethan was leaving with Jacob, Doctor Travis, and Olivia, so Damon turned to Violet. "He was touching you?"

"That was not..." Violet puffed her cheeks. "It was a misunderstanding."

Ethan saw Violet and Ashton coming down the stairs, and he rushed to hug Violet – as always. They didn't see each other often because Ethan was studying in a college with humans, and he visited last time more than six months ago.

Ethan was about to greet Violet, how they usually would, but instead of Violet's hug, Ethan was greeted with Ashton's wrath.

Violet never saw that side of Ashton. His energies were hostile and prickly, and it was difficult to breathe even for her. She was surprised to see how easily Ashton suppressed Ethan. Ethan just froze with his mouth agape as Ashton hit him. Thrice.

"Alright!" Damon didn't shout loudly, but everyone flinched. "Youngsters had a spat. We all know that newly mated couples are territorial. This is not something for us grown-ups to meddle with."

The crowd quickly dispersed, leaving Ashton, Violet, and three sets of parents.

"Are you alright?" Talia asked as her eyes moved from Violet to Ashton.

Ashton turned to Violet. He was still charged up and irritable, and he was also concerned about how Violet would react. What if she scolds him and defends Ethan?

Violet frowned at Ashton. "You shouldn't hit my friends."

"He is not a friend," Ashton said with more fierceness than he intended, but that was his wolf talking. "He is a male with affection for you. You accepting him is..."

"Not happening," Damon interjected and turned to Violet. "Vi. What is your wolf saying?"

"My wolf?"

"Sweetie," Talia called. "I know we taught you to use your head and follow your heart, but when it comes to your mate, you should listen to your wolf. They don't share."

'You tell her!' Liseli hissed in Talia's mind.



"Ethan is my friend. Are you saying I can't have friends because I have a mate?"

Talia nodded in acknowledgment of Violet's words. "I hear you, but if you want to remain friends with unmated males, there must be a boundary between them and you. If you don't do that, you will hurt your mate. Do you remember the main rule about dealing with conflict?"

"Put myself in the other person's shoes," Violet said, and she sucked in a sharp breath. If that were a female going for Ashton, Violet would blow up everything.

She threw herself at Ashton and hugged him tightly. "I'm sorry, Ash. It won't happen again. I will tell Ethan to stay away."

Ashton released a long breath, relieved that she was not angry at him. He put his arms around her awkwardly.

Violet looked up at Ashton. "Are you blaming me? What can I do to fix it?"

"Why do you think I'm blaming you?"

"Why are you not hugging me properly?"

"Because I have blood on my hands, and you told me that was your favorite dress."

Violet's eyes flashed in understanding. "OK. Let's go so you wash your hands, and then you can hug me."

Talia leaned on Damon and smiled. Damon was never fond of Ashton, and it got worse after he found out that Ashton and Violet were mates. However, now Talia sensed Damon's approval of the young Alpha. Was it because of Ashton's vicious attack on Ethan?

*Chapter 1070: Alpha Violet and Alpha Ashton (11)*

"Will young Alpha Ethan hold grudges?" Luna Michelle asked.

She knew that Ashton was fighting rogues, but this was the first time for her to see in person Ashton drawing blood. She was distraught, but Alpha Cristian warned her to not cause a scene.

"If he doesn't hold grudges, he wouldn't be a man," Maddox responded.

"What should we do?" Luna Michelle asked.

"Nothing," Alpha Cristian responded before anyone else could. "I know this is your son, and you are worried..."

"Ash is your son also!" Luna Michelle said.

Alpha Cristian shook his head. "Ash is the future Alpha. He is an adult, and he will deal with the consequences of his actions, no matter what they are." He held onto her shoulders and looked at her seriously. "Mica, your behavior is hurting him. Do you not see his position?"

"What position?"

"Ash is Violet's mate. As such, he will be the Alpha of the Dark Howlers pack and the Midnight Guardians pack and at the head of the coalition. This is way beyond the Spring Leaf pack. Do you think Luna Tatiana didn't want to go to Ethan to check on his injuries? Do you think it was easy for her to stand on the side while her son was bleeding? Do you think Alpha Maddox was happy to see his son on the floor? But they did that because they were putting Ethan first."

Luna Michelle looked around to realize it was only her and Alpha Cristian in the hallway. Everyone else left. When did that happen? But it meant she could talk to her mate.

"How is that putting him first when they showed no concern for his wellbeing?"

"They were putting his future first. If people saw a mother running to her adult son, or his father getting vengeance in his stead, they would see Ethan as weak. For us, our image is half of the battle. Babying Ash and doubting him openly makes others think he is weak."

"I am not doubting him, but..." She sighed in defeat. "I already did the damage, didn't I? How can I fix it?"

"Don't. Just give him space. If any fixing is to happen, it needs to happen on their terms."

"Their?"

"Ash and Vi, Mica. They are together now as one. We need to step back and give them space. It will be hard, but it's the only thing we can do unless you want Ash to push us away."

Alpha Cristian hoped that his mate would understand that this was hard on him, and she won't think of him as the bad guy.

Ever since the incident with Arya, Alpha Cristian felt guilty because part of him feared he failed as a mate. He didn't cheat or abuse Luna Michelle, but he allowed an unmated female to get too close, and he didn't see how much that hurt Luna Michelle. She told him that she disapproved of the attention he gave to Arya. Still, he would brush it off with arguments that Arya was a child, an orphan who didn't have anyone else, and he would repeat that until Luna Michelle lowered her head and accepted her fate. As a way of coping with Alpha Cristian's absence, Luna Michelle got attached to their son.

It was a messed up situation, and Alpha Cristian should have got the hint when Luna Michelle said she didn't want more kids. He didn't see it then, but later he understood that she didn't want more kids with HIM.

After Arya recognized Keith as her mate, Alpha Cristian turned to Luna Michelle, only to see that she was emotionally detached. She poured everything she had in Ashton.

Alpha Cristian went above and beyond to convey how sorry he was for neglecting her needs. He failed to assure her she was his priority, and those wounds still didn't heal. In the last five years, Luna Michelle would fervently wait for Ashton's call, and the only joy she showed was when there was news of Ashton.

Now that Luna Michelle had to let go of Ashton, will her attention return to Alpha Cristian? Will she like what she sees? What if it was too late? What if she leaves him? Where would she go?

Alpha Cristian knew Luna Michelle had nowhere to go, and part of him feared that was the only reason she had stayed with him so far. He would catch her often staring into the distance with a dreamy smile on her face which faded when she turned to see him there. It made him wonder if she was thinking about Ashton, or about some other man, or about the time when their relationship was fresh, and they had no Ashton, no Arya, and it was just the two of them.

Alpha Cristian was aware that his pack was mediocre, so he put his efforts into not falling behind impressive youngsters like Alpha Damon and Alpha Maddox. At the same time, he failed his mate completely. Was there a way to turn the clock and start over?

...

Ashton and Violet appeared at the party half an hour later, and based on the blush on Violet's cheeks, and the size of Ashton's grin, no one was wondering why washing hands took so long.

There was a table set on a small podium with six chairs. On the far left were Alpha Cristian and Luna Michelle, on the far right were Damon and Talia, and the two chairs in the middle were empty. Violet tugged Ashton's hand in that direction. Those two spots in the center were for them.

Normally, the main people of the party would be inside the event hall, with high-ranking members of their society, but the Dark Howlers pack prioritized their pack members. Damon never liked rubbing shoulders with Elders and Alphas of other packs. If they wanted to socialize with him, they could join him in the garden.

"Everyone will be watching," Ashton grumbled while walking to the podium with Violet.

"Is that a problem?"

He spent five years not attracting attention, and also... "I don't want people looking at you and getting funny ideas."

Violet giggled and snuggled closer to him. "I'm sure you can take care of those. But this is only for the meal. Once we are done with food, we can mingle."

Ashton leaned to speak close to her ear, "The only one I want to mingle with is you." He nipped her ear, and she shrieked.

"Ash! Behave!"

Ashton grinned and tightened his hold on her.

Talia ate food that Damon was feeding her, and she smiled in approval as she watched Ashton pulling a chair for Violet, and then he got busy piling food on her plate. Ashton was looking only at Violet, and Talia had a feeling those two would be just fine. Better than fine.

Talia turned to Damon.

He cocked an eyebrow at her. "What?"

Talia stuffed a forkful of food in his mouth, and then she cupped his cheeks and gave him a smacking kiss on the greasy lips. She lingered there to lick him clean.

"Life is good," Talia said and gave him eye signals to continue feeding her.

Damon was delighted that Talia was in a good mood and affectionate, and he hoped this would last forever.