

## THE ALPHA'S BRIDE

Chapter 1071: Alpha Valeria and...?

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Violet basked in Ashton's attention, and she looked around.

"Is everyone who matters here?" Violet asked no one in particular.

"I believe so," Talia responded without removing her eyes from Damon, who was feeding her.

"I don't see uncle Axel and aunt Yasmin."

"They said they will come, but with the time difference, it's hard to say when. You know how they are. They might come in the morning or next week depending on how much time Yasmin takes to style her hair."

Violet didn't respond. She didn't care about Axel and Yasmin in particular, but she wanted to see if Valeria and Edgar will come. For Violet, it was only two days since they left the Midnight Guardians pack, but Valeria had two months to think about accepting her fate as not the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack.

Violet snapped out of her thoughts when she saw a piece of perfectly grilled meat hovering on a fork in front of her face. It was Ashton feeding her, and she liked it very much.

Violet grabbed another fork and poked a piece of meat for Ashton.

"Together," she said, and they opened their mouths at the same time to accept each other's offerings.

Ashton chewed with gusto. This was an indication to everyone that they would treat each other as equals, and he wouldn't want it any other way.

People on the right stirred, and Violet looked that way to see Axel and Yasmin at the door, making their way into the garden. The row of people behind them were Moonrider kids, with the oldest ones first.

And it was not just them, but Meg, Kai, Tyler, Sandy, and many other ranked members from the Midnight Guardians pack. They were spilling into the garden and filling up any available spots.

Regular pack members came earlier, but the ranked ones waited to accompany Axel and Yasmin; they were just proxies, but Talia insisted they should be treated with the respect a real Alpha and Luna would have.

Violet kept an eye on the female behind Yasmin.

"Don't," Ashton said to Violet.

"What?"

"I want your attention to me."

"You have it."

"It didn't look like it."

"I am perfectly capable of multitasking," Violet said in her defense.

"Then make all your tasks about me," Ashton responded with a straight face.

Violet's shoulders shook, and then she burst into laughter. She couldn't believe he was so cheeky. And handsome. And hers.

Valeria plastered a smile on her face and kept walking after her parents. They went to greet their hosts first.

"We won't take too much of your time, as we already congratulated the newly mated couple," Axel said.

"Don't worry about formalities," Talia said. "We are family." She glanced to the side and saw that Zina was already instructing Omegas to set up a table for the Moonrider family. Grown-ups and teens should have their places. The little ones can run around with other kids in their designated area where they had kid-friendly food and drinks and several responsible grownups watching them.

Talia gestured to Zina and spoke to Axel and Yasmin, "Enjoy food and drinks, and we will catch up later. We have a double-Alpha ceremony to plan."

"Without us?" Violet asked.

Talia shook her head. "Some things need to happen even if you don't like it. We expect you will give us a rough timeline for when you will step up as the Alpha. Shaman Gideon will calculate the best day for the ceremony."

"What's the rush?" Violet asked.

"We are not going to make you rush into this, but Ash is of age and overdue to take his role as the Alpha, and our people are eager to see you step up. Now that you found your mate, there is nothing to hold you back."

Violet suspected there was more to it, but she didn't want to ask for clarification in front of people. She will talk to her mother. Later.

Valeria sat at the table with her parents and Edgar.

"You can at least pretend you are happy," Edgar said in a low voice to Valeria.

Edgar pushed a plate with food in front of her. "Eat, Val. I recommend that you come up with an amazing toast for our cousin, or people will think you don't approve of Vi having a mate or you don't approve of her being our Alpha. Either of those will paint you in a bad light."

Valeria rolled her eyes. Edgar was off. Well, mostly off.

Valeria was bitter that Violet humiliated her the last time they met in front of the whole pack, and now Valeria needed to show up cheerful like the incident didn't happen.

She understood the hierarchy and the consequences of defying it, but she felt wronged and bullied, and everyone telling her to suck it up was not helping. Damn it! It's not like she had anything else to do. It was about studying and training, and she was great at both, but they came with a bitter aftertaste at the thought that it was all done so she could be Violet's second.

The pinnacle of Valeria's existence would be the role of Violet's proxy, or maybe Violet's Beta in the Midnight Guardians pack, and both of those meant that Violet was above her. It was like the whole life she was in Violet's shadow, and it was suffocating.

Valeria was pushing the meat on her plate, and it looked delicious, but she didn't feel like it.

There was only one thing she would eat no matter what.

Valeria checked her purse and frowned when she saw she had run out.

She nudged Edgar. "Give me some dried apricots." Those were his favorite snacks also.

Edgar cocked an eyebrow at her. "What makes you think I have them on me?"

Valeria scrunched her nose. "If it's not you, why do I smell them?"

Edgar sniffed the air. "I can smell many things, but apricots are not one of them." Everything smelled of grilled meat, but now that she mentioned it, he could pick up a faint scent of apricots also. Did he imagine it? Or was he sensing Valeria's craving through their twin bond?

"Let me go and check."

Edgar stood up and walked away in search of apricots. He was going to check the grills and tables where side dishes were served. If there were none at the party, they should have some in the kitchen.

Edgar totally missed that his sister was frozen when he left the table.

Axel's brows came together in concern when he saw that Valeria was not moving. "Val, sweetie, are you feeling unwell?"

She didn't answer.

"Yasmin," Axel called. "Something is wrong with Val."

Yasmin's lips stretched into a smile. "There is nothing wrong, Axel." She put her hand over her mouth when she realized where Valeria was looking. Or, to be more precise, at WHOM she was looking.

Valeria stood up in slow motion and walked through the people toward the door and the striking young man standing frozen on the terrace and staring back at her.

"Oh, no!" Axel shouted while clutching his chest. That was his firstborn, and she was about to leave the nest!

Due to Valeria's high position, Axel assumed that her mate would come to live with them, but considering the identity of her mate, maybe she would go with him.

*Chapter 1072: The Journey Ahead*

"Yasmin," Axel called breathily. "Do something!"

"What do you want me to do?" Yasmin asked incredulously. Was he implying that she should prevent the mate bond from falling into place? "We can't go against nature. No matter what it is, we need to embrace it, or we will suffer a backlash."

On the terrace...

Valeria stopped walking when she was only one step away from her target. He had gauze covering most of his face, but to her, he was the most handsome guy ever.

"Hi," she said.

"Hi," he returned the greeting, hating that his voice was nasal. It was not manly.

There was no need for introductions because Valeria and Ethan had known each other since they were little.

Valeria reached to touch his face, and they both jolted when sparks of their bond flared.

"My mate," Valeria said, more to herself, like she was confirming this was real.

Ethan stared at her stupidly. Blondes were his type, and he knew Valeria was pretty, but he never realized how beautiful she was. When was the last time he saw her? A year ago? She was breathtaking.

Valeria inched closer, and Ethan moved toward her, and when their lips connected, they both recoiled, and they hugged each other so the kiss wouldn't break. Ethan and Valeria didn't notice claps and cheers all around them. It was just the two of them.

Ethan was surprised at the way Valeria clung to him. She tasted of hazelnut dipped into smooth milk chocolate, and he couldn't wait to lick her all over. And he will do much more than licking!

Valeria gasped when Ethan's tongue made its way into her mouth. She was never so deliciously invaded before, and this Alpha tasted of apricots; the sweetest kind.

Violet stared at Ethan and Valeria, who kissed like no one was watching, and she rubbed her eyes. "Ash? Do you see what I'm seeing?"

"I see you. What do you see?"

Violet turned to Ashton. "Seriously. There." She didn't want to call out names aloud, so she gave eye signals.

"I see nothing worth mentioning."

Violet was about to snap at him, but then she looked at the terrace, and Ethan and Valeria were not there anymore. Where did they go? Oh! They went to have sex! Considering the forest was full of people, they probably went to one of the guest bedrooms.

Violet was unsure about the extent of Ethan's history with women, but it will be Valeria's first time, and Ethan should make it special or risk spoiling it completely. On the other hand, Ethan was quite blunt when it came to females, so the chances of him messing up were big.

Once, when Violet complained about how Ethan was rude to girls, Talia mentioned that uncle Max was such a klutz that he nearly caused aunt Tanya to reject him and that it wouldn't be strange if Ethan followed his father's footsteps. To Violet's dismay, she never got the details of that incident, so she was unsure what Talia meant by that comment.

"Love?" Ashton murmured close to Violet's ear. "Do you want more food, or should we dance?"

Dancing with Ashton was what she needed because she didn't want to imagine Ethan and Valeria getting frisky.

Talia glanced at Michelle and Cristian to see they were focused on their plates. Something was off about the mood between them, and Talia was

unsure if that was related to Ashton and Violet or something else. In any case, she was never the one to meddle. If they came to her for help or advice, she would do what she could gladly but without imposing.

Talia looked at the crowd to see many friendly faces, all enjoying at this gathering.

Maya and Caden, Keith and Arya, Dawn and George, Gideon and Mindy, Kai and Meg, Sandy and Tyler, Travis and Olivia... Wilkow sisters, Tatiana, Kalina, Daria, Lidia, and Varya, were with their mates, Maddox, Tony, Pierce, Jordan, and Grady. And there were also Axel and Yasmin, Zina and Owen, Dawn and George, Caleb and Trisha, Liam and Amelia, Cornelia and James, Petra and Zack, and many other happy faces wherever Talia looked.

Damon's arm moved around Talia's shoulders and pulled her to lean on him.

'When are we going to announce our departure?' Damon asked through their mind link.

'Not tonight,' Talia responded and looked dreamily at Violet and Ashton, who were slowly dancing beside the bonfire, surrounded by friends and pack members. They had so many promising youngsters present tonight, and Talia knew that Ethan and Valeria recognizing each other as mates was a big deal.

It might take time, but Valeria will find her place in this world and be Violet's trusted ally. Considering what was to come, Violet would need all the help she could get.

'I don't want Vi and Ash to accept their roles under the weight of deadlines,' Talia said. 'After they take over as Alphas, we can tell them we are leaving. Until then, we will teach them everything they should know.'

'What if Vi asks us to stay?'

'She is a big girl,' Talia responded. 'She knows that the two of us going to search for my grandparents is important. It will help us understand the connections between realms and hybrids. Unless we find out from where and how they are coming here, we will never win.'

They also hoped to find a way for Sapa and Liseli to be together without depending on Damon and Talia. An ancient scroll found in the archives of the Silver Flame Coven spoke about creatures that were versed in magic and

communicating with spirits, and Talia believed they might have some hints on how to create bodies for two old wolves.

'Vi will understand. I am the only one who can move without portals.'

'That we know of,' Damon reminded Talia. If their assumptions were correct, and hybrids were coming from another realm freely, someone else could cross the barriers without portals, which was dangerous.

Even after all this time, Talia could sense a connection to her grandparents, who left many years ago in search of Valerian. It was faint, and Talia had a feeling they were in another realm and that it was all related to hybrids. Somehow.

It was a journey full of uncertainty, and Talia knew that other than Damon and her, no one else could do it. If they failed, their friends and family would be in serious trouble.

However, that was a story for some other time...

-- THE END --

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Woah! It's the end.

I want to thank everyone who followed Damon and Talia through this epic journey with their friends and family. Their story is over, and I will miss them.

I am humbled by the support this novel received so far.

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At what point did you realize that Stephanie was not who she pretended to be?



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How do you feel about Lisa? And what about Marcy?

What were your biggest "I didn't see that coming!" moments?

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