

Read The Alpha's Bride online free 5

The next day was a blur for Marcy as she struggled to accept reality while cursing the day of returning home.

Luna Layla's tea parties, Nora taking Marcy places and trying to cheer her up while thinking that Marcy has difficulty adjusting to the life in the pack, Marcy coming up with excuses why she is not shifting into her wolf form, various faces, and fake smiles, it all blended into fuzzy nothingness.

The knowledge that she had a mate and lost him was like tasting the best delicacy and knowing it will forever be out of reach. But what were her options?

Marcy didn't reject George on a whim.

As much as Marcy is the princess of the Red Moon pack, in the last ten years, she experienced independence, met various people, and learned some things about life. She is not stupid.

Marcy is aware that her parents see her as a token that can be exchanged for climbing up the power ladder. They sent her to Europe to increase the mystery around Marcy's identity and to give her a label of a she-wolf who knows the ways of the world.

Just like any she-wolf, Marcy dreamed about meeting her other half and losing herself in his embrace.

The guy of her dreams was tall and muscular and his scorching gaze was directed at her. He would command thousands of werewolves during the day, and win fierce battles, while in the night he would make sure to tire her out in all positions of Kama Sutra.

George was tall and muscular, and his scorching gaze whispered promises of sleepless nights full of carnal pleasures. But he didn't have anyone to command because he was the one receiving orders.

Marcy concluded that something must be wrong with George. If he was healthy, he would definitely be part of some warrior unit and not an Omega on cleaning duty.

George would never get the approval of her parents.

Marcy mentally went through numerous scenarios and outcomes, depending on who her mate would be, and she knew that if her mate is not someone outstanding, the best outcome for both of them is to reject that bond before it solidifies.

Omega is someone without a title, without a position, without resources.

Marcy's parents would not accept him and if Marcy insisted on staying with him, they would either disown her, or they would punish him. Harshly. He might even lose his life.

Alpha Edward and Luna Layla would not approve of such union, because that would sully their family and ruin twenty years of investments they made in Marcy.

Marcy is the princess and it's her duty to ensure the prosperity of the pack, even if it means she needs to suffer. That sounds virtuous, but Marcy is aware how that is only a facade created by her parents and other powerful individuals behind them. The truth is that they will use any means to grasp more, and it's never enough.

Losing a mate is devastating, and the longer two are together, the stronger is the bond. There are cases when one mate died and the other one followed soon after, due to heartbreak.

Rejecting George was the best decision, Marcy is confident about that.

The bond was still weak, and they will survive and move on.

Who knows? Maybe the Moon Goddess will give them second chance mates, or if they complete the mating process with someone else, any other crushes and bonds will disappear. Hopefully.

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It was early morning when Alpha Edward called Marcy into his study.

Other than her father, also present were Luna Layla, James (aka the brother), Beta Raymond, and Nora. Based on this lineup, Marcy knew that it's something important.

Panic swelled within her. Is it possible that they heard about her rejecting George?

Marcy told herself to calm down. Being rejected is a big shame, so George probably didn't share that with anyone, and she kept her lips sealed.

Or did someone saw them kissing in the garden? Even if that's the case, kissing is not a big deal. Marcy was already spinning a story in her head, how that was a dare or a bet.

"Sit, Marcy.", Alpha Edward commanded, and when she sat on the chair, he announced, "Alpha Damon of the Dark Howlers pack is coming to visit us tomorrow. He will be here in time for lunch."

Marcy didn't understand why that required her presence or why it sounded so official. It's just a guest, an Alpha. He will join them for lunch and maybe dinner, and spend the day with her father.

"The Dark Howlers pack is the largest pack in North America.", Luna Layla chimed in while looking at Marcy meaningfully.

Marcy nodded in acknowledgment. She knew this.

Marcy spent the last ten years in Europe, but she was aware of the major events among packs.

Alpha Damon made quite a reputation for himself as a fierce warrior, undefeated among Alphas. Other Alphas admire him, fear him, and despise him at the same time because Alpha Damon got his position very young, and he doesn't take anyone's shit.

The word is that Alpha Damon has a nasty temper.

Marcy could guess that her father hates Alpha Damon. It's nothing personal, but because of the Dark Howlers pack, the Red Moon pack is second, and her father hates being second. Sprinkling salt to his wounded ego is the fact that Alpha Damon is half of her father's age, so there is that.

Marcy wondered why her father was smiling, and his next few words answered Marcy's silent question, "He is coming to meet you and discuss with me the deal for you to become his Luna."

Marcy's word stopped. Deal to become his Luna. Luna? Like marriage, Luna?

And then things fell into place.

All the classes and training she took; her parents let her pick whatever she wanted as long as she takes etiquette lessons as well as various classes that are related to house and budget management. It all pointed out to the possibility of her parents grooming Marcy to be the lady of the house, a big house. Probably a Luna.

Marcy understood that her parents are working on this for some time. Maybe from the day she was born.

When Marcy returned, the first thing her father asked was if she is mated, probably to eliminate any potential problems.

Marcy shook her head inwardly while thinking how it's a good thing she didn't tell anyone about George, and she hoped that he kept his mouth shut about them being mates because if that reaches her parent's ears, George will be in trouble.

Marcy looked at her parents. From the beginning, they were preparing her for this, and she knew that the probability of an arranged marriage was high. However, Marcy hoped that it will be more on the lines of them meeting and getting to know each other before they discuss marriage, and not this... business transaction.

Marcy glanced at Nora, and she wondered if Nora knew about this in advance. Does it matter? It won't change anything.

"What do you say, Marcy?", Luna Layla asked excitedly.

Marcy grit her teeth. What kind of a stupid question was that? Does she have a choice to oppose?

"I am still taking in this information.", Marcy responded ambiguously.

"You have until tomorrow noon to take it in and adjust your attitude.", Alpha Edward said, and only then Marcy noticed that his expression darkened. "A lot of things depend on this marriage, so you better leave a good impression."

Marcy responded with a tight smile.

How could she forget that her father did everything for his own gain? He probably sees Alpha Damon as a youngster that can easily be manipulated. It would be stupid to think that this was ever about Marcy.

"Yes, father.", was the only thing Marcy could say. "If you excuse me..."

Luna Layla gave eye signals to Nora to follow after Marcy. From the day Marcy returned, Nora's duty was to ensure Marcy doesn't do anything stupid.

This is a crucial time for Marcy, and they needed Marcy to accept her reality and stay composed. That's what they raised her for.

Marcy's mind was a mess after receiving the news that tomorrow she will meet Alpha Damon, the Alpha of the notorious Dark Howlers pack, aka her future husband.

She still didn't recuperate from the event of finding (and rejecting) her mate, yet now she needs to think about another man. And this was not just any man. Alpha Damon has a grim reputation on the battlefield and an even worse reputation related to women.

In search of solitude that would allow her to think, Marcy went to her room.

To Marcy's horror, Nora was two steps behind her, cooing how this is the best thing ever.

Marcy was exasperated when she saw that Nora came into her room. Why won't Nora leave her alone?

"What do you know about Alpha Damon?", Marcy asked irritably.

Nora whipped her phone out. "Very handsome! This one was taken two months ago when he visited the Silverburn pack. I have a friend there, so we exchange hottie-related information, and Damon is a hottie, so... I can't believe he is coming here!"

Marcy looked at the photo Nora showed her. Well, he is handsome.

"I guess with you marrying him, I will have the hottest info on him.", Nora grinned at Marcy. "You will be OK with me reporting things to my friends about your hot husband, right? Damon being married won't make him any less handsome, and we are only talking and looking. Not touching."

Marcy let out an exasperated sigh. "Take as many photos as you want. It's not like I own the guy. This is all my father's doing, for the benefit of the pack. No one asked me how I feel about this."

Nora cocked an eyebrow at Marcy. "How do your feelings change the fact that you are set to marry the hottest werewolf in North America? He has looks and money and thousands of warriors at his disposal. I can only imagine how lavish his mansion is. His territory is larger than ours and it has forests and lakes and mountains as far as your eyes can reach. It will be all yours."

"What about his womanizing?", Marcy asked.

Nora rolled her eyes like Marcy asked something silly. "Hellooooo! Damon is the Alpha of the largest pack in North America. He never lost a challenge, and he is young, handsome, and single. Do you expect him to be a monk? Women throw themselves at him. If he says a word, an endless line of beauties will form and wait for him to claim them."

Marcy groaned. "I was not talking about hookups. Didn't you hear about numerous women offering themselves as brides and Alpha Damon rejecting them?"

Nora shrugged. "One or a hundred, why does that matter? Do you put yourself on the same level as them? You are beautiful, well educated, and your father is the Alpha of the Red Moon pack. Even if Alpha Damon doesn't fall for you right away, as long as he doesn't reject you, you will get your chance to seduce him."

Marcy agreed with this, she is all what Nora said, and much more, and Marcy didn't meet a guy who would refuse her. No matter how many layers Alpha Damon has around him, Marcy was confident that she will be able to win him over.

At the mentioning of rejection, Marcy remembered George, the Greek God who gave her a few minutes of bliss before the harsh truth plunged her into agony.

Does Damon have a mate or someone he prefers? Marcy was confident that a guy like Damon probably has several women at home, willing to please him. What if he has a harem?

"Do you know if Alpha Damon found his mate?"

"Maybe he did, and things didn't work out...", Nora mused. "But you should focus on the fact that he is available. After you complete the mating ceremony, it won't matter if his mate is out there because the bond between the two of you will form and overshadow any others. You will be the Luna of the most powerful pack and he will adore you."

Marcy pursed her lips while thinking about Nora's words.

Luna Marcy, Luna of the most powerful pack in North America. It doesn't sound bad. The fact that Alpha Damon is young and good-looking is an added bonus. Only a fool would pass such an opportunity.

Marcy told herself that no matter what mate the Moon Goddess set for her, she can choose her mate. If they complete the mating process, any other bond will disappear, including this longing Marcy feels for George.

Marcy put her hand over her chest. She rejected him. Why does she still feel restless whenever she thinks of him?

"Are you OK?", Nora asked with concern obvious in her voice.

"Yes, yes.", Marcy was quick to plaster a smile on her face. "Tomorrow is a big day. Help me pick what to wear. Unfortunately, I didn't pack some of my favorite dresses and we might need to go shopping."

Nora squealed at the possibility of shopping. That's her favorite pastime.

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~ The Dark Howlers pack ~

While Marcy and Nora were going through Marcy's closet, at the same time, in the Dark Howlers pack...

Damon exited the packhouse and just like every time when he leaves for longer than one day, he stopped and observed the three-story high majestic building.

On the first floor are common rooms, where pack members gather and they entertain guests.

On the second floor are offices, guest bedrooms, and Beta's quarters.

The third floor is reserved for Alpha and his family.

Damon remembers the time when the packhouse was lively. When he was a child, it was always buzzing with activity. His mother, Luna Violet, knew how to attract people. She was kind, with the warmest smile under the moon, and everyone loved her.

Now, it's just a handful of them staying in this huge mansion. Regular pack members have their own dwellings in the area, and they come to the packhouse only when they have some business or when Alpha is hosting an event, which is not very often.

It's quiet.

Damon turned to the car where Caden and Maya waited for him.

It was time to head to the Red Moon pack and meet Marcy, the next candidate for his Luna.

"Cheer up!", Caden shouted from the car at Damon. "You look like you are going to a funeral, and not to get laid! The mental image of a fine woman like Marcy spreading her legs for you should make you happy!"

Maya slapped Caden over his shoulder.

"What?", Caden asked Maya innocently and she rolled her eyes at him.

"Why can't you pick your words a bit?", Maya scolded Caden.

Caden smirked. "Since when you mind when I talk dirty?"

"It's fine when it's only the two of us...", Maya responded with a whisper and Caden chuckled before pulling her closer to give her a smacking kiss on the lips.

Damon observed this lover's banter, and he was not enthusiastic about the upcoming trip. It will be a long drive and he will be forced to watch the PDA between those two lovebirds.

"Wait!", a breathy female voice was heard from the hallway and a second later a middle-aged woman appeared at the main door with a full head of curly red hair, and food containers in her hands. "This is food for the road. I don't want you kids to go hungry."

Damon stifled a laugh and shook his head. For her, they will always be kids.

Damon accepted food containers without complaining. "Thank you, Steph."

Stephanie takes care of the packhouse, handling tasks that are usually done by the Luna, and Damon often jokes that he will marry her.

Luna of the pack takes care of the packhouse, and she ensures that the pack members are happy, while Alpha is in charge of security and everything running smoothly within the pack, and with their external relationships (allies and enemies).

To explain Alpha and Luna roles in simple language: Alpha takes care of the needs, while Luna takes care of the wants, and only when Alpha and Luna are working in harmony, the pack can grow and prosper.

Damon doesn't have a Luna, so those duties are split between Stephanie and Maya, with Stephanie focusing on the packhouse while Maya keeps an eye on the pack members.

Stephanie was Damon's mother's best friend, and her mate was the Beta of the Dark Howlers pack when Damon's father, Alpha Jacob, was the Alpha. Stephanie's mate died with Damon's parents.

Stephanie has a daughter, Lisa, who was eight years old at that time, and Damon treats Lisa like his baby sister.

With the demise of Alpha and Luna of the Black Howlers pack, the situation was unstable, and Stephanie couldn't leave Damon on his own, so she decided to send her daughter to her sister, for safety reasons.

It took about two years for the peace to return to the Black Howlers pack and by then Lisa adapted to the life with her aunt and uncle, and they decided that she will stay there. Lisa still visits occasionally, mostly during summer break and on holidays.

For the last decade, Stephanie is treating Damon as her child, and everyone in the pack loves and respects her.

"Drive safely.", Stephanie said to Caden when he started the car.

The trio would save a lot of time if they went with a helicopter or a plane, but werewolves like to feel the ground below them and won't fly unless it's absolutely necessary.

"Be back in three days.", Stephanie added meaningfully.

Caden paused while thinking about his and Damon's schedule. There was nothing that would require their presence for at least one week. Any work that was pending could be done via phone, email, or video chat.

"What's in three days?", Caden asked.

"Cassie is coming.", Stephanie responded with an unhappy face.

Caden stifled a laugh and Maya grimaced.

"What? Why?", Damon asked dejectedly.

Stephanie narrowed her eyes at him. "You should ask her and not me. Cassie wanted to come today, but I told her that you will be out for a few days on business, and then she changed her tune to how she will go to New York for three days and come here after that. Make sure you are back by then. I don't want to entertain girls who think they are my Luna."

Damon nodded obediently. "I will keep you informed about our schedule."

Before Stephanie could say anything, Damon slipped in the back seat of the car and mind-linked Caden, 'Drive, NOW!'

"See you in a few days, Steph!", Caden shouted through the open window and drove away.

"Not a few! Three! Did you hear me!?", Stephanie shouted after them and shook her head helplessly. Kids.

In the car...

"Man, you should tidy up your loose ends.", Caden said to Damon teasingly.

Damon groaned in frustration.

If not for Caden setting him up with that blasted date, Damon wouldn't even know who Cassie is.

Cassie was one of the bride candidates. About three years ago, Damon went to meet her, and they met. Intimately.

Damon didn't know it was her first time; not that it would make any difference.

Damon deflowered many girls, she-wolves and humans alike, but after Cassie, he made a rule to stay away from virgins.

Cassie is a spoiled young lady, daughter of Alpha Richard, and Damon wonders if she has marbles instead of a brain.

Damon rejected her many times, but she refuses to accept it and walks around telling people that they are planning her Luna ceremony. The woman is delusional.

Since their one night together, Cassie shows up at the Dark Howlers pack occasionally, demanding that Damon marries her because she gave him her first time.

Damon would probably imprison her or maybe make her disappear if that wouldn't risk a war with the Steelbite pack.

The Steelbite pack on its own is not a problem. It's one of the smaller packs in the Southeast. But Alpha Richard has many connections, even among the Elders, and Damon doesn't want to give them more reasons to target him.

To Damon, Cassie is a temporary nuisance, and just like many she-wolves who are throwing themselves at him, Damon can tune her out.

Cassie comes about once a month, spends two to three days making a ruckus, and when she gets tired, she leaves.

As much as Damon can ignore Cassie and block her attempts to crawl onto his lap or sneak into his bedroom at night, Stephanie feels like snapping Cassie's neck whenever she hears Cassie saying how she is the Luna.

For Stephanie, there was only one Luna of the Dark Howlers pack and she perished ten years ago. How Stephanie sees it, every time Cassie shouts she is Luna (and tries to act like one), Cassie is tarnishing the image of Damon's mother, late Luna Violet.

Stephanie is aware that one day Damon will find his Luna, and Stephanie hopes that the girl will be at least half as good as her deceased best friend. Cassie is not good enough to clean Luna Violet's shoes which are sitting boxed up for the last decade, and taking Luna Violet's position is out of the question.

Damon exhaled sharply, releasing his tension together with last thoughts about Cassie. With any luck, she will not come, and he won't need to deal with all that drama.

Women like Cassie enforce Damon's conviction that having a woman in life only brings trouble. He already has so much to deal with. Managing the pack, balancing the relationships with other packs, alliances, deals, concealed enmity, and all those damned Elders who are trying to manipulate him.

Other than his mother and Stephanie (and maybe Maya), Damon didn't see any woman who can handle her own burden. That's why he doesn't want a woman in his life. His

hands are already full and if he needs to deal with whinnying and pacifying women, he would go crazy.

How Damon sees it, one-night stands are perfect and there are plenty of women who won't ask for more from a handsome stranger, especially she-wolves who have a high libido.

Whenever he has time, Damon goes outside of his pack borders, into areas where no one knows him. He finds a woman, they have fun, and by morning he can go back to his duties without any strings attached.

A clean break after an enjoyable night. Is that too much to ask for?

Unfortunately, Damon is something like a celebrity, and those few women with whom he spent more than one night, started building expectations and he didn't want to deal with their tantrums, so he bailed out.

Damon's phone rang and his handsome eyebrow arched when he saw the caller ID, "Jade".

Ah, another of his ex-es (aka bride candidates), but this one didn't call him in more than a year, so he decided to see what she wants.

"Yes?"

"Hi Alpha Damon, can we talk?"

Damon hummed in confirmation. This is what he likes about Jade. She doesn't beat around the bush, and she doesn't play games.

Damon remembers when he met Jade for a date, about two years ago. Jade told him that she is into modeling, and she has no plans to abandon her career, but she is not against one night of fun.

"We are already on a date, why not enjoy it all the way?", she said with a wink and Damon approved.

In the morning, there were no hugs, no kisses, and no empty promises. Jade just left which earned her a big brownie point in Damon's books and that's why he didn't block her number.

And now it seems that she has something on her mind.

"Tell me.", Damon said.

"I am aware that you are still single, and that Elders are pressuring you to get married more than ever, right?"

Damon frowned and said sternly, "Get to the point, Jade."

Jade heard the Alpha's tone in Damon's voice, and she got aroused. She can't help it. Every she-wolf reacts to a powerful male, it's in their genes.

"My father is nagging me to quit my job and find a husband and all the other stuff I don't want to do, so I thought of you."

Damon didn't get it. "Explain."

"We can help each other. I will stay at your place for a few days, we go out, take some photos, and make it look like we are in a serious relationship. That should pacify my father and Elders for some time. I can go back to my runway, while you do... whatever you do. When they start bugging us again, we will repeat the process. What do you say?"

"You want to be my fake girlfriend?", Damon summarized. Part of him thought how that's a good idea.

"Fake, real, those are just labels, right? We already shagged each other's brains out, so other than marking, we went as far as possible. This is something that can benefit both of us. If you want, we can sign a contract. I will appreciate it if you don't meddle in my career and don't touch my money." After a brief pause, Jade spoke with urgency, "I need to go. The show starts in five minutes, and I'm the first model. Think about it and let me know. If you have any conditions, I'm open for negotiations."

The call ended abruptly, and Damon stared at his phone.

"Will Jade be your pretend girlfriend?", Maya asked with amusement in her voice.

"I hope not.", Caden said seriously. "Damon, remember that once they get in, it's a headache to kick them out. What if she wants more than pretending? And before you say how Jade is cool, let me remind you that she is crafty and ambitious. If she is not, she wouldn't be such a successful model despite her father's objections."

Damon exhaled sharply as he agreed with Caden. All the irritation he left behind was back again.

Women only bring trouble.

Why can't they leave him alone?

Author's note: see Talia's photo in the comments

~ The Red Moon pack ~

"Out of the way!", Anna spat angrily while carrying a stack of plates into the kitchen.

Talia quickly stepped to the side, not wanting to attract attention. She never understood why Anna or other Omegas are treating her like trash, she is an Omega, just like they are.

The only difference between them and Talia is that they all have families, while Talia is an orphan. No one will stand up for her and in the world of werewolves, one wins by strength or numbers. Unfortunately, Talia doesn't have any of those, so she needs to submit or risk another beating.

Talia read in a book that a good Luna should advocate for kindness and helping the less fortunate ones, but Luna Layla is not one of those. Other than worrying about herself, Luna Layla cares about the flashy image of the Red Moon pack, and that's where her concerns stop.

Talia huddled in the corner, behind a big ficus, and observed the commotion.

The whole packhouse was buzzing with activity and she overheard Omegas talking how someone important is coming for lunch. Probably an Alpha.

The packhouse is a big mansion that is used as a home for the Alpha, the Beta, and their families. Also, guests stay there.

Other pack members have their own dwellings in the area whose size and proximity to the packhouse reflect the owner's standing within the pack.

Talia is the only exception as she is a nobody and she lives in the packhouse, but only because she stays in the attic. No one knows Talia exists as long as she completes her chores, and she doesn't get in anyone's way.

On a normal day, Talia thinks of herself as a house mouse that lives within the walls without anyone noticing.

Talia likes when they have important guests because that means there will be plenty of food to go around, just like during the party, two days ago.

That party was amazing. Talia listened to the music from the window she cracked open while munching on a full plate of various snacks she sneaked from the kitchen.

The only bad thing was that the guest of honor, princess Marcy (how other Omegas call her), bumped into Talia after Talia returned the empty plate. Luckily, Marcy didn't raise a fuss and she even apologized.

Talia is confident that Marcy is a good person.

When Talia cleaned Marcy's bathroom while Marcy was on one of her spa outings, Talia observed an array of beauty products she wouldn't even know how to use, and Marcy's closet was full of fancy outfits which confirmed to Talia that Marcy is the real princess. Princess Marcy.

Talia used the less used passages to reach her room in the attic. The things inside are old and dingy, but she keeps it clean and most of the time no one bothers her.

She smiled at the sight of two apples and a dinner roll that were on the napkin, next to the futon where Talia sleeps.

Normally, Talia stays in her room during the day. At night, she would complete her chores, and she uses that opportunity to shower in a bathroom that is attached to one of the unused guest bedrooms. When everyone is sleeping, Talia sneaks into the kitchen to find food.

How Talia sees it, today is a good day. With an important Alpha coming, there will definitely be a feast, which means more leftovers.

Talia laid on the futon that is riled with holes, and she stared at the ceiling while munching on an apple.

Talia likes to think of herself as a captured princess, waiting for her prince to rescue her, but Talia is aware that she is no princess and there is no prince. Not for her at least.

Talia was brought to the Red Moon pack, when she was a toddler, by the previous Alpha. She heard rumors that the Alpha was kind and powerful, but unfortunately, soon after Talia's arrival to the Red Moon pack, he died, and his son, Edward inherited his position.

Alpha Edward was eager to prove himself and in the world of werewolves, that is done by strength and strategizing. His strategy was to focus on warriors and military power, and he neglected everything else.

Of course, Alpha Edward's perfect image was important, so Luna Layla was in charge of making the packhouse looking glamorous and organizing parties, while their daughter Marcy was sent to Europe to attend prestigious boarding schools when she was in her early teens, and their son James was busy with tutors even before he could walk properly.

Between all that activity, Talia is convinced that Alpha Edward and Luna Layla forgot about her existence.

Talia was seven or maybe eight years old when Alpha Edward repurposed common rooms for additional training areas, and at that point, Talia lost her bedroom.

"Where should I go?", Talia asked while looking at people who were taking the furniture out of her room.

The woman paused. "The attic is not used."

And here she is. In the attic.

That was more than a decade ago.

Since then, Talia is living low-key with Alpha and Luna not acknowledging her existence. It's not that they are ignoring her on purpose. Talia is a quiet, inconspicuous girl, with a talent for diminishing her presence.

Talia was a child when she came to the Red Moon pack, and she never went through the ceremony of joining the pack, so she doesn't have the mind link. That's one of the reasons why Alpha Edward doesn't know about her.

But Omegas know. They tend to bully Talia for the smallest mistakes and over the years, Talia learned to keep to herself and to avoid them effectively.

She cleans the bathrooms and empties the trash in the packhouse, without anyone noticing.

Talia shifted and groaned when a hard corner hit her lower back. She reached for the book that's the culprit for her pain. That will leave a bruise.

Talia lives with the werewolves, but she is no more than a human.

If not for her wolf speaking to her, Talia would believe that she IS a human.

Unfortunately, Talia heard her wolf the last time about four years ago.

'You are too weak to shift...!', Talia's wolf spoke into her head. 'If you force it, it might kill you...'

Talia didn't feel her wolf since then, and Talia is not sure if her wolf is sleeping or if she is lost forever.

Without her wolf, Talia doesn't have the speed or the strength, or the enhanced senses, and her healing ability is super-slow. On top of that, Talia is malnourished and much

smaller than an average werewolf, making her look like a fifteen-sixteen years old (skinny) girl, instead of nineteen years old.

Talia looked at the book in her hand and observed the illustration of a princess who is smiling and running with her prince. There is a castle in the background, they are holding hands and look happy, and Talia's eyes always wander to the princess' shiny shoes.

The book is about Cinderella, a poor girl who is abused by her stepmother and stepsisters, and then she meets a fairy godmother who magics a fancy dress and shiny shoes so that Cinderella can go to the ball, meet her prince, and live happily ever after.

'What nonsense.', Talia thought. 'The story is rubbish. One's fortune can't depend on a pair of shoes', but Talia still cracked a smile.

This book reminds Talia of Olivia, the only member of the Red Moon pack who treated her as a person.

Olivia left the pack about one year ago and Talia misses her dearly. Every night Talia hugs that book to sleep, and she remembers Olivia.

Olivia is two years older than Talia and her father is Dr. Scott, the pack doctor.

Olivia would sneakily come to the attic and help Talia tend to her cuts and bruises. Olivia didn't dare to help Talia openly when others bullied her, but Talia never blamed her for it.

Olivia taught Talia a lot about plants; which one is good for swelling, which one for reducing pain, etc.

When Olivia noticed that Talia is reading slowly, she gave Talia the book about Cinderella. "Practice reading daily. This is a great book to remind you how there is such thing as magic, and dreams can come true.."

Talia thought how that was silly, but she was touched by the gesture and accepted the book.

Last year, Olivia was away for a few weeks, and when she returned she came to say her goodbyes.

"Where are you going?", Talia asked her curiously.

Talia never thought about leaving the pack. Not because she didn't have the courage, but more because she had no idea where she would go. Her knowledge about the world outside of the Red Moon pack was extremely limited making her feel like a frog in a well that was sealed and she can't even see the sky above.

Olivia smiled dreamily. "I met my mate. I'm going to live with him. Larry is waiting for me at my house. I used the chance of Larry talking to my dad to come here and say goodbye..."

Talia hugged Olivia and wished her all the best. Talia was happy for her friend, even though she knew that she will be lonely.

Olivia found her prince and she was going to have her happily ever after, and Talia held her tears for after Olivia left.

Talia placed her hand on the book about Cinderella and dozed off.

Her duties start in the evening when everyone is sleeping, so she can rest. By then, the guests will arrive and all the buzz will be over, and Talia smiled at the thought of all the leftovers she will find in the kitchen.

It was late morning when Damon, Caden, and Maya arrived at the Red Moon pack.

Luna Layla apologized for the absence of her husband. "He is with the scouts who picked up suspicious movements on the eastern border of our territory before dawn. Alpha Edward is a hands-on leader and wants to personally ensure we are safe."

Luna Layla was welcoming enough to personally show them to their rooms on the second floor.

'Wow! This place is glitzy.', Maya shared her thoughts with Damon and Caden through their mind link.

'You can say that again.', Caden responded.

None of three commented on two lines of Omegas who bowed to greet them in front of the packhouse.

The floor of the entry hallway was made of white marble and the matching tall columns reached the three stories high ceiling. The marble staircase elegantly curved upward, looking pure and flawless, perfectly complimented by golden rails and the opulent crystal chandeliers that looked like they came from a fancy castle.

'How many homes could one build with all this money if they only take luxury down a notch?', Damon grumbled through the mind link.

'In the Red Moon pack, only mated couples get a dwelling. Highly ranked warriors get a single home, while others get apartments.', Caden reminded Damon who usually

doesn't care about the internal workings of other packs. 'Everyone else above the age of twelve years old lives in common buildings where six to eight people share a room.'

Maya frowned at this thought.

In the Dark Howlers pack, they have common buildings, but most of the pack members live in single homes. Community buildings are used by teens who want to experience life away from parents, and by the elderly who want their space while staying close to people of their age, and of course, in case of emergency situations, when someone's home catches on fire or for refugees until they find them a permanent housing solution.

Damon continued his father's practice of treating everyone with equal importance regardless of their occupation or gender. Omegas get the same privileges as warriors and doctors. After all, each of them is an important member of the pack and deserves dignity.

Giving preference to someone compared to others will create an atmosphere where members are inclined to choose an occupation, disregarding their interests, only because of the benefits it brings. It could easily bring inequality and the creation of social classes. And there is also jealousy, feelings of superiority, and other negativity can easily catch roots.

The Red Moon pack is known for its military prowess, but only because Alpha Edward appreciates warriors and gives them better living conditions which caused most of the able males to become soldiers.

Maya felt the oppressive atmosphere the moment she alighted from the car. Two warriors standing stiffly on each side of the main entrance, the distant shouts from groups that were training... It was like they came to a military compound and not a pack where families live.

"Are you OK?", Caden asked Maya while rubbing her shoulder and she wondered if she made a face or Caden noticed her uneasiness because of their mate bond.

Maya glanced at Luna Layla before turning to Caden with a smile. "Fine. I'm just tired from the trip."

"Please, freshen up and join us downstairs. Lunch will be served in one hour, food will replenish your energy, and you can rest after that if you wish.", Luna Layla said to what Maya responded with a nod.

"Will Marcy join us for lunch?", Maya asked before entering the room. The young Miss and the reason they are here didn't welcome them at the door.

"Yes. She is getting ready.", Luna Layla said and glanced at Damon. "She wants to look her best."

"Her best...", Caden repeated. "We look forward to seeing her best."

Luna Layla's smile froze, and she would snap at Caden for making such an ambiguous remark. Why does he, a Beta, want to see her daughter? But Alpha Damon was right there, with his icy stern expression that made her shrink, so she plastered a smile on her face and sucked it up.

Damon entered his room and locked the door before heading to the bathroom.

Since they entered the Red Moon pack territory, Damon started feeling uneasy, like an omen of unpleasant things coming.

He wanted to shower and relax a bit because traveling with Caden and Maya who are always flirting or playfully bickering is exhausting, and based on the overly enthusiastic welcome by Luna Layla, Damon had a feeling that his mood will only get worse.

Damon met several dozens of she-wolves who tried to become his Luna, but this was the first time for Damon to stay in the packhouse overnight. Normally, he would meet the woman and her parents, take her out for dinner or to a nightclub before they end up rolling in the sheets in a hotel room. Compared to that, this looked more like meet the in-laws scenario, the one where he needs to stay for a few days and returns home with a wife.

That's not happening.

He wanted to talk to Alpha Edward and get to the bottom of what he wants, other than Damon marrying Marcy. There must be some other expectations attached to it. But unfortunately, Alpha Edward didn't join them for lunch, so that had to wait.

Damon, Caden, and Maya had a meal in the lavish dining room that matched the rest of the villa, in the company of Luna Layla, Marcy, and Nora.

Marcy and Nora were already seated at the table when Damon, Caden, and Maya arrived, and they briefly shook hands while exchanging pleasantries.

Alpha Edward and Beta Raymond were still absent, busy with scouts, and Luna Layla promised that they will return soon and definitely join them for dinner. She also apologized because her son was not present, saying that he is doing some exercises with warriors in order to build a strong character.

During their meal, Luna Layla played the role of a good hostess, Marcy chose her words while striking a balance between not being mute and not overstepping her boundaries, while Nora was stealing glances at Damon and blushing profusely.

How Nora saw it, life doesn't get better than this. The man from her wet fantasies was at the same table, eating and talking and every movement of his lips was seductive. She wondered what else he can do with those lips, and with the rest of his body.

She shook hands with Damon, and his grip was solid and warm and she wished that he grips more than her hand.

Nora glanced at Marcy and wondered if Marcy will mind if Nora makes a move on Damon. After all, Marcy didn't seem to be possessive of her future husband and it's not like Nora wants to snatch him for herself. Just a taste will be enough. One night.

After lunch, Luna Layla suggested, "Marcy, why don't you show Alpha Damon the garden? Hydrangea is in full bloom, and you can use this chance to get to know each other."

Marcy glanced at Damon and smiled. "Are you interested?"

"For a walk?", Damon asked, and Marcy confirmed with a nod. "Since your father is still busy, I need to fill in the time with something."

Luna Layla's lips twitched. Why is Alpha Damon sounding like he came for business with her husband instead of to meet Marcy?

'I'm going for a walk.', Damon said to Caden and Maya through the mind link.

Caden smirked. 'Have fun.'

'We will do our part.', Maya assured Damon.

Caden and Maya had a task to investigate the Red Moon pack and see if they can find anything that Damon can use. Ideally, they would find dirt on Marcy so that Damon can label her as unworthy without making up stuff and any negative information on Alpha Edward would be a bonus.

In the garden...

"You seem uneasy.", Damon voiced his observation.

Marcy was glancing around, hoping that she will not see George. Or maybe she wished to see him. But she couldn't admit that to Damon because she would need to say why George is important and that might complicate things.

Other than Damon's icy demeanor, Marcy thought that he is a good-looking, powerful, man. With his status, he had the right to be prideful. She didn't know Damon, but what she saw so far was impressive.

"I would like for us to talk in private.", Marcy said. "And here we can be overheard."

Damon paused. It's not that he didn't plan to sink deep into Marcy, but he didn't think that she will take the initiative less than one hour after they met.

"How about my room?", Damon suggested, and he smirked when Marcy nodded in approval.

In the guestroom...

Damon sat in the comfy sofa chair and observed Marcy smugly. She was standing three steps in front of Damon with her hands crossed over her chest defensively.

"You wanted privacy, so here we are.", Damon said while waving his hand, gesturing for Marcy to start talking.

"Considering our future relationship, I believe that we should be able to talk openly."

Damon cocked an eyebrow. "Our future relationship?"

Marcy narrowed her eyes impatiently. Why is he pretending that he doesn't understand? He wants her to spell it out? Fine!

"We both know that you are here because I will be your Luna."

Damon poked his cheek with his tongue while looking at Marcy mockingly. He realized that Marcy is impatient to clarify her status as his Luna. What's with the rush? She didn't seem to be desperate to get married, and if one was watching them during lunch, Nora seemed eager to put her hands on Damon, while Marcy was in a meh-mood.

Damon wondered if he saw it wrongly, or maybe Marcy is a good actress.

He wanted to test how far her act will go.

"My Luna? What makes you think you are qualified?"

Marcy was offended. Is he looking down on her?

"Just so you know, I was trained my whole life to be a good Luna. I can take care of the packhouse and the pack members and many other things, including housing, food, and finance management. I will relieve you of your burden."

"You want to relieve me of my burden...", Damon drawled, and Marcy nodded confidently.

Damon slid lower in the sofa chair until the back of his head reached the edge of the backrest, and his legs parted more.

"Since you are eager to relieve me of my burden, how about you put that pretty mouth of yours to good use and give me some relief."

Marcy paused and it took her a moment to understand the meaning behind Damon glancing at his crotch area.

She swallowed hard. 'He wants me to suck him off...'

Well, it's not like she never did that before, but it involved courting and dinner, and... his smug expression frustrated her profusely.

Marcy told herself that this guy in front of her is not some random Pierre or Jacque, this is Alpha Damon, and he is used to women serving him.

Marcy is prideful and willful, but at this point, she couldn't afford to offend him. Her father would skin her alive.

Marcy walked slowly toward Damon and got on her knees between his legs.

She bit her lower lip while unbuttoning his pants and he lifted his buttocks so that she can pull them lower, just enough for his erection to spring free.

She took a mental note that he didn't have underwear on.

Marcy looked at the beast in front of her and her eyes widened. 'He is huge, and not even fully erect!'

Damon let out a low hiss when Marcy took him into her mouth.

She knew what she was doing.

...

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...

Talia jumped from her sleep when piercing pain assaulted her shin.

"Wake up, slave!", Anna said with malice in her voice and Talia was immediately wide awake.

There are several Omegas who bully Talia, and Anna is their ringleader. But normally they don't come to the attic, and Talia had a bad feeling about this.

Talia yelled when Shawn grabbed a handful of her hair and dragged her toward the door. "You need to listen, slave..."

Talia never understood why they call her 'slave', and sometimes they call her 'rat' or 'roach'.

Is it because she is not part of the Red Moon pack? Or because she has no family? Or because she doesn't get any compensation for the work she does?

She gets a place to stay and food, and Talia even gets clothes from the pile others are discarding, so she didn't think about asking for more. Who would she ask, anyway? She wouldn't dare to approach Alpha or Luna with any demands.

Or maybe it's not about Talia, but these Omegas want to be superior to someone, so they are insulting Talia because she is easy to pick on.

Talia's thoughts were partially right. They bullied her in order to feel better, but what she doesn't know is that Anna and her gang think that Talia is having it easy.

Other than hard work, Omegas attend mandatory harsh trainings because Alpha Edward believes everyone should be a soldier, and whenever they fall behind, they get beatings. Every time Anna gets a beating, she searches for Talia in order to release some of her steam.

This time, Anna came up with a plan that will get Talia in big trouble. How big? It will depend on what happens next.

When Shawn let go of Talia, they were in the hallway on the second floor.

Anna smiled maliciously and tilted her head to the side.

Zina stepped forward and pushed a handful of stacked towels into Talia's hands.

"Fifth door on the right. Alpha Damon needs fresh towels for his bathroom.", Anna said and gestured in that direction.

Talia took a step back. "Towels? I only clean the bathrooms and take the trash. What if he is inside?"

"Are you arguing with me?", Anna hissed and raised her hand like she is about to deliver a slap.

Talia shrunk and scurried down the hallway.

Anna stifled a laugh at the scene.

"What do you think will happen?", Zina asked in a whisper. "Princess Marcy and Alpha Damon are alone for some time. What if they are going at it?"

"Good. We want Talia to cause a ruckus, right?", Shawn chimed in.

"She is enjoying a carefree life while we suffer.", Anna said maliciously. "It's time for Alpha Edward to take notice of this rat who is always falling through the cracks. I wonder if she will survive the day."

Talia gently knocked on the door and listened intently. It was quiet.

She guessed that Alpha Damon Anna mentioned is the big guest and she wondered if it's OK to get in if he is sleeping. With his Alpha-hearing, he would definitely hear that knock and tell her to come in or to scram.

Talia put her hand on the doorknob and slowly opened the door.

Her heart stopped at the sight in front of her and she froze.

A handsome young man with a head full of raven black hair was leaning back in the sofa chair with his head tilted up so that he can stare at the ceiling. His chest heaved and she couldn't see if his eyes were open but what she could see was princess Marcy, kneeling between man's legs and... and... Talia's brain stuttered.

This was too much.

Unsure what to do, Talia's eyes fell on the towels she was clutching tightly, and then she took a peek at the duo who was too busy to notice her.

That's right, they didn't notice her.

Talia decided to complete her mission. If she retreats without delivering towels, Anna will give her a hard time, and if she proceeds inside, there is a chance they will not catch her.

Talia stepped into the room and moved toward the bathroom while sticking as close to the wall as possible, without making any sound.

She left the towels next to the sink and dashed out with light steps, the same ones she uses to move through the packhouse without anyone noticing her.

Talia stopped at the door and pulled it to close slowly. For some inexplicable reason, Talia took another peek at the duo and her stomach dropped when she met two piercing blue eyes directed at her.

She was caught!

And Alpha Damon looked angry!

"Stop!", Damon shouted, but there was no way that Talia would stop.

She closed the door and ran upstairs as fast as she could, not stopping at the giggles and mocking from Anna and her gang, and not stopping until she reached the attic and closed the door behind her firmly. Talia pushed the cabinet to block the door and then she huddled in the corner, slowing down her breathing and wishing that her wild heartbeat doesn't betray her location.

'Is this it? Is this the day I die?', Talia wondered.

She only did what she was told to do, but that doesn't change the fact that she saw something that shouldn't be seen.

What did she see?

Talia didn't know much about male-female relationships, but Talia knew about body parts. Olivia also explained about periods and getting pregnant, and Talia was not sure why would princess Marcy put that part of Alpha Damon in her mouth. It should go elsewhere when they want to have babies.

In the guest bedroom...

Damon pushed Marcy away from him and Marcy fell on her butt unceremoniously.

"Who is that girl?", Damon asked while buttoning up his pants.

Marcy was confused. "What girl?"

"The one with towels! She left towels in the bathroom and left!", Damon roared and jabbed his hand into his hair. "Damn it!"

Marcy stared at Damon and blinked rapidly while trying to understand what happened.

Less than a minute ago...

Marcy was going down on him, and she was doing wonderfully, but then Damon inhaled the most seductive sweet citrusy scent that reminded him of delicate freesia flowers and his cock lurched in response.

'Mate!', Damon's wolf said.

'What?', Damon asked in disbelief while staring at Marcy.

If Marcy is his mate, why was his wolf silent during lunch? And why did her scent change? Marcy didn't smell like freesia. Marcy's scent was coconut-like, and there were traces of it everywhere, but this new scent was gentle and seductive.

His wolf growled. 'Not her. The bathroom...'

Damon whipped his head toward that direction, just in time to see Talia disappear behind the door with a handful of towels.

Damon watched Talia as she sneaked out of the room, and he observed her small frame in oversized clothes and her coppery-colored hair that reached just below her shoulders. She was totally unaware that Damon was watching her.

'Stop her!', Damon's wolf demanded. 'She is the one for us! If you let her go, you will regret it!'

"Stop!", Damon shouted, but Talia was gone, and the door was closed, and he couldn't get up and go after her because Marcy was still sucking him off and if he made sudden movements, she might bite him.

The girl was gone and what Marcy did didn't feel good, especially not while his wolf growled at Marcy while urging Damon to go after Talia.

Back to the present...

Marcy's eyes widened when she understood what Damon said. "There was a girl in here?"

Damon nodded. "Who is in charge of towels?"

Damon didn't know anything about this sneaky girl, and he was not pleased that his wolf told him that Talia is his mate, but he had an urge to understand the aching need to get close to the girl with the coppery colored hair, and for that he needed to find her.

Marcy shrugged. "I don't know who handles towels. One of Omegas."

"Find out!", Damon squeezed through his teeth and Marcy lowered her head in submission.

"Yes, Alpha Damon. I will find out and let you know...", Marcy responded robotically and left the room with urgency.

Now that she was outside the reach of Damon's wrath, Marcy had space to think. She hated that he used his Alpha tone on her! But more pressing was that someone saw her

going down on Damon. Yes, that's her future husband, but she definitely needed to do damage control and send a warning to all Omegas on how they should behave.

Marcy snorted. No wonder her father looks down on Omegas. They are useless.

Marcy glanced left and right and spotted a group of Omegas lingering at the end of the hallway.

"You!", Marcy called. "I have some questions..."

...

Damon paced through his room and discomfort in his crotch area got his attention.

He remembered that Marcy was sucking him off and just when it got good it stopped, and now he was left halfway, with Marcy's coconutty scent lingering on him.

He didn't think much about Marcy's scent before, but now he found it repulsive. Is it because of the towel girl?

Her sweet citrusy scent was addictive and he craved for more. How can a girl smell so good?

Damon saw many wolves lose themselves once they find their mates. It happened with Caden the moment he met Maya. Caden was always a carefree guy, with an edge and eagerness for adventure and to experience new things, but once Maya entered the picture, Caden's whole world shifted, and she became the center of his everything.

Damon and Caden grew up together, and they shared many hardships. Damon is aware that Caden will never betray him, but Damon is confident that if Caden ever needs to pick between his loyalty to Damon and infatuation with Maya, Damon will be left hanging.

Will Damon allow his world to change because of one girl? That's not going to happen. No way. He will fight this off.

Damon decided to shower.

Just the thought of Marcy touching him made him feel dirty and he needed to wash it off.

As warm water caressed his body, images of the coppery colored hair flashed in front of his eyes, and he remembered the sweet citrusy scent of freesia... and he was aroused again.

"Damn it!", Damon cursed and gripped his shaft.

He is not the one who usually helps himself because there are always girls willing to please him, but this was an emergency, so he started pumping.

Ah, if he knew it will come to this, he wouldn't chase away Marcy. Not until he comes at least.

'Do you think you can orgasm with just any girl?', his wolf spoke.

Damon's hand stopped moving. 'What do you mean?'

'Being with another girl will hurt our mate. Can you hurt our mate?'

A mental image of Talia's petrified expression flashed in front of Damon's eyes, and he cursed under his breath.

'Great! You made me see that, how can I finish?', Damon grumbled.

'Maybe instead of jerking off you should go and find our mate!', his wolf growled.

"Shit!", Damon exclaimed and turned off the hot water while hoping that the cold shower will help him settle down.

Damon changed into fresh clothes and was on his way out of the room when someone knocked on the door. It was Nora.

"Alpha Damon...", she called his name in a singing voice when he opened the door.

"Alpha Edward and Beta Raymond returned, and Alpha Edward is in the study. He said that you can join him anytime it works for you. I'm here to show you the way."

Damon frowned. Yes. Alpha Edward. Marcy. That's why he is here.

"I'm ready now. Please, lead the way."

Nora smiled and gestured to her left.

When her father said that he will inform Alpha Damon that Alpha Edward is waiting for him, Nora offered to deliver the message instead of her father.

Nora was hoping that Damon will say how he will see Alpha Edward later, and then she would offer to wait in his room and then... ah, the possibilities.

...

In the study...

"Alpha Damon...", Marcy's father greeted Damon. "I hope your trip went well and that so far things are in order. I apologize for not welcoming you personally when you arrived, but I had urgent matters to take care of. I'm sure you understand."

"Of course...", Damon responded with a straight face.

Yes, he understood that this is how Alpha Edward showed disrespect.

Scouts found something suspicious? There should be a report and someone issuing orders. There was no need for Alpha himself to investigate. It was obvious that was a lame excuse for Alpha Edward to avoid welcoming Alpha Damon personally.

Damon knows very well what Alpha Edward thinks of him.

"How was your trip?", Alpha Edward asked.

Damon was not in the mood for exchanging meaningless pleasantries. "Trip was fine. Your wife showed us to our rooms, and lunch was satisfying. Your daughter is interested in us getting to know each other better, but I wanted to talk to you first."

"Talk to me? About what?"

"About what do you want.", Damon went to the point.

Alpha Edward chuckled awkwardly. "I want for my daughter to have a good husband, and to be taken care of. You are available and fulfill all the criteria. At the same time, Marcy is a beautiful young lady who has all the skills to be a remarkable Luna. Did you expect something else?"

Damon narrowed his eyes. "When you put it that way, it sounds like you are not getting anything out of it."

"What would I be getting? Once you and Marcy are married, she will live with you. I only hope that you will let her visit us occasionally. Of course, I would love to visit as well, but I am busy with managing my pack and training James, and I'm not having much free time so maybe I will visit you when James takes over. I can spend some time with my grandkids."

Damon clenched his teeth in irritation. How can this old fart say that he is too busy to visit, yet he requested that Damon stays with him for a few days? Shameless!

Damon stood up from the chair and stuffed his hands in his jeans pockets.

"Alpha Edward, we will leave tomorrow this time. Until then, think about all the conditions you want to attach with me being close to Marcy. I want to know all parts of

the deal before I agree to anything, and I am not a man who changes the conditions on the fly. If you try to reach for anything that's mine, there will be consequences."

Alpha Edward's lips twitched. "Are you threatening me?"

"No. I am giving you a heads up."
