

## The Alpha's Bride

### #Chapter 881: Babies! (E&V) (1)

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##### Chapter 881: Babies! (E&V) (1)

Damon and Talia reached the pack hospital to see that Meg, Kai, Sandy, and Tyler were standing in the hallway on the second floor.

"What's the status?" Talia asked.

Meg smiled and gestured toward a nearby door that was closed. "I was just about to mind-link you. Babies were born a few minutes ago. A boy and a girl. Nurses are cleaning them up, and they said we could visit them in a bit. Axel is there with Yasmin."

Talia's heart was beating like a war drum. Babies! A boy and a girl! They were right there, behind that door.

"What is that?" Tyler asked while peering behind Talia at Damon, who had his hands full of plastic bags. He wouldn't ask, but he picked up a delicious smell that stirred his appetite.

Talia responded, "We got ramen for everyone."

Kai and Tyler relieved Damon from his delicious load. Other than sealed bowls with ramen, there were plastic spoons, chopsticks, and napkins. The six people sat on the floor to eat while waiting for Doctor Travis and the nurses to finish their work.

"Do you think we can see the babies tonight?" Talia asked before opening her mouth to accept the food that Damon was offering.

"Why not?" Meg responded with a mouthful before Kai stuffed more food in there.

"I don't know. What if the new family needs time to bond?"

Meg waved like it was not a big deal.

Sandy gestured for Tyler to pause feeding her so she could say, "They can bond at home. Now that we are here, how can we not see the babies? Besides, we will be the ones escorting them safely back home..."

Talia wondered how long Yasmin and Axel would stay here. What if they decide to leave tomorrow? Talia read that even humans stay only twenty-four hours in the hospital (sometimes less) if the delivery didn't have complications.

Talia realized that she didn't have proper presents. She turned to Damon. "Can we go shopping in the morning? I would like to get something for the babies." With Axel being the only child, Talia was the closest relative (other than grandparents).

"Sure." Damon agreed immediately and resumed feeding Talia. He was glad to feel her excitement and happiness.

Talia's previous guilt and anxiety were gone now. Damon knew that Talia blamed herself not only for Lulu's death but for Marcy's as well. If they didn't send Marcy to that shelter, she would probably be alive now. Talia also believed that if she were not Damon's mate, Marcy wouldn't be ousted like that, and Lulu wouldn't become her guard.

In more ways than one, Talia saw herself as a catalyst for those two deaths. Damon wished for Talia to see all the good her presence brought to everyone. She needed to accept that there was no way to predict how events will unfold.

Luckily, this news about babies was a good distraction. Damon hoped that nothing bad will happen because he wanted his kitten to be happy.

The door of the hospital room opened, and a nurse came out while pushing a big cart with soiled towels and blankets on it.

Doctor Travis was right behind her, and he bowed while informing them that the babies and mother were doing well, and they could go and see them, but not to make a fuss. The last comment was mostly for Meg who was bouncing on her heels from excitement.

Talia was first to peek inside.

Yasmin was on the hospital bed with two babies on her chest. Axel was standing next to the bed and caressing Yasmin's head while looking at Yasmin and the two babies with a gaze full of gentle love.

Infants were tiny, with only diapers and small white hospital hats on; they were on their bellies, each covering one of Yasmin's bare breasts, reminding Talia of little pink frogs. Yasmin's bottom half was under a blanket.

"Are you accepting visitors?" Talia asked.

Yasmin gave her a tired smile. "Come in."

Damon was right behind Talia, pushing a plastic bag into Axel's hands.

"We got you some ramen," Talia explained, and Axel kept the bag on the side table.

Meg, Kai, Sandy, and Tyler also entered the room, and they made a circle around the bed to stare at the babies who were lying on Yasmin without moving. The infants were sleeping.

"How are you doing?" Sandy asked the first question.

"Happy," Yasmin responded. "Glad that it's over and things went well."

"Did you decide on names?" Meg asked.

Yasmin glanced at Axel, silently telling him to take over.

Axel cleared his throat. "The boy's name is Edgar. He is seven minutes younger than his sister, Valeria."

"Oh, what wonderful names!" Meg squealed, and Sandy bobbed her head.

Talia's eyes widened when she realized that Edgar was the name of Yasmin's father and Valeria... "Is that for my father?"

Axel confirmed. "Valerian Moonrider was an impressive individual. His grandniece will wear his name with pride."

Talia's chin trembled, and she was glad that Damon was holding her.

"Thank you," Talia said under her breath. This was another gesture from Axel and Yasmin to confirm that they stand with Talia and don't approve of how she was treated before.

Talia couldn't imagine how Sophia and Isaac would react when they hear about the girl's name. Would they be angry? Or feel guilty? Talia shook those thoughts away. It was not her problem.

"They are quiet," Tyler said. "Aren't babies supposed to make noise and poop everywhere?"

Sandy nudged him with her elbow. "They are sleeping. Besides, newborns only eat and sleep for the first week or two. After that, the fun times start."

Meg nodded knowingly and spoke to Yasmin and Axel, "Sandy is right. You should pick a few healers from now to help you with little ones. They can watch over them for a few hours every day so you can rest properly."

Yasmin cocked an eyebrow. "Why do I need healers when aunt Meg and aunt Sandy are right there?"

Sandy was happy to hear that. It made her feel like they were part of a family. She glanced at Meg's belly, which was showing. "Meg's pup will join little ones. When will I get my heat?"

"In five days," Talia blurted out, and Sandy and Tyler stared at her.

"What?" Sandy squeaked, and Tyler swayed like his legs would give in.

Meg waved her hand to get Sandy's attention. "Didn't you know that our Alpha has the ability to predict heat?"

Talia laughed at Sandy's comical expression. She couldn't explain that it was Liseli who knew these things, so she focused on Yasmin. "What does the doctor say? How long do you need to stay in the hospital? Should we prepare a guest bedroom in the packhouse? That will be more comfortable than here." And more secure as here they had hospital staff and other patients nearby.

"He said that because it's twins, we should stay an extra day..." Yasmin's voice trailed when the baby girl started moving. It was not a big movement, but she was on Yasmin's left breast, so Yasmin felt it.

Valeria opened her mouth, and they all huddled closer to observe the cutest yawn in the world that came with a small twitch of the baby's right leg.

"Aww..." Meg, Sandy, and Talia said in unison.

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Chapter 882: Babies! (E&V) (2)

Yasmin looked at Talia. "Do you want to hold her?"

Talia was alerted. "Me?"

"You are Valeria's aunt," Yasmin reminded Talia.

Talia glanced at Damon, who smiled at her.

"Go ahead," Damon said.

He was standing on the side and imagining how a few months into the future, Talia will be in a bed like that with their pup. It was the best mental image ever.

Talia rubbed her hands before gently taking the infant into her hands. Valeria had only a diaper and a hat; a helpless and fragile little creature.

"Make sure to support her neck," Axel said from the other side of the bed.

Talia knew what to do. From the moment she found out that Yasmin was pregnant, Talia watched videos about pregnancy, delivery, and infants, so that she could be the best aunt ever. And here she was, holding her niece. Valeria.

Talia was emotional. The little bun was so light, and Talia was sure her plush toy, Blackie weighed about the same.

"Look how cute she is," Talia said to Damon, who was nodding in agreement.

'Our daughter will be cuter,' Damon said through the mind link for Talia to hear, and she couldn't believe that he treated this as a competition.

Valeria's tiny tongue was darting out, giving cues that she was hungry, but Talia wanted to hold her just a few more seconds.

Valeria's eyes sprang open to show silver-colored irises glowing in pulses. Before anyone could react, a mass of silvery light exploded from the infant in all directions, passing silently through people and things like they were not there and disappearing into the forest that stretched around the pack hospital.

'A great way to announce to the world you are here!' Liseli said in Talia's head sarcastically.

Talia swallowed a mouthful of air. This was unexpected.

Talia glanced at Damon to see that his eyes were out of focus. Her Alpha was ensuring that security was tight.

Talia was unsure if the explosion of light happened because she was holding the baby, but she recognized the energies clearly.

"Valeria has the power of a Guardian," Talia said, and then she looked at Edgar, who was sleeping peacefully on Yasmin. "Edgar has it also, but Valeria's is stronger."

"What are you saying?" Yasmin asked under her breath.

Everyone stared at Talia, and she realized that not many people knew about Talia's guess related to Yasmin's father. That was not a guess anymore, and this was not the time for secrets.

"Yasmin, I believe your father was a Guardian, like my mother. That explains why your energy is different and is resonating with mine. Everyone here knows that the Guardians are dying because their females can't bear children, and they are looking for powerful females to..." Talia couldn't say the next words, but everyone understood where this was going.

Yasmin didn't doubt Talia's words. From a young age, Yasmin was aware that her energies were different. Evanora would say how that was because Yasmin was a hybrid and because she was talented, and Yasmin believed her. But now that Talia disclosed how both of them have the Guardian bloodline, it all fell into place to complete the puzzle.

Scary stories about Guardians and Vincent's interrogation resurfaced in Yasmin's mind, and she waved at Talia to give Valeria back. She needed to feel her children skin-to-skin, to assure herself that they were all there, together.

Even if Yasmin's father was not a Guardian, if Guardians believed he was, Yasmin and her children will be in danger!

Damon squeezed Talia's shoulder before talking to Axel and Yasmin. "We don't want Guardians to find out about Edgar and Valeria. Considering what happened, we should take you to the Midnight Guardians pack as soon as possible."

Yasmin hugged her babies. "What's the point of going to the Midnight Guardians pack? Don't Guardians know where the portal is?" No place felt safe except next to Talia.

"They know," Talia admitted. "But they don't know what you are, and considering I am here, even if they have spies, they will think that this energy blast came from me. Just in case, you might consider staying in the Coven for some time. Evanora won't allow anyone to get close to you or her grandchildren."

"Are you saying that the Guardians know you are one of them?" Axel asked.

Talia confirmed. "It happened at the Blue River pack. A Guardian approached me, and he did something that wouldn't affect me if I'm not one of them, but it did, so..." Talia's voice trailed. She didn't want to mention how that caused her heat. "The Guardians know about me. There is no need for them to find out about Yasmin or your children."

Seeing that there were no other objections, Talia turned to Damon. "Call Liam and Amelia. They need to transport Yasmin and newborns as soon as possible."

Yasmin didn't like this. Why do they need to hide?

Why did Guardians act like they own everything?

Yasmin was determined to go to the Coven and demand answers from her mother. Everyone assumed that Yasmin's father was a werewolf, and Yasmin believed it. But now that Yasmin thought about it, Evanora didn't talk about Edgar until Talia brought up the topic of portals and his disappearance. Did Evanora know that Edgar was a Guardian? Yasmin had so many questions!

People moved quickly.

Amelia drew the transportation diagram on the floor of the hospital room, and Axel was talking to Doctor Travis about postnatal care for Yasmin and the babies.

Travis didn't approve of Yasmin leaving so soon, but he understood there was some emergency.

Talia remembered one thing to advise Yasmin. "Talk to Cassandra about ancient relics. We found that at least a few of them are suppressing our powers. You should keep those close to children until they learn to master their abilities and you are confident they won't use them rashly."

Yasmin frowned. "You want me to suppress their powers?"

"Yes. It was a common practice among Guardians." Talia knew this because of the knowledge transferred from her mother's necklace. "What if one of them can teleport? Where will you find them? Or what if they can start a fire? They might think it's a game, but it will be easy for them to get in trouble or to be tricked by someone."

Yasmin realized that Talia was right. Members of the Midnight Guardians pack had abilities, but those awakened after they mate, after their eighteenth birthday. Even witches couldn't do much with energies until they were twelve years old.

Edgar and Valeria were special, and Yasmin was clueless about the Guardians.

"I want you to come and visit as soon as possible," Yasmin demanded from Talia. "I need to know about Guardians and how to raise my children."

Talia smiled at the silly witch. "Just follow your instincts, Yasmin. You are a wonderful mother. But yes, I will come as soon as I can."

"The diagram is ready," Amelia announced.

"Should we send some security through first?" Axel asked.

"No need," Liam responded. "We already sent more than a dozen batches of people. Even if someone is watching, they won't think of this group as different."

Talia agreed with Liam. "Do it how you would normally send people. Anything other than that will attract attention." She pulled a baseball hat and tucked her hair into it. "Besides, I'm going with you."

Damon frowned at the cap. "Where did you get that?" And did she say she was going?

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### Chapter 883: Trip to the portal

"I asked nurses if they had something for me to cover up, and they gave me this cap," Talia said to Damon. "Look. If I pull it low, no one can tell it's me."

Seeing Damon's frown deepening, Talia quickly added, "I got one for you also. Normally, a couple of warriors would go with newly mated couples to escort them to the portal, but now we can take their place."

Damon was glad that Talia didn't think of leaving him behind. Yes, it wouldn't take long, but every second without Talia stretched into eternity.

If it were up to Damon, Talia would be waiting in the packhouse, but he knew that was not an option, so he agreed that both of them would go.

Damon mind-linked Pierce and Daria to come. They will serve as an escort all the way to the Midnight Guardians pack. As a bonus, Daria can see Varya and spend time with her sister. A few days there are only a few hours in the human realm, so Pierce and Daria can treat it like a vacation.

The Midnight Guardians pack had several witches mated to their members, so bringing back Pierce and Daria whenever they want to return, won't be a problem.

Damon also instructed Pierce to assess Grady's and Varya's attitudes. Damon was uneasy with Grady's background as a rogue and how Varya didn't think it was a big deal. Damon was unsure if they would take it as far as collaborating with whoever gives them more benefits (that's how rogues operate), but one can't be too careful. If Sophia and Isaac didn't notice Guardians getting in and out of their territory, Damon doubted Axel's ability to handle similar situations. If Axel failed, that would harm Talia, and Damon didn't want to allow it.

"Liam," Damon called solemnly. "We will rely on you to report if anything is out of the ordinary when we reach there."



"Yes, Alpha," Liam responded right away.

"Don't use your aura," Talia reminded Damon. "We don't want to expose ourselves unless necessary."

Talia looked at two babies that were being swaddled by a nurse for Yasmin and Axel to see.

"What if Guardians are there and they can sense presences?" Talia asked Damon. "No matter how much we conceal things from sight, two tiny lifeforms will attract attention." And there was a chance of Valeria causing a light spectacle again.

"I have an idea," Sandy said from the side. "The energy disturbances around the portal are preventing anyone from using long-range abilities, however, short-range abilities work to a certain degree. I can identify the presence of a wolf that manifests as a spirit. Lately, I have been practicing on expanding mine, like a blanket. Let me show what I mean on Tyler."

"You can expand your spirit?" Talia asked, genuinely curious.

Sandy confirmed. "It's not perfect, but I'm working on it. However, we don't need perfection now. The energies are messed up, and I can help scramble that further. It should be enough to cover up the presence of those two nuggets."

Damon waved at Sandy to go ahead.

Talia focused on Sandy, and she could sense that Sandy's presence expanded to cover up Tyler completely. The shape was odd because it was obvious that it was either two people or a monster, but with two babies cradled closely, Sandy might pull it off.

"What do you think?" Talia asked Damon, knowing that he was paying attention as well.

"Looks promising," Damon said. It depended on what kind of sensing Guardians had, but this was better than nothing.

Their first priority was to get Axel and Yasmin with babies through the portal without anyone noticing that the babies were there.

Damon asked Doctor Travis and the nurses to keep it a secret that Yasmin gave birth, and they immediately agreed, but Damon knew it was only a matter of time until the information leaked. Friends, coworkers, family, strangers... someone will talk.

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The forest was silent when several figures appeared out of thin air.

Amelia, Liam, Meg, and Kai led the way, with Sandy, Tyler, Pierce, and Daria behind them. Axel and Yasmin were right there with Talia and Damon at the back.

Sandy was wearing a baggy trench coat that covered Valeria and Edgar, who were secured by baby carriers to Sandy's body.

Talia held Damon's hand and looked around.

'Do you sense something?' Damon asked Talia through the mind-link.

'No,' she responded.

They were in the natural maze that surrounded the portal, and even the keenest senses would be messed up, but Talia couldn't shake off the feeling that someone was watching them. Was she just paranoid, or were her instincts telling her to run?

Talia put her hand over her belly, and she snuggled closer to Damon. Her shoulder fit under his armpit as his arm supported her upper back. She loved his grip on her shoulder. It was solid, and it gave her confidence that he was there to protect her.

The ten minute-long walk seemed like forever, and they would stop and turn at the slightest sound. By the time they reached the portal, everyone was breathing rapidly.

Talia was glad that for the last two-three minutes the feeling of being watched was gone. But again, maybe it was not gone, but only her senses were impacted by energy disturbances.

After a short round of goodbyes, eight figures passed through the portal, leaving Amelia, Liam, Talia, and Damon behind.

They waited at the portal until Talia got a text message from Axel that they had reached the main house in the Midnight Guardians pack.

Talia looked at the portal that was projected right in front of a massive tree. The faint ripples in the air were barely noticeable with a naked eye, and unless someone was aiming to walk into a tree, they wouldn't step through it accidentally. But Talia knew that applied only to humans. Many creatures could sense something there, and some could see the energies twirling.

Leaving this here unguarded was unsettling, but putting guards would also bring attention.

Talia wished to scoop everyone dear to her and bring them through the portal. And then she would close the portal, and all the bad things would be on the other side.

Talia was aware that was just wishful thinking. If she did that, many good people would be left behind. Did she have the capacity to worry about others? Talia was not sure, but she knew that leaving them with Guardians to fend for themselves would plague her for the rest of her life. Maybe that was not her problem, but she had the bloodline of a Guardian, and she felt it was her responsibility to stop them from harming others.

Should she just ruin this portal? Maybe Axel and others will hate her for it, but at least they will be safe.

Talia shook those thoughts away. If she did that, she wouldn't be better than Sophia and Isaac, who opted to isolate their people in the name of keeping them safe. It wouldn't be fair to do so without giving them a choice, and Talia knew that they would pick to fight compared to staying imprisoned. Too many people were still unmated, waiting for their turns to find their other half, confident that their Alpha Natalia would make it happen.

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#### Chapter 884: Cassie's information (1)

Later that evening...

Talia plopped on the bed and stared at the ceiling while thinking about the events from the last few hours.

She was Damon's Luna now, and she could feel the Dark Howlers pack.

The fair mixer was a big success, with almost one hundred new mates reported across various packs. Talia was looking forward to finding out the final numbers tomorrow.

Yasmin had her babies, and their family of four reached the Midnight Guardians pack safely.

Overall, it was a successful evening, so why was she feeling uneasy?

"What are you thinking?" Damon asked while sliding on the bed next to Talia.

So many things. "I am thinking that we should speed up dealing with the Guardians. Yasmin doesn't deserve a future where she needs to hide with her children." And it was not just hiding; it was about a lifetime of living in fear of being kidnapped, used, brainwashed, enslaved, and many other horrible things.

Talia put her hand over her belly. "Maybe Yasmin will be fine staying in the Coven or the Midnight Guardians pack, but what about me? Should I disappear and pretend that the world doesn't exist? What will Guardians do when they find out about our baby? What if they..."

"Shh..." Damon shushed Talia while pulling her into his embrace. He loved how she nuzzled his chest with her nose before turning her head to rest her head there. He knew that she was listening to his heartbeat.

"We will figure it out, kitten. Don't allow the anxiety of an uncertain future to spoil what we have now. Feel the pack. They are happy to have you as their Luna, and the fair was fantastic. Remember all the smiling faces you've seen tonight. Remember the feeling of Valeria in your hands. That was new life, thanks to you."

"Thanks to me?"

"Mhm," Damon confirmed with a hum. "If you didn't open the portal to the realm of witches, Axel and Yasmin wouldn't meet, and they wouldn't have the twins. Thanks to the event you organized, so many mates found each other tonight. You are like a blessing that spreads to everyone around you. Even Chef Page was into the arcade with Jane by his side. So many good things happened. Let that positivity seep into you and silence your worries." At least for tonight.

Talia wished that it was that easy.

"Help me, Damon," Talia pleaded. "Help me forget about all the bad things."

Damon was about to ask how, but then her lips found her mark on his neck, and a barely audible 'Ah' escaped his lips as the pressure in his groin increased.

That night, Damon and Talia made love slowly, unhurriedly.

Damon's every touch, kiss, and heated gaze told Talia how much he worshiped her as he caressed her ears with his sweet whispers.

Talia allowed herself to get lost in the love Damon was giving her, hoping he could feel that she loved him back with equal devotion.

...

Next evening...

Damon and Talia entered the study to see that Cassie was there.

Amelia, Liam, Keith, and Arya stood around Cassie who was sitting on a chair.

"Can you tell your guards that I'm not an enemy?" Cassie said to Damon.

"We will see if you are an enemy," Damon responded to Cassie and looked at Keith. "Thank you for bringing her here. Did you have any issues?"

Damon got the report through the mind-link, but he wanted Cassie to hear that this was official business and that they were being cautious.

"She is clean of trackers, and we were not followed. Her cell phone and tablet are powered off, and we brought them in a Faraday bag. The tech team is looking into those. Other than her attitude, things went smoothly," Keith responded.

Keith was leading the team in extracting Cassie from the Steelbite pack. Normally, high-ranking soldiers would be involved in that type of mission, but because they were using teleportation to move, and Amelia's identity as a witch was not widely known, Damon and Talia decided to send a few people who already knew what Amelia could do.

In order for Cassie to not find out about witches, they knocked her out at the point of pickup, and they woke her up only after reaching the packhouse of the Dark Howlers pack. She had no idea how long she had been unconscious or how she got there.

Cassie didn't know they would knock her out, and she threw a fit after waking up, hence Keith's comment.

Cassie pressed her lips into a line while looking at Damon, who leisurely sat on his extra-wide executive chair, and he spread his arms, silently inviting Talia to sit on his lap. Only after Talia sat there and his arms closed around her did Damon look at Liam and Amelia.

"Cornelia should be here with James soon. Make sure to tell them where we are. After that, you are dismissed for the day."

Liam and Amelia acknowledged Damon's instructions and left the study.

"The two of you can wait in the hallway," Damon instructed Keith and Arya.

With four people gone, Cassie got more comfortable in her chair.

Seeing that Damon didn't talk, she did. "Won't you ask me anything?"

"In a minute," Damon responded.

"Are we waiting for something?"

"Someone," Damon corrected her.

Cassie was not sure what to expect. Damon rested his chin on Talia's shoulder, and his eyes closed as Talia leaned on him. Damon and Talia looked like they were relaxing.

After a brief knock, the door opened for Liam to peek in.

"They are here," Liam said and pushed the door open for Cornelia and James to enter.

"James Redmayne?" Cassie was unable to conceal her surprise. She turned to Damon. "Are you selling me out?"

Damon cocked an eyebrow at her. "James is here because I called for his presence. As for me selling you out, it will depend on what you have to say."

Cassie was not happy about it. "I agreed to talk to you. I have information, and in return, you will give me a ticket out."

Cassie didn't like all these additional people. Cassie and Talia were not getting along well, and Cassie had no idea who Cornelia was. But James was the young Alpha of the Red Moon pack, and Damon knew that Alpha Richard and Alpha Edward were collaborating. Why did he bring James here?

Damon was losing his patience. "Listen, Cassie. I brought you here, and I can easily send you back."

Cassie's eyes widened. "You wouldn't do that."

"Don't test my patience, Cassie. I can tell Alpha Richard that you came to me with information about him, but I didn't believe you, and I decided to let him handle the situation because I didn't want to dirty my hands. Do you want a way out? I need to hear what you will give me in return."

"That's not what we agreed. You send me first..."

Damon raised his hand, making Cassie stop talking. "We didn't agree on anything beyond me listening to what you have to say. Well, I am here, listening."

Seeing Cassie's stubborn expression, Talia put her hand over Damon's, indicating that she will take over. Cassie obviously thought that she had some leverage over Damon, and Talia didn't like it.

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Chapter 885: Cassie's information (2)

'Let me get into her head,' Liseli said eagerly to Talia.

Talia wanted to find out what Cassie knew, but the image of Vincent's confusion and diminished mental capacity was something Talia wouldn't wish on anyone. Not even Cassie.

'Let's leave that in case of an emergency,' Talia responded.

'This looks like an emergency to me.'

'Lis, you are not helping.'

'I want to help, but you are not letting me.'

Talia couldn't believe how casual Liseli was about this. And it was more than casual. Liseli was thirsty for blood, willing to crush Cassie like a bug. Pregnancy hormones were messing up with Talia's mood, affecting Liseli as well.

'Let's calm down first,' Talia said. 'We should use minimal force to get her to talk. We can always resort to violence later.'

Liseli snorted, and Talia felt that the old wolf yielded. For now.

Cassie groaned when Talia's aura pressed on her, making it difficult to breathe.

Cassie looked at Damon, thinking it was him, but then she saw Talia smirking, and Cassie realized who the source was.

Cassie panicked. How could Talia exert so much pressure without even trying? Was it because of Damon's mark?

"What are you doing?" Cassie asked with a strain in her voice.

"Getting your attention," Talia responded before retracting her aura. "Now listen and listen well because I will say this only once. Here is how this will work. You will give us the information you promised. If we don't believe you, we will send you back. If your words are believable and useful, you will stay in a safe house until we confirm if what you said was the truth. If it turns out to be rubbish, we will send you back to your father. So if you want your ticket out, you better start talking, and it better not be nonsense."

Damon's hold on Talia tightened. She was bossy, and it turned him on.

Cassie could see that Damon was looking at Talia with sparkles in his eyes and her insides tightened from the jealousy that swelled within her. She knew that Damon was taken. She couldn't believe how he had changed from a cool and aloof guy into a doting mate. If the Moon Goddess paired up Cassie and Damon, wouldn't Cassie enjoy this special treatment?

Cassie remembered Talia as a weak and submissive Omega who was sneaking into the kitchen and not fighting back after getting slapped. Did Talia change so much because of Damon's support?

How much would Cassie's life change if Damon picked her over Talia?

Liseli growled in Talia's head. 'How dares she look at mate like that!?'

Talia agreed. Cassie was gazing at Damon with the longing that was pushing Talia's buttons.

'SNAP-SNAP!'

Talia snapped her fingers to make Cassie look at her.

"If you keep looking at my Damon like that, I won't care about what information you have. I will rather face ten calamities than allow any woman to get close to my mate. So you better start talking before my patience runs out."

Damon swallowed hard. He really wanted to tell Cassie to scram so that he could have his way with Talia right there, on his desk (it wouldn't be the first time). The idea of such a powerful female claiming him as his and then giving herself to him was the biggest turn-on ever.

"Do you plan to let her go free after this?" James asked from the side.

Damon frowned at James. "I assume there is a reason you asked that."

James looked at Cassie, and his smirk made Cassie's hairs stand on ends.

"We have ways to make her talk," James said. "Instead of wondering if she was sent here by someone, or if she is lying, or if she is concealing something, we might just force her to tell the truth, to tell us everything, and then we can dump her body. No one will find her." James turned to Cornelia. "I know my Cora would love a werewolf specimen for her experiments."

Cornelia looked at James dreamily. "You know me well."

Cassie was sure that her heart would come out of her chest. Will she pass out now?

She was almost confident that Damon wouldn't harm her. Not seriously, at least. And she believed that Talia wouldn't go to the extremes, but James was a different story. He was Alpha Edward's son, and everyone knew they were ruthless.

"Wait! Wait!" Cassie spoke breathily. "I came here to cooperate. I have information that will be useful to you. It can save lives!"

Talia rolled her eyes. "Should we believe you are here to save the world?"

Cassie regretted her idea of coming here. "You can't kill me!"



"I have no intention of killing you," Talia said. "But I will send you to give company to Miss Jade. If you don't want to experience hard work in the name of charity for the world to see, I suggest you start talking. Or are you thinking that delaying is working in your favor?"

Cassie gritted her teeth. What were her options?

Disagreeing would probably mean going to a dungeon, or maybe they put her to do dirty jobs like Jade. Everyone knew that Jade was forced to work in the Dark Howlers pack; no one bought the story of how a fashion supermodel would ruin her image for charity.

"As I mentioned, my father is collaborating with a few other Alphas to attack the Dark Howlers pack. Someone is organizing them, and rogues are involved as well." Cassie lifted her chin. "I'm sure you confirmed that after what happened at the Spring Leaf pack."

"Rogues were there, but we didn't see a single warrior associated with a pack," Damon said.

Cassie shook her head. "You wouldn't notice them. Warriors were observing from a distance. Rogues were used to see how close they can get and to figure out the best strategy to divide your forces so they can capture their target." Cassie frowned when she saw Damon's skeptical expression. "You don't believe me? Didn't you notice that rogues are switching from infiltration and scouting to attacking?"

'She is right,' Talia spoke to Damon through their mind link. 'Rogues are escalating. At the Blue River pack, they would retreat and avoid fighting unless cornered, yet at the Spring Leaf pack, they were attacking.'

Damon agreed. Cassie's words were not wrong, but that didn't mean he could trust her. Actually, the more Cassie made sense, the less Damon trusted her. Cassie was not meddling in politics or warfare. It sounded like someone coached her on what to say.

"Who is pulling the strings?" Damon asked.

Cassie shook her head. "I don't know. I'm not sure that even my father knows."

Damon cocked an eyebrow at Cassie. "Are you expecting me to believe that Alpha Richard will follow instructions of someone without knowing who that is or their goal?"

Alpha Richard was shrewd and prideful, but those were exactly the reasons why he wouldn't allow anyone to push him too far. It was one thing to accept paying a tribute but working with rogues meant turning his back away from everything packs stand for. Even his own pack would reject him as their Alpha if this were spread. They would label him

as a traitor or mentally unstable. Rogues have no loyalty, and their wolves are feral; no one would follow an Alpha that went rogue.

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### Chapter 886: Cassie's information (3)

"It's not just my father," Cassie said. "There are other Alphas also."

"Who else is involved?" Damon asked stiffly.

Cassie glanced nervously at James. "Alpha Edward from the Red Moon pack."

Damon already knew about Alpha Edward and Alpha Richard. Those two were allies for a long time, and they were openly against Damon since he took over as Alpha. Damon wanted to know about others.

"Who else is involved?"

Cassie shrugged. "In the last few weeks, my father also talked to Alpha William and Alpha Patrick, but I'm not sure how much they are involved."

"Is Alpha Adam part of this plan? What about Alpha Peter?" Damon started listing names, and Cassie shook her head.

"If they are involved, I'm not aware of it."

"If you don't know about others, how can you be sure that my father is involved?" James asked from the side. It's not that he didn't believe her, but he wanted proof.

James saw this as an opportunity for Damon to get more allies. If there was evidence of Alpha Richard and Alpha Edward working with rogues, Damon could use that to sway neutral packs to join him. Alphas would follow power and benefits either for personal gain or as an excuse for how it benefits their pack. However, working with rogues only brought misfortune. No one would associate with rogues unless they are ready to give up on their pack.

James was confident that Damon could use this information to unite packs and maybe even get rid of Alpha Edward for good.

"I took photos of documents my father kept in his drawer," Cassie said. "The photos are in my phone."

"We need more than photos, Miss Cassie," James said condescendingly. "How do we know that those photos were not manipulated? How do we know that Alpha Richard didn't send you here as a spy?" That was another burning question.

"I wouldn't do that." Cassie turned to Damon. "You know me. I say a lot of things, but I don't lie."

"Is this the time for you to worry about Alpha Damon's opinion of you?" James asked. He leaned toward Cassie. "My presence here should tell you that Alpha Damon values what I have to say, and unfortunately for you, I don't believe you. You will either prove that your information is solid, or I will kill you right here."

Cassie glanced nervously at Damon.

"He won't save you, Miss Cassie," James said. "This is about my safety and the safety of my mate."

Cassie paled. "Your mate?" Since when did young Alpha James have a mate? Isn't he underage? But there was a female right next to James, and they were sitting close and holding hands, and she was marked! No werewolf would act so familiar with a mated female that belonged to someone else.

"Why did you tell me that?" Cassie squeaked.

James sneered. "To show you how serious I am. If I suspect you are backstabbing us, I will kill you. I will do anything in my power to keep my mate safe."

Cassie thought that the air was getting thinner in the room. What the heck? No matter how much she proved herself, she was a liability, and James will kill her. Even if that doesn't happen, they won't let her leave, not with so many secrets.

Cassie's only hope to get out of this alive was Damon.

"I'm telling the truth. You can see photos and... there is more."

Damon gestured to Cassie to keep talking.

"If you give me a map, I can point where rogues are."

This got Damon's attention. "You can?" They were trying to locate rogues for a while. If Cassie's information was valid, it would be a breakthrough... or a trap.

Cassie nodded fervently, happy that Damon finally showed some interest in what she had to say. "I also know they are planning to make their move at young Alpha James' birthday party."

"What are they planning to do?" Damon asked.

"I'm not sure," Cassie said in a small voice, and she panicked when James moved. "I only know that they will be there, and my father got instructions not to react when the attack happens and to ensure that Alpha Natalia is not harmed."

"People behind rogue attacks are after Alpha Natalia?" Talia asked. Weren't they after Luna Talia? Sure, it was the same person, but not many knew that.

Seeing that Cassie's confidence was returning, Talia's mood fluctuated.

Liseli amplified Talia's hostility, and with the pregnancy hormones affecting her, Talia was on the verge of snapping.

"My father got..."

Cassie's voice trailed when Talia pushed herself to stand.

Talia pressed her palms on the surface of Damon's desk as her eyes narrowed on Cassie.

"No more games, Cassie," Talia's voice was low with a slight echo as she issued an Alpha command that can't be refused. "The truth. All of it. Why is your father part of this? Money? Territory? Women?"

Cassie was sweating like she was in a sauna, but the air around her was cold, and she struggled to talk, "Power."

"What kind of power?" Talia asked.

"Life. Abilities."

"Explain!"

"My father believes that the people behind it all can grant him longer life, youth, and abilities."

Talia would be confident that Cassie was lying if not for the Alpha command. But she was not sure if she heard it right. "What?"

"My father is getting into an age where he is not a young man anymore. He wants another lease on life."

"How?" It was Damon who asked.

"Organ transplant."

"What?" This was James.

Cassie turned to look at James. "They speak of creatures with powers, like humans, but not exactly. They call them witches. Alpha Edward is an expert in that area. They say that if they transplant organs from witches, there is a chance that the recipient will be rejuvenated and get mysterious abilities. Humans died during experiments, but with werewolf healing, the surgeries have a high chance of success."

Cornelia was looking at James anxiously. "What does that mean?"

Cassie rolled her eyes. "Don't you know what an organ transplant is? They take heart or a liver or a..."

"Enough!" Damon roared. His eyes lost focus for a moment, and Keith and Arya stepped into the study.

"Take her into the dungeon," Damon instructed.

"What!?" Cassie shrieked. "I cooperated!"

"You wouldn't cooperate if I didn't make you," Talia said.

"I would!" Cassie exclaimed while looking anxiously at Keith and Arya, who were approaching her now. "I was just keeping that information for last."

Damon waved his hand, indicating to Keith and Arya to go ahead. "Make sure she is isolated, and no one is allowed to talk to her. Only warriors with the highest security clearance are allowed to bring her food."

Cassie struggled and shouted, and then...

'PAK!'

Keith karate-chopped her neck, and Cassie passed out.

With Cassie gone, the study descended into a tense silence.

"You didn't ask her if she came here as a spy," James was the first one to speak.

"It wouldn't matter," Damon responded. "We will soon get reports on the data in her phone and tablet. Cassie came here because she was hoping we would help her escape from Alpha Richard, or she came to set us up on his orders. In either case, Cassie only worries about her interests." But more importantly... "Does anyone believe the organ transplant story?"

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## Chapter 887: Preparations for whatever is coming [Bonus chapter]

"Kitten?"

Damon's voice reached Talia, and she realized that she was back on Damon's lap and he was cradling her in his arms protectively.

"Do you think..." Talia inhaled forcibly. "Do you think that missing people from my pack were used for experiments?"

Damon puffed his cheeks. He didn't know how to answer this.

Over the years, some people from the Midnight Guardians pack would get desperate to find their mate, and they escaped through the portal into the human realm. None of them returned.

Talia got information from Vincent that the Guardians were aware of the portal's location, and they were watching it. If Guardians did that, there was a chance that someone else was watching the portal as well. Even if they didn't know the exact location, only by knowing the proximity, they could set up traps.

People from the Midnight Guardians pack spent a lot of time isolated, unaware of what waited for them on the other side. They could easily be tricked, captured, and used for who-knows-what.

"There is no way for us to know that," Damon said. "Let's stick to the facts."

Talia didn't like this. "What facts? The ones that Guardians know about my pack members having abilities? Or the fact that they know where the portal is? Or how about the one where Marcy called me a witch, and now Cassie spoke about witches also?"

Damon tightened his hold on Talia and started rocking in the chair like he was trying to pacify a child. Her anxiety was washing over him, and he was nervous as well.

"I don't think the Guardians would be interested in harvesting organs," James said.

"They consider themselves as above others. If they want to deal with their problem in a modern way, they will capture powerful females and perform artificial insemination or clone themselves."

"If Guardians are not behind this, who could it be?" Damon asked.

"I didn't say they are not involved in this," James said. "They wouldn't participate in organ transplants, but they might use it as bait for others. I know that my father has an inferiority complex. He can't accept the fact that he is not the strongest Alpha and that his pack is not the largest or the strongest. If there is an option for him to power up, he will take it."

Damon nodded in agreement, but he had to ask, "Did this come from what Cassie said?"

"No. After Marcy identified Talia as a witch, I found something. My grandfather was collecting data on people with abilities. The last record was about at the time when my grandfather died." James pressed his lips into a line. "If my father found those, he wouldn't overlook it."

"Are you saying that Alpha Edward continued your grandfather's work?" Talia asked.

James agreed. "That is possible. There is a safe in his bedroom. I don't know what's in there, and I can guess that he has more places to stash secret documents."

"Or people," Cornelia added in a small voice.

James squeezed her hand. "I won't let him harm you."

Cornelia smiled a little. "I know."

James was getting tenser by the day as his birthday was approaching, and now that Cassie said how Alphas and rogues were planning something for this birthday, Cornelia could feel that James was anxious under that calm façade.

Cornelia wanted to make everything better, but she was unsure what the right approach was. Just the two of them couldn't do much, but they had friends.

Cornelia looked at Damon and Talia. "We will all keep each other safe."

Talia and Damon nodded in agreement.

"Will you come to my birthday?" James asked.

"Of course," Talia said confidently, surprising both Damon and James.

Talia was not willing, but she knew this couldn't be avoided. "If we don't come, your father will either look for another opportunity, or the attack will proceed, and our allies will be trapped. It's best if we stick together. Like this, at least we know that is coming. With any luck, we will find out who is behind this."

Damon frowned at these words. "Do you plan to let them capture you?"

"No," Talia said right away. "I won't leave your side. Don't tell me to stay home and hide because we reached the point where we shouldn't care about Alpha Edward's or Guardians' motives. They are after my people and after me, and that's enough for me to stop deluding myself about how we can live peacefully. Rogues will work for whoever pays, and Alpha Edward is not above hiring them. The only difference is that so far, they



were not organized on this scale. It would be nice if we could find out what exactly is going on, but this is a conspiracy covered up with lies and half-truths, and we don't have the luxury of time to investigate it. The only thing we can do is get in there and face whatever is coming, together."

Pride swelled in Damon's chest. This was his kitten. She was done with playing games, and if this didn't include putting Talia in danger, Damon would clap and cheer loudly for her.

"If my father shows hostility, it will give you an excuse to retaliate openly. By removing him from his position, we will cut him off from whatever organization he belongs to," James said. "My father won't make a move during my birthday party."

"What makes you think so?" Talia asked.

"The event will be full of high profile people and journalists. My father won't take the risk of failure when so many eyes are watching. Once the party is over, you will need to be vigilant. He might attack you on your way home or the next morning."

"I suggest you don't eat or drink anything there," Cornelia said. "It will be easy to spike food with small amounts of relaxant, not to knock you out, but to give you a buzz like you got drunk. I will talk to Dawn to prepare food for you separately in George's villa, and you make sure to eat only that."

"This is what I was talking about. We know it's coming, so we will prepare," Talia said, and her lips lifted into a smile while looking at Cornelia. "Why are you talking like you are not going? How can my special advisor miss James' birthday party?"

Cornelia glanced at James nervously. They didn't talk about it. She was used to hiding and spending nights with James at George's villa. The idea of them being in the open, talking, dancing... she liked it very much.

Damon hugged Talia close to him, and he buried his face into her hair while inhaling deeply. Her sweet citrusy scent of freesia calmed him down, and the thought of her going into danger was driving him mad. But he knew that his kitten was strong and determined and that telling her to stay home and hide was not an option.

On the other side, Damon would prefer if rogues attacked in the Red Moon pack. Like that, he didn't need to worry about his pack members getting hurt or damage to his property.

"Should we clean up rogues before your party?" Damon asked James. "Assuming Cassie knows their location, we could eliminate them before they cause damage."

James thought for a moment before responding, "First, we need to confirm if her information is solid. Next, we should plant our own spies and find out their plans. Ideally,



we will find an opening to disable them from attacking without alerting people who are pulling the strings. Only if we allow this attack to escalate to the last stage we will get an opening to see who is behind this..."

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Chapter 888: Luna Talia's new guard (1)

Cornelia and James stayed late into the night.

The data from Cassie's phone and tablet was retrieved, so Damon, Talia, Cornelia, and James looked at the pictures of documents and maps while discussing various strategies.

Everyone could see that James was in his element. He came up with scenarios no one thought of, and he provided various solutions while clearly stating the pros and cons of each.

James didn't sound like a sixteen year-old boy. He was more like a top-tier strategist with several decades of experience behind him, and Cornelia's inputs complemented him perfectly without overshadowing his brilliance.

Damon was more and more confident that he needed to convince James to come to the Dark Howlers pack ASAP. What if someone else snatched him first? Having James as an enemy would be dangerous, but Damon knew that pushing too much could backfire.

"Maybe you should stay here for the night," Talia said when they were done with serious talk.

James glanced at Cornelia, who was dozing off on his shoulder, and he couldn't make himself wake her up. He scooped Cornelia into his arms carefully, ready to take her to the guest bedroom that Cornelia used when she was in the Dark Howlers pack.

Before James left the study, Damon said, "Thank you for this. I'm sure that with your plans, we will save many lives."

"Don't mention it," James responded with a smile. He loved that Damon acknowledged his inputs and even thanked him. Alpha Edward never did that.

"When will you join the Dark Howlers pack as my Gamma?" Damon had to try.

James didn't have an answer to this question.

Seeing that James didn't respond, Talia spoke, "Do you want to stay in the packhouse or a separate house with your mate? As a Gamma, you will get a suite on the second

floor and an office. Or if you want more privacy, we will arrange a home for you. It can be in Darkbourne or in the forest. Apartments are also an option. Talk about it with Cornelia when you get a chance."

James stifled a laugh. They were talking about it like it was a done deal.

The truth was that James would often daydream about his life with Cornelia. He would work as a Gamma, and she would do her research; they would wake up side-by-side, meet for lunch and dinner, and then spend the night together. During weekends they would travel, go shopping, or just laze in the house... without hiding. James would do it in a heartbeat, only if his father were not looming over his head as a threat to ruin the world.

"I will think about it," James responded to Damon and Talia before walking out of the study with Cornelia in his arms.

Talia was about to plop into a chair, but Damon wrapped his arms around Talia and pulled her to him.

Talia buried her face into Damon's chest and enjoyed his solid embrace. When they stood like that in silence, it seemed like there were no problems in the world.

'KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK!'

Three small knocks on the door disturbed their peace.

"Who could it be this late?" Talia asked in a low voice, and Damon responded with a shrug.

He pushed Talia to stand behind him before calling, "Come in!"

The door cracked open to reveal a figure.

Damon frowned in displeasure. "Keith? I assume there is a reason why you are here in person and not contacting us through mind-link."

"This should be discussed in person," Keith responded, and Arya peeked from behind him.

Damon waved at them to get inside. "Must be urgent if you couldn't wait until morning."

Keith glanced at Arya. "We wanted to wait with this, but considering the recent developments, we decided that this should be addressed as soon as possible."

Talia was worried. "What is it?"

"I want to appoint Arya as your guard," Keith said to Talia while glancing at Damon.

Talia's eyebrows shot up in surprise, and Damon's went down into a scrutinizing frown.

Talia was aware that Arya was tagging along with Keith, but she assumed that Arya wouldn't tie herself to Talia because of how shaky they started. Also, Arya was probably aware of the ambiguity between Keith and Talia. Actually, Talia was waiting for Keith to say how he wanted to abandon his position as Talia's guard because he would focus on his mate. This was unexpected.

Damon was still remembering the scene of Talia above Arya, and he didn't like the idea of Arya being close to Talia. As her guard, there will be instances when male guards should look away, so female guards were preferable, but why Arya?

Talia and Damon exchanged quick glances before asking in unison, "Why?"

"Is there a problem?" Arya asked. "As a former General in the Spring Leaf pack, my skills are not lacking. I am willing to take the blood oath and pledge my loyalty to Luna Talia."

"This is not about your skills or pledging loyalty," Damon said.

"Alpha," Keith called before Damon could reject Arya as Talia's guard. If Damon voiced it, it would be impossible to take it back because Alphas don't change their decisions. It would be perceived as a weakness. "You said that as Luna Talia's head guard, I have the freedom to appoint and dismiss other guards. Arya has the skills and is willing. Please, consider this request."

Damon poked his cheek with his tongue while scrutinizing Arya.

"Let me ask you one thing," Damon said. "As Luna Talia's... no. As my mate's guard, will you put her safety above everything else?"

"Yes," Arya responded without missing a beat.

"I want you to imagine a scene where you are facing rogues. They captured Keith and Talia. You can save only one. Which one will it be?"

"That's not fair," Talia said before Arya could respond.

Damon agreed. "Life is not fair, kitten. You are my first priority. If your life is in danger, I will abandon everything in order to save you. I don't need a blood oath for you to know I'm serious about it because my life would be hell without you in it. Similarly, Arya and Keith are mates, and they will prioritize each other over you. Blood oath won't prevent

them from doing so because I'm sure Keith will rather lose his life than watch Arya suffer."

"So, what are you suggesting?" Talia asked.

"Keith can remain your guard, but Arya will stay behind when he is on a mission to protect you. If they have problems with that, Keith can stay behind as well. I will rather have fewer people guarding you than rely on a person who is a liability."

"Alpha!" Arya exclaimed. "Can I speak?"

"Go ahead." And make it quick.

"I understand your thinking," Arya said. "In a way, it makes sense. However, I am willing to work with my mate to ensure Luna Talia's safety. Please, give me a chance."

Damon was not willing. "Do you think I will give you a chance to fail and endanger the life of my Luna?" And there was his pup as well.

Talia put her hand on Damon's arm and gave him a squeeze. "Let her talk." Talia was curious to hear what Arya had to say.

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Chapter 889: Luna Talia's new guard (2)

Talia waved at Arya to keep talking.

Arya glanced at Keith nervously. Ever since joining the Dark Howlers pack, this was the first time for Arya to speak to Damon and Talia, and her nerves were acting out.

For nearly two decades, Arya saw Alpha Cristian as a guiding light; comforting and nurturing. She didn't have much opinion of Luna Michelle as they didn't interact often; Luna Michelle would not interfere with warriors where Arya belonged. Compared to them, Damon seemed like a tall and solid wall, cold and impenetrable while Talia was like a small bundle of explosives that might burst into colorful fireworks or deadly blasts. Arya didn't know what to expect, but she was not willing to give up without trying.

"I would appreciate it if you evaluated me while disregarding who my mate is," Arya said. "I was a General in the Spring Leaf pack. Now I am here; the Dark Howlers pack is my home and I am trying to find my place in it. Please, give me a chance to prove myself as a valuable resource. Give me tests, challenge me, but don't dismiss me without giving me a chance."

Arya turned to look at Keith. "When you think about who my mate is, think of him as Luna Talia's head guard. Keith has a lot of pride in his position, and I know that

protecting Luna Talia is very important to him. If we are facing a dangerous situation where I can help Keith or Luna Talia, I know that my mate will never forgive me if I picked him, so I would do what he would, and protect our Luna because protecting her means protecting our pack."

Talia was moved. If Arya said that she would protect Talia because it's the right thing to do, or because Arya would put Talia above everything else, Talia wouldn't believe her. However, Arya framed it as how she would do it for Keith and Talia believed her.

"I vote that we give her a chance," Talia said.

Damon pressed his lips in disapproval. "Since when was this a thing we can vote on?"

Talia blinked at Damon. "Since you said that I can pick my guards and you authorized Keith that he can do the same. I won't dismiss your opinion as not important, but at least each of us has a third. Keith and I agree to give Arya a chance, so you are a minority. Or are you going back on your word?"

Damon had to think hard about this. Did he really tell Talia AND Keith that they can pick Talia's guards? It seems he did. Damn it!

Damon grumbled under his breath before turning to Arya.

"I want you on the training ground tomorrow morning, six o'clock sharp."

Arya needed a moment to process this. Talia diffused the situation, just like that. She didn't use sweet-talking, or force; it was just normal words and it worked! Or maybe there was some witchery that Arya missed noticing it. In any case, Arya bowed to Damon. "Thank you, Alpha."

"Thank your Luna, not me."

"Of course," Arya said breathily and bowed to Talia. "Thank you, Luna."

"Don't think I did you a favor," Talia said. "I heard that your skills are impressive, and it would be a pity to leave them unused. Be prepared tomorrow morning. You might not become my guard, but this will be your chance to impress your Alpha. He won't go easy on you."

Arya had no objections. She was used to breaking into a sweat on the training grounds.

"Keith," Talia called. "Ask Shaman to set up the blood oath for Arya. Even if Arya is not my guard, considering how much time she is with you and close to me, I would be at ease knowing that she took the oath."

Keith agreed right away. "Yes, Luna." He saw this as Talia speeding up the process for Arya to become Talia's guard.

Arya's grin matched Keith's. "Thank you, Luna! We will see you in the morning."

Damon was alerted. Why was Arya looking at Talia with sparkles in her eyes? Somehow, he had a flashback of a living room sofa and Talia on top of Arya, and he didn't like it.

Keith and Arya left the study, and Damon turned to Talia.

"Are you sure about this?" He asked.

"About making Arya my guard? No. About giving her a chance to prove herself? Yes."

Damon was unable to disagree with Talia on this.

"Let's go to sleep, kitten. It seems I have an early morning tomorrow."

"WE have an early morning," Talia corrected him.

"You are also coming?"

Talia cocked an eyebrow at him. "Do you think I will let you be alone with an attractive female so she can jump on you when you are not looking?"

Damon gaped at Talia. "Who is an attractive female?"

Talia smiled while wrapping her arms around Damon's neck.

"Good answer," she spoke against his lips, and then he closed that small distance between them.

...

~ the Red Moon pack ~

Days were passing as James' birthday was getting closer.

Cornelia would come every evening to spend the night with James and to bring news about recent developments in the Dark Howlers pack to James, Dawn, and George.

Alpha Edward could track any electronic communication and intercept messengers, so sending texts and emails was not secure, because it could get James and George into serious trouble. Luckily, Cornelia's teleportation was different and thanks to her, James,

George, and Dawn knew what was going on with their allies while they shared information on recent movements within the Red Moon pack.

With James' birthday only one day away, they confirmed that other than Damon and Talia, Tony, Kalina, Maddox, and Tatiana will also be in attendance.

Cristian and Michelle declined the invitation with the excuse that Ashton was ill. The truth is that they stayed home with a task to keep an eye on not only their territory but on Maddox's and Damon's as well.

More than once, James and George closed themselves in George's study for hours, and after that George would have a frown of worry on his handsome face that made Dawn anxious. She could sense the pressure in the air, like an invisible bubble was growing and was about to pop.

Today, she was especially nervous, but in a good way because Zina was coming!

Talia approved for Zina to come one day earlier so she can spend time with Dawn. This will be Zina's first time to visit Dawn, so Dawn was hoping to leave a good impression. Everything needed to be perfect!

Dawn prepared for Zina the best guest bedroom, Zina's favorite snacks were ready, and Dawn told Estelle and other Omegas that an important guest was coming and that outsiders shouldn't know about it.

That morning, George went to work with a chuckle because Dawn was bouncing from excitement and her joy was seeping into him through their mate bond.

"I wish I can stay longer to welcome your friend," George said.

"Me too," Dawn responded dreamily. "If you come for lunch, you can join us. We will stay in the villa."

George hummed in approval. "I will do my best to make it."

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Chapter 890: Best friends (D&Z) (1)

Luckily, Dawn didn't wait long.

The door of Cornelia's room opened, and Zina peeked out.

"AHHH!" Dawn screamed while rushing to hug her friend. "Why are you this late?"

Zina laughed and hugged her bestie, who was clinging to her like a koala. Zina was happy to see that Dawn was energetic as usual.

Cornelia confirmed that Zina was delivered as promised, and then the witch returned to the Dark Howlers pack. At this time, James was on the training grounds, and Cornelia had research to do.

Dawn helped Zina settle into a guest bedroom, and then she showed her around to see the rooms and common areas and to meet Omegas, who were working in the villa. They were all friendly and loyal to George, but Dawn wanted to avoid Omegas peeking at them secretly because they were curious about Zina. Like this, they all knew that the pretty redhead was Dawn's friend.

No one asked how Zina got there because they all saw Cornelia making appearances sporadically while her room was off-limits.

Keeping secrets in this villa allowed Omegas to live and work without fear of being beaten, and they knew that betraying George (or Dawn) would get them fired, which meant returning to the Red Moon pack and the bad treatment they were getting there.

Lastly, Zina and Dawn went to the garden to have fresh lemonade, coffee, and pastries Dawn made. They called Estelle to join them, but the old lady refused; she didn't want to intrude.

"Now that we concluded the tour of this place, and I served you with refreshments, I want you to tell me what's going on at home," Dawn spoke to Zina excitedly.

"Isn't this your home?" Zina asked while taking a bite of a butter croissant that Zina could describe as heavenly. She really missed Dawn's pastries.

Dawn pouted. "You know what I mean. The Dark Howlers pack will always be my home."

George treated Dawn well, and she had everything she wanted in their villa, but stepping outside the property was a challenge, and Dawn couldn't think of the Red Moon pack as her home. Also, she didn't break the pack bond with the Dark Howlers pack, and part of her yearned to return there. In a way, Dawn was torn between belonging with her mate and belonging to her pack, but she knew there would be challenges when she agreed to come with George, so she didn't make a fuss about it.

Zina bobbed her head at Dawn. "What do you want to know?"

"Everything!" Dawn exclaimed, but then she added, "Talk to me about the good stuff."



"Are you stressed?"

"Aren't you?" Dawn questioned back. "To be honest, I am surprised you still came considering the latest developments."

Zina didn't know the details, but she knew that James' birthday party will be tumultuous.

"I wanted to come here for a long time," Zina said. "Besides, if shit hits the fan, someone needs to be here and watch your reckless ass."

Dawn was touched. That snarky comment sounded like Zina, but Dawn knew that Zina meant it.

"I am glad you are here. Now you have Trisha, and you don't need me anymore." Dawn pouted.

Zina waved her hand, indicating to Dawn to stop. "Don't be sappy. Trisha is a good person, and we are getting along well, but she won't replace you. You will always be my best friend, Dawn," Zina said honestly.

Seeing that Dawn relaxed, Zina continued with a smile, "Let me tell you some good things. There are many new faces in the pack. The fair mixer was a huge success, and it added to the frenzy we like to call Malia." Zina sighed while thinking about how everyone had a mate other than her. But she didn't want to talk about it now. "Last weekend, we had a pack-joining ceremony for twenty-seven new pack members."

Dawn's eyes widened. "I'm sorry I missed that."

"I wish you were there. One girl joined. She is barely ten." Zina was talking about Jane.

"Ten? How can a ten year-old find a mate? Or did one of her parents find a second chance mate?"

Zina waved her finger, indicating how that was not the case. "She was in the shelter of the Blue River pack. An orphaned girl who was so traumatized that she didn't speak. She was at the fair and helping Chef Page around his booth. After that, he visited her in the shelter, and now he adopted her officially."

"Oh," Dawn said under her breath. She knew that Chef Page was Lulu's father and that Lulu was his whole world. Dawn had no idea how the man was holding on after Lulu's death, but everyone needed someone, and Dawn was glad that he found that girl. In a way, this development made Zina feel better also.

Zina continued with her updates. "Maya and Caden returned from their vacation. Maya had her heat there, and she doesn't want to confirm if she is pregnant." Zina glanced at Dawn's stomach. "What about you?"

Dawn shrugged. "As you know, I had my heat, but there are no symptoms, so..."

"Not everyone gets prego on their first heat."

"I know," Dawn said while rubbing her flat stomach. "Actually, I'm happy it didn't happen. This is a bad time for pregnancy and pups."

Zina didn't believe her. It was obvious that Dawn was sad, but Zina didn't want to push for it.

Zina almost spilled the news about how Talia was pregnant, but she swallowed those words back. She promised to keep it a secret. It was not Zina's secret to tell.

At the thought of Talia, Zina remembered... "You should see Alpha Damon sulking."

Dawn was curious. "About?"

"About new Talia's guard. You heard that Keith found his mate, right?"

Dawn confirmed, and Zina continued.

"Keith's mate is Arya. A very pretty she-wolf. Arya was a general in the Spring Leaf pack. She is now Talia's guard, and Alpha Damon doesn't approve."

"Does he not trust her?" Dawn guessed.

"It's not what you think," Zina said and moved closer to continue in a whisper, "I heard that there was an incident of Alpha Damon walking into a room where Talia and Arya were in a compromising situation."

Dawn didn't get it. "Compromising situation?"

Zina wiggled her eyebrows, and Dawn got it.

"Oh, oh. But, isn't the female Keith's mate?"

Zina confirmed. "She is."

Dawn was not sure what to think about it. Did Arya sway both ways? What about Talia?

"What does Keith say about that?" Dawn asked.

"You know Keith. He was always creepy when it came to Talia, and now it seems his mate joined him in worshiping our Luna. You will see when they arrive tomorrow. I believe that Alpha Damon was hoping Keith would find his mate and stop looking at Talia with hearts in his eyes, but instead, now both Keith and Arya are following after Talia and looking at her passionately."

Dawn burst into laughter at the mental image of Talia standing, two figures trying to get close to her, and Damon swatting them away.

Zina happily munched on vanilla and chocolate cookies that went great with cherry glaze. She was glad to experience this leisurely atmosphere with Dawn and talk about anything, and everything like Dawn never left.

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