

## The Alpha's Bride

### #Chapter 911: Ready to go

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#### Chapter 911: Ready to go

Talia observed changes in Cassie's expression. Shock, realization, defeat. Somehow, it reminded Talia of the emotions she went through when Cassie accused her of stealing food in the kitchen of the Dark Howlers pack.

Cassie was far from the image of the pompous female who strutted into the packhouse while shouting, 'Damon, baby!' at the top of her lungs right after scolding Omegas for not handling her precious luggage with proper care.

Cassie stared at the WW Magazine. Sure, they published how she ran away from home, and in a way, she did. But Cassie was confident that her father would contain that information. Were Damon and Talia behind that article? It didn't matter.

"I... I..." Cassie started in a small voice. "I want a pack to settle in." She thought about it. Traveling the world sounded great, but Cassie was never on her own. Living outside of the protection a pack would provide was scary, and Cassie didn't think she could do it. Cassie didn't know much about humans other than their bodies were fragile.

As a bonus, as long as she was attached to a pack, she would be close to their kind, and there would be a chance to see Damon again. Damon was currently infatuated with Talia, but in a few years... maybe he would change his mind.

Talia had no idea what was on Cassie's mind, but it didn't make sense. "You want to stay in a pack? You have no Alpha aura, you are not a warrior, and you have no skills other than matching clothes and bossing others around, and those don't count for much. The only way for you to join a pack would be as an Omega. Will you be OK with it?"

No matter how progressive a pack is, an Omega does low-level jobs. Cassie was used to being served and not to be the one who served. Just her attitude alone would earn her punishments.

"Your whole life, you were in the limelight. You made sure to attend every party and appear in many articles." Talia pointed at the magazine. "Your face is famous. How long can you stay hidden? Your father doesn't care about you, but he cares about his reputation. He won't let you live in another pack. The best case will be if your father

demands your return, and the worst will be if he forces it. Who will risk provoking the Steelbite pack because of you?"

Cassie pressed her lips into a line. Talia was right. Now that Alpha Richard was expecting a child, Cassie was disposable, but the old guy cared about his image. He would not only drag her back but also punish her publicly for everyone to see.

In general, packs wouldn't dare to go against the Steelbite pack or stir unnecessary trouble, but there were few that stood above others.

"What about this pack?"

"Keep dreaming, Cassie."

"You are keeping Jade here!"

"Not anymore," Talia said. "We let her go yesterday." And Jade and Cassie were not the same.

Damon and Talia waited for Alpha Adam to sign the tribute from the Silverfur pack before releasing Jade. Officially, the tribute was a thank you for allowing Jade to learn about the Dark Howlers pack, but everyone knew it was extortion. Alpha Adam was not willing, but he couldn't let the only daughter of his Beta be publicly humiliated further; it was reflecting negatively on the Silverfur pack.

The tribute was not much in terms of finances, but its message was immense. The Dark Howlers pack was showing supremacy over the Silverfur pack, and no one dared to interfere.

As part of the deal to release Jade, Talia requested that Jade attends James' birthday party. As Beta's daughter, Jade won't have an issue securing an invitation, and Talia wanted Jade to see with her own eyes when Damon and Talia appear, hand in hand, to reveal who Talia truly is.

Talia wanted everyone to be there, so she didn't need to repeat herself. If, after that, shameless women still come onto Damon, Talia will kill them without mercy. Liseli agreed.

With the revelation that Luna Talia and Alpha Natalia are the same person, the wolf world will explode, and Damon and Talia were ready. Once it becomes official that the two most powerful Alphas are fated mates, only idiots would dare to go against them.

Cassie's chin trembled. "Are you abandoning me after everything I've done?"

Talia's eyes flashed in outrage. "Why are you acting like I owe you a favor? Do I need to remind you how you treated me only a few months back? The first time we met, you

accused me of stealing food, and the second time you claimed I stole a phone. On both occasions, you were eager to teach me manners with a delusion that you are Damon's Luna! One would think that you learned I was not an Omega after Damon kicked you out, but the next time you saw me, you acted like I'm the impostor that needs to be slapped!"

Talia took a deep breath to calm her raging emotions. "We are done here. A warrior is stationed at the door, waiting to hear where you want to go. Knock when you are ready but don't take too long. The Dark Howlers pack won't accept you, nor will the Midnight Guardians pack. If you have another pack on your mind, we will be happy to take you there, but don't expect us to call in favors for your sake. If you need to make a phone call, we can arrange for it, but you will do it with someone listening..."

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Talia walked into the hallway, and the moment the door closed behind her, she found herself in a solid embrace that was infused with the scent of the forest and the dark chocolate.

"Are you OK?" Damon asked.

"Yes."

He could sense her unstable emotions. "You didn't need to do this. I could have..."

"What?" Talia snapped. "You wanted some time alone with Cassie?"

Damon exhaled helplessly. "No. If you let me finish, you would hear how I could have sent Caden and Maya to deal with her."

Talia felt guilty for snapping. She disliked Cassie because of how Cassie treated people. Cassie was also a walking reminder of Damon's promiscuous past, and Talia's hormones only made everything worse. Her stomach was not showing, but her temper was flaring uncontrollably. She didn't want to vent on Damon. He was her biggest support. He was her everything.

"Sorry, I just..."

"It's OK," Damon said while tightening his hold on Talia.

He knew that her pregnancy hormones affected her and Liseli. Talia was edgy and would go from raging to laughter in a matter of seconds as the stress from uncertain dangers was getting to her.

Damon tried telling Talia to relax and let him handle things, but that only made her angry, so he let her have it. Damon would let Talia have whatever she wanted, and

even if she blew the world into pieces, he would be right there to help her clean up... unless she said that cleanup was not needed.

Damon decided to change the topic. "Are we ready for our trip?"

Talia nodded. "Dawn is expecting us. She said they have news."

Damon didn't like surprises, especially not this close to the event that Alpha Edward was hosting. "Do you know what news?"

"She said it's a secret, but we will love it."

Damon looked at Talia tenderly. "There was only one thing worth loving from the Red Moon pack, and I got her."

Talia's insides melted into an emotional mush because she knew he was talking about her. Can he be any sweeter?

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Chapter 912: Preparations for James' birthday party (1)

~ the Red Moon pack ~

Cornelia came with Damon and Talia to George's villa via teleportation spell.

Keith, Arya, Mindy, and Gideon were on their way via an armored Mercedes van with tinted glass and a luxurious interior. Keith was driving, and no one would dare to stop them and look inside, knowing that it was for the delegation from the Dark Howlers pack.

Keith and Arya were going as Talia's guards, Mindy was Luna Talia's aide, and Gideon had no intention of leaving Mindy to go there without him. Talia requested her other guards (and their mates) to stay in the pack and be vigilant.

James told Damon and Talia that they got a spot reserved for their van in the underground parking. Once the van from the Dark Howlers pack reaches its destination, Cornelia will teleport Talia and Damon close to it. Like that, Talia and Damon got extra time to meet Dawn and George and discuss last-minute strategies.

James wanted to be present as well, but he had a final fitting for his suit, and his mother was fussing about him, so he couldn't leave the packhouse without making it a big deal and attracting attention.

Dawn and Zina welcomed Talia, Damon, and Cornelia, and the females moved to the study. They didn't want to risk anyone seeing the newcomers, and Damon decided to

stay in the bedroom and do some work from his laptop so that Talia could have some girl time until George returned from his duties.

Zina's neck was covered with a scarf because she wanted to make it a surprise after Dawn shared updates.

Talia was concerned to hear that Dawn and Zina had ended up being invited to the party. And it was not just any invitation; it was from Alpha Edward directly. Dawn skipped the part about Owen because she left it for Zina to tell, but she mentioned going to the market and confronting Omegas, which reached Alpha Edward's ears.

Talia didn't like that Zina caused a ruckus. Her explosive friend would always speak her mind, but Talia didn't see the point in scolding Zina over something that had happened already.

"I thought you said you have good news," Talia reminded Dawn.

"I do," Dawn said.

"How is that good? What if Alpha Edward makes a move on you? Will George sit and watch? What if Alpha Edward figures out you are an Alpha?"

Zina pressed her lips into a line at this. Talia knew that George and Dawn were Alphas, yet Zina didn't. The fact that Dawn kept secrets from Zina while sharing the same with Talia, stung Zina unexpectedly.

Talia asked her last questions. "Do you have anything to wear for the event? Or should we figure it out?"

This reminded Dawn of one small thing. "Nora will be here shortly to help us get ready."

Talia couldn't believe this. "Nora? As the Nora who spent time in the dungeon of the Dark Howlers pack?"

"That one," Dawn confirmed.

"She will recognize you."

"She will," Dawn agreed.

Talia spread her arms helplessly. "I am still waiting to hear the good news."

Dawn looked at Zina, who pulled the scarf down in slow motion.

Talia's eyes widened when she realized that thing on Zina's neck was not a hickey.

"You are marked. By whom? Don't tell me it's someone from the Red Moon pack."

Zina quickly raised her hands, indicating to Talia to calm down. "I know what you are worried about. Owen is a good guy."

Talia didn't believe it. She lived in the Red Moon pack long enough to know that there were no good guys there. Bad guys called shots, and others submitted. Even if her mate was the best in the world, if he submits to the corrupted ones, Zina will become collateral damage.

Talia turned to Cornelia, who had been sitting quietly from the beginning. "Did you know about this?"

"I knew that Zina found her mate," Cornelia admitted.

"Talia," Zina called pleadingly. "Can you give him a chance and not jump to conclusions?"

"Fine. Tell me about him."

"Owen is a Lieutenant. He has no family here, and he hopes to talk to you and Alpha Damon."

"Why?" Talia asked.

"I suggested to him that we live in the Dark Howlers pack," Zina responded.

"And he agreed to it?"

Zina was not in a position to confirm, but... "He agreed to talk to Alpha Damon. I hope you will welcome us if he decides to leave the Red Moon pack."

How could Talia say no to that? But there was the possibility of Owen wanting to switch sides and be a spy for Alpha Edward. As a Lieutenant, Owen would be stupid not to know about the friction between packs. Would he accept to come to a hostile pack just because Zina asked him to? No matter how accepting people in the Dark Howlers pack were, once they discover that Owen was from the Red Moon pack, they won't be welcoming.

Talia needed a way to assure herself and everyone else that Owen didn't mean harm to the Dark Howlers pack.

"Will he take the blood oath?"

"Is that a requirement to join our pack?" Zina responded with a question.

"For someone from the Red Moon pack, yes."

Zina was about to protest, but Dawn put her hand on Zina's shoulder with, "How about you have this discussion after Owen comes here?"

Zina agreed to this. Surely, when Talia sees Owen and how lovey-dovey they are, Talia will not doubt Owen's sincerity.

With the important updates out of the way, Zina turned to Cornelia. "Can you take me home? I need a dress for tonight, and I would rather take something mine than let Nora pick for me. Knowing Nora, she will probably give me a dress with faulty stitches, so I end up naked halfway through the party."

Cornelia narrowed her eyes at Zina. "I am not a transportation service."

"I will make it worthwhile."

"How?"

Zina was ready for this. "I can let you go through my closet. Pick a dress of your choice."

Cornelia thought about it. They were about the same height. Zina was bigger than Cornelia in the chest area and smaller in the hips, but with some alternations, it might work.

"Two dresses," Cornelia demanded.

Zina rolled her eyes. "Fine."

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It was mid-afternoon when George and Owen arrived. They didn't come for lunch because they wanted to finish the work in order to be free for the rest of the day.

Talia and Damon greeted George and Zina was right there to introduce Owen.

They didn't have much time to socialize because the group from the Dark Howlers pack was less than an hour away, and Talia also confirmed that Sandy and Tyler from the Midnight Guardians were coming.

People from the Midnight Guardians pack usually don't attend these events, so Alpha Edward made sure that information leaked about Alpha Natalia coming to his party. Talia wondered how the old guy will react when he realizes why she was making an appearance.

Since Owen was not familiar with many details, he was waiting in the living room with Zina. He was nervous.

"It will be alright," Zina assured him. "They are good people."

How Owen saw this, the only good thing about the situation was that Zina was by his side.

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## Chapter 913: Preparations for James' birthday party (2)

In the study...

George, Dawn, Talia, and Damon discussed the latest developments. They couldn't communicate openly during the event, so it was important to figure out as much as possible in advance.

Cassie brought information about Alphas and rogues plotting an attack during James' birthday party with an intention to snatch Talia. This was not a surprise for anyone, and it matched what they knew before. The surprising part was that Cassie's information was legitimate.

Damon, Talia, Maddox, Cristian, and Tony collaborated in the last two weeks. They decimated rogues, cut underground supply chains that moved between several packs, and captured spies that resided in their territories. Did that make a difference? To what extent? No one had answers to these questions.

James said he would snoop around areas where his father might keep sensitive data, but Damon advised against it. If James got caught, a lot of things would be exposed. James was their hidden trump card in this mess that could erupt into a full-blown war if they were not careful.

"The most efficient thing will be to eliminate Alpha Edward," George said, allowing some of his Alpha aura to leak in a show of determination.

Damon agreed, but... "Didn't you say that he set up fail-safes? In case something happened to Alpha Edward, sleeper cells will act."

"I worked with James to take care of more than a dozen protocols Alpha Edward arranged."

"We have no proof that those are all of them," Damon said.

"We will never know if we got them all," George protested. "How long should I wait?"

"I don't know," Damon said honestly. "It's easy to prioritize your personal agenda when you don't have a pack relying on you."

George and Dawn didn't like this comment.

"It's not fair to use lack of pack to diminish the importance of what George wants to do," Dawn said.

"I'm not diminishing anything," Damon responded. "I only stated facts." He turned to George. "Think about Dawn and Omegas you've got here. If there is a chance, even the smallest chance, that Alpha Edward planted an explosive in your villa that will go off when he takes his last breath, would you go for a kill? Will it be worth getting your way if innocents need to pay the price?"

George gritted his teeth. At this rate, he will never get his revenge. Other than his revenge, there was Dawn. She was stuck in the villa, away from her friends, and deprived of simple things like going out for a walk without fearing for her safety.

"Let's not talk like we are not making progress," Talia said. "Our recent actions reduced the power that Alpha Edward and his allies have. Every day he is losing informers and resources. It's in our favor to drag this as long as possible and watch Alpha Edward turn impatient and make mistakes. We don't want to start an open conflict, but we are watching, and we won't stay still as he makes his moves. With any luck, he will lead us to the person who is pulling the strings from the dark."

Damon looked at Talia with sparkles in his eyes. She was kind and reasonable and his.

After their talk about handling Alpha Edward, it was time for Zina and Owen to appear in front of Talia and Damon.

Dawn wanted to stick around and be there to support her friend, but George advised against it.

"Zina and Owen need to do this on their own," George said. "I know you mean well, but with you around, Talia will feel pressured to put your friendship first." And Damon will do anything to make Talia happy. "No matter how much you care for Zina, it will be on Talia and Damon to hear them out and decide accordingly. Or do you think Talia and Damon will harm Zina and her mate?"

Hearing this, Dawn gave up.

Owen was nervous, and that made Zina nervous as well.

Damon didn't care to make them comfortable. He checked the time and waved impatiently. "We don't have all day. If you want to say something, out with it."

Zina gave Owen's hand a squeeze, silently telling him that she was there with him.

Owen straightened his back and lowered his head. "Alpha Damon, Luna Talia. I want to discuss the possibility of me joining her pack... your pack."

"You want to join the Dark Howlers pack?" Damon asked.

"I want to find out if that's an option and what conditions need to be met for that to happen."

"Why?" Damon asked.

Owen paused. "The Red Moon pack is not the most hospitable one, and we are considering options."

"Is that all?"

'Damon,' Talia called through their mind-link.

'Let me handle this, kitten,' Damon said. 'I know what you are worried about. Zina and Owen are in front of us, expecting we will provide them with solutions. That's not how life works. If he is a man who will take care of Zina, he needs to be in charge. There is strength in knowing how to deal with challenges, and there is wisdom in knowing when to ask for help.'

Talia didn't disagree with this, but... 'Aren't Alphas supposed to provide guidance to their people?'

'Owen is not part of my pack. If he wants my help, he needs to work for it and prove himself. Being mated to Zina is not enough.'

Talia remembered that Damon was a determined Alpha whose personality was molded by surviving in a hostile environment. Damon indulged her, and he let her have it, but that was only for her.

Zina realized that this was not going as easy as she thought it will. "Alpha, is there a problem with Owen joining our pack? We accept people from all packs and backgrounds."

Damon cocked an eyebrow at Zina. "When was the last time we accepted a warrior from a hostile pack?"

"Owen is not hostile."

"I was talking about his pack," Damon pointed out. "Let's say he has no ulterior motive other than to be with you. I can assume he doesn't have an exit strategy because if he

did, we wouldn't be having this conversation. Did you think I will smuggle your mate out of here in a trunk without anyone noticing?"

Zina blinked at Damon. That was oddly specific. And why was Talia smiling at Damon like he said something important?

"What will happen when people from his circle notice he is missing? How long will it take until someone figures out where he went? Will they think I kidnapped him, coerced him, or bribed him? No matter how you spin it, Alpha Edward will use it against me." Damon leaned forward to rest his elbows on his knees. "Alpha Edward will use it against the Dark Howlers pack. He is your mate, but to me, he is a warrior from another pack. Ranked warriors don't leave their pack without reason. What is his reason? To be with you? If that's his drive, he doesn't need to leave the Red Moon pack. So, tell me, Zina, how do I welcome a warrior who is defecting to my pack?"

Zina's stomach dropped. "Are you saying that Owen can't join?"

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Chapter 914: Preparations for James' birthday party (3)

Talia could feel Damon's impatience rising. He was sweet and caring with Talia, but that was only for her.

'Can I?' Talia asked Damon through their mind link.

'As long as you don't give him a free ticket into the Dark Howlers pack,' Damon responded.

'I know,' Talia assured him.

"Damon didn't say that your mate can't join the Dark Howlers pack," Talia said.

Zina looked at Talia apprehensively. That's how it sounded to her. "What did the Alpha say?"

"Owen needs to find a way to cut his ties to this pack amicably."

"How?" Zina asked.

"Have faith in your mate," Talia said. "He is a Lieutenant for a reason. As someone who lives in this pack, I'm confident that Owen can do his research and pick the least painful option."

Owen looked at Talia with eyes open wide. She had no idea about him, yet she spoke like he could solve their predicament. Somehow, it made him feel important.

"You won't help us?" Zina persisted.

Talia raised her hand and spoke sternly, "Stop right there, Zina."

Zina was one of Talia's best friends, and if this were girl-only chatter, Talia would let her talk and steam out her grievances. However, Damon was different. Damon would never allow anyone to show disrespect toward Talia, not even her friends. Owen (aka an outsider) being present only made things more serious.

Talia didn't want Zina to end up in trouble because she was emotional.

"You just got marked, and your bond is fresh, which means you are sensitive and protective of each other. But this is not something that can be decided on an impulse. Give it a few days. With the event going on, Owen shouldn't have a lot of duties. Spend that time together, get to know each other, and discuss options."

Seeing Zina's defeated expression, Talia added through the pack link, only for Zina to hear, 'Zi, you and your mate need to come up with solutions. It is one thing when you are single and you follow your Alpha's orders. However, since Owen marked you, he is the one who needs to take care of you. Give him a chance to show you what he is capable of and make sure both of you agree on how to proceed forward.'

Talia spoke for everyone to hear, "The bond comes with new emotions, and it's normal to be edgy. Is there a way for you to avoid going to tonight's event?"

Owen shook his head helplessly. Part of him hoped that Alpha Damon will accept him into the Dark Howlers pack. In that case, Owen and Zina would leave immediately. But Owen knew that Damon and Talia had valid points. If they avoided the event, it would cause issues for George and later for the Dark Howlers pack.

Owen was many things, but he was not a coward. How could he be a coward now that he had a mate?

Owen bowed. "Thank you, Alpha Damon and Luna Talia. We will accept your advice."

When Zina and Owen left the office, Talia slumped on Damon.

"Tired?" Damon asked.

"Mentally. Tonight will be a mess."

"What makes you think so?"

Talia looked up at Damon. "Zina and Dawn will be there, and Owen and George can't be with them. You saw Zi; she is not herself. Cornelia and James are another couple that can't reveal they are mates."

Damon chuckled. "Aren't you glad that we will reveal our relationship?"

She was, but... "My hormones are all over the place. If George or James don't cause a scene, I will."

"I am more concerned about their mates," Damon said.

"What?"

"These events are for socializing and establishing connections. You will be with me, but George and James won't be lucky enough to enjoy the company of their mates. I got information that Alpha William's daughter will be pursuing George, and can you imagine what Cornelia will do when she sees females throwing themselves at the birthday boy?"

Talia's face fell. Damon was right. She didn't care much about George and a random woman, but she felt responsible for Cornelia. "Is it too late to send Cornelia away?"

"If that's us, would you want to stay away?"

"No," Talia responded without missing a beat.

Damon hummed in confirmation. "At this point, we will go with the flow and hope for the best. With any luck, people will be so focused on the two of us that no one will notice when Cornelia turns half of the guests into frogs."

Talia burst into giggles. It was a funny mental image.

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In the packhouse...

"Why do I need to deal with dressing up Omegas?" Nora asked her father.

She was about to take a bath and start her pre-party routine, and Beta Raymond came to Nora's room to tell her that she needed to go out. She was NOT happy about this. "I need to get ready for the party and not cater to a pair of Omegas no one ever heard of!"

Beta Raymond shook his head and moved to stand in front of Nora. He put his hands on her shoulders and gave her a small squeeze.

"Nora, dear, this is not about dressing up Omegas. It's about getting access to Commander George's villa."

Nora's face turned ugly. She didn't want to go anywhere near George.

For years, Nora didn't think much about the youngest Commander, but after their trip to the Dark Howlers pack, she realized that he was volatile, unpleasant, and in cahoots with Alpha Damon. Unfortunately, due to the blood oath they forced on her, Nora couldn't talk about it. Even just thinking about it made it difficult to breathe.

Nora knew that her father was curious about Commander George. It was not a secret that Commander George's villa was a no-go zone. George had his dedicated group of Omegas, and others couldn't enter.

The truth was that no one cared about Omegas in the Red Moon pack. They were disposable. George could abuse them or use their limbs for sacrifices to ancient Gods, and no one would bat an eye. However, that didn't mean people were not curious.

Beta Raymond wanted to know what was going on there and the only thing preventing him from storming the place was that he didn't want to offend George.

Beta Raymond didn't like George. How did that youngster rise through the ranks so quickly? And another problem was that Alpha Edward praised George like he was the star of the pack. What did George do to make Alpha Edward accept him?

Something was fishy there, and Beta Raymond needed information.

That was a job for spies, and Nora was not one of those. Why did her father volunteer her for going to that place?

"Why should I go...?" Nora grimaced as Beta Raymond's squeeze on her shoulders became painful.

"I have my suspicions about him. You will go there and be extra friendly to those two Omegas. Make them like you. Ask questions without being obvious. Keep your eyes and your ears open. I want to know everything that's happening there. Be my eyes and ears, Nora. Can you do that much for your father?"

Nora nodded weakly, and Beta Raymond loosened his grip on her shoulders.

"Good girl, Nora. If you agreed immediately, we wouldn't need to go through this."

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## Chapter 915: Preparations for James' birthday party (4)

Accepting her fate of going to George's villa, Nora asked her father, "Am I going to get dresses to take there, or am I supposed to give them mine?"

"Ana will bring some. You can also get a few of your old ones. The more you have for them to try, the longer you can stay there."

Nora was not happy about this. Did she need to share her designer dresses with Omegas? But maybe they pick the ones that Ana brought and leave Nora's alone.

At the thought of Ana, Nora had to ask, "Does an Omega have any formal dresses to give?"

Beta Raymond turned to look at Nora. "She doesn't, but Marcy left some of her wardrobe behind."

Nora doubted that any of those were still left. When Nora returned from the Dark Howlers pack, she went to Marcy's room to find only a few items still there. She was unsure if it was Ana or someone else, but they had already taken everything worth taking.

"Is there something I should pay attention to while in Commander George's villa?" Nora asked.

"Everything."

"No one can see everything," Nora retorted. "What if I miss something important? There is a limit to how much one person can see." Not to mention that she can't report on anything because of the stupid blood oath!

"That's why you are not going alone."

Nora had a bad feeling about this. "Who else is going?"

Right on cue, there was a knock on the door, and Ana appeared with four dresses on hangers. Nora's face fell when she realized that her father pointing at Ana indicated that Ana would join her.

Nora didn't like it. Ana was an opportunist who was sticking close to Marcy, and now she was entertaining Alpha Edward's libido.

It's not that Nora was enamored with Alpha Edward, but with Ana in the picture, Alpha Edward paid less attention to Nora, which meant she had fewer perks.

"Isn't there anyone else who could accompany me on this trip?" Nora protested. She didn't want to go in the first place, and going with Ana only made everything less pleasant.

Beta Raymond looked at Nora suspiciously. "Ana volunteered, and considering that everyone is busy with preparations for the event, we don't have many choices. Is there something wrong with her going?"

Everything! "Not really. It's just as you said. With the party preparations ongoing, I assumed that Ana would be busy like other Omegas."

"Preparations are done," Ana responded sourly. Did Nora need to point out how she is an Omega? "Things in the kitchen are moving along as planned, and so is setting up everything. Considering how much I've been working for the last ten days, I will count this as a little break."

Nora stifled a laugh. "You need a break? Didn't you have one yesterday afternoon?"

Ana's face darkened, and Beta Raymond raised his hand to get their attention.

"This is not open for discussion. Both of you will go. Keep your eyes and ears open, and don't disappoint me." He waved at Nora to get going. "Pick a few dresses and head out. The sooner you leave, the more time you will have to investigate the situation there. Don't disappoint me."

Nora pursed her lips and watched as her father walked out of her room.

When the door closed, Nora crossed her arms over her chest and turned to Ana. "You volunteered? Don't tell me that you developed a soft spot for fellow Omegas?" Nora glanced at the dresses Ana was holding. "Did your heart break at the thought of needing to separate from those?"

Ana looked at Nora smugly. "Keep barking. You can't harm me. If you try anything funny, I will tell Alpha Edward."

Nora rolled her eyes. "Do you think he will side with an Omega compared to Beta's daughter?"

"We won't know unless we try."

"Should I mind-link him? I did that many times. Did you?"

Ana glared at Nora, and Nora smiled victoriously with, "I thought so. Tell me why you are going or I will find a way to exclude you."

"Those two are responsible for me being detained. Do you think I will miss this opportunity to get even?"

"Aren't you afraid that Commander George will punish you again?"

Ana shrugged. "He is working now, handling the security. I am going there on Alpha's orders. Will he dare to give me a hard time? My intention is not to trash the place, but accidents happen."

Nora's expression was blank, but her eyes sparkled with mischief. Ana had no idea who George was. Didn't she realize how much Alpha Edward favored George? Even young Alpha James came second, after George. Ana wanted revenge against Omegas who were working in George's villa? Wouldn't it be wonderful if Ana causes a ruckus and George snaps her neck?

On the other hand, if Ana was right and George was not at home, Nora could also snoop around. She couldn't disclose things to Alpha Edward or her father, but she could still find out useful things. Besides, if anything goes wrong, it will be Ana's fault.

"Give me a minute to pick a few outfits, and then we can go," Nora said and walked to her closet with a spring in her step.

Ana was confused by this sudden change in Nora's behavior. Was it because she remembered that Alpha Edward was upset when he heard that Ana was detained? No matter how much Nora hated Ana, Nora couldn't go against their Alpha, and Ana was getting his favors now.

...

Estelle opened the door to see Nora and Ana. One more Omega was there, a male in his late teens. He wore shabby clothes which spoke about his status as an Omega and was holding hangers with dresses that were in plastic garment bags.

"Beta Raymond sent me here to help someone get ready for the party," Nora said. "I believe you are expecting me."

Estelle confirmed. "They are expecting you in the living room. This way..."

Nora and Ana looked in all directions as they entered the main hallway. It was clean, without glitz and glam. It was nothing special.

Estelle took the dresses from the teen, and she called Adele to give instructions, "Take the boy to the kitchen and give him something to eat while he waits."

The boy's eyes lit up, and he quickly followed after Adele without waiting to hear from Nora that he was dismissed. Luckily, Nora was too distracted by looking around to pay attention to the teen.

Ana was an Omega also, but Estelle didn't want to be nice to her. Ana was wearing good clothes, and she held herself like Nora's peer and not as an Omega.

Nora paused at the door of the living room when she saw Dawn, Zina, and another female... Talia. Why was Talia there? Nora had a bad feeling about this.

Talia heard that Nora was coming, and she had a hunch that Nora would give them a hard time. She told Damon, Owen, and George to stay away because this was a matter between females.

Damon didn't mind using this chance to sync up with Tony, Maddox, and Cristian, but he was worried that Talia's temper would flare when faced with Nora's stupidity.

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#### Chapter 916: Preparations for James' birthday party (5)

Dawn and Zina didn't like Nora polluting the space with her presence, and they had a bad feeling when they saw Ana. Why did she come? Considering their encounter at the market, Ana was definitely up to no good.

Nora didn't know much about Zina, but she was aware that Dawn was George's mate and the mistress of this villa, and everyone knew that George was not to be trifled with. And then there was Talia, who could decide on Nora's life and death with a thought. Nora didn't dare to show attitude while wondering why those three were sitting there.

Dawn and Zina felt Talia's chilling aura that leaked from the moment the newcomers appeared. Dawn and Zina assumed that Talia's reaction was due to Nora. It was normal for Talia to show hostility because Nora was throwing herself at Damon to the point of ending in the dungeon of the Dark Howlers pack.

Talia's vision zeroed on a female that was standing behind Nora.

How could Talia forget her bully? More than Marcy and any other member of the Red Moon pack, Ana was the leader of bullies, the main character in nightmares that plagued Talia's dreams and reality, and here she was... standing behind Nora and looking around the living room without acknowledging the presence of her hosts. How rude. As always. Ana was so full of herself that she overlooked the danger she was in.

Ana was happy to see Zina and Dawn present. She didn't care much about Talia, but she was delighted that Commander George and Owen were not in attendance. It was

perfect for Ana to cause a mess. The only question was how to make those two pay for all the trouble they caused on the previous day.

"This is what Miss Nora brought," Estelle broke the intense silence while placing the dresses on the backrest of the sofa chair that was free.

"Thank you, Estelle. We will call you if we need something," Dawn said, and Estelle was glad she could leave the living room.

Estelle was the only Omega in the Red Moon pack who knew about George's true identity, which meant Estelle was aware that Dawn was her Luna, and Luna could take care of herself. In the worst case, Dawn will kill them, and Estelle will get the task of digging a hole deep enough to hide their bodies so no one can find them.

"Where are two females we should help get ready?" Nora asked Dawn politely. She wanted to be done with this business as soon as possible. She will come up with an excuse to her father later.

"You are looking at them," Dawn responded while gesturing at herself and Zina.

Nora's face fell. "The two of you?"

Dawn smirked and instructed, "Show us what you've brought."

Nora had so many questions. Her father told her it was two random Omegas. How can Commander George's mate be random? Ana provoked them on the market! Well, Ana should deal with her mess.

Nora waved at Ana with urgency. "Open them."

Ana was not willing. "Why should I serve Omegas?"

"Because I say so!" Nora hissed and turned to Ana. "You volunteered to come as my helper. Help, or I will send you back, and my father will hear about this."

Nora made sure to hint how Ana came here of her own volition. Nora didn't want to be caught in whatever was about to happen between Ana and Dawn... and Talia.

Ana was confused to see that Nora was... scared. What the heck was going on?

Ana tugged on a zipper angrily, tearing the delicate plastic in the process.

"I hope you won't accuse us of breaking those," Dawn said to Nora.

"Of course, not. It's just a bag. You will get to keep what you choose."

Dawn cocked an eyebrow. "Does that mean Ana tore my garment bag?"

Ana couldn't hold it in anymore. "Who do you think you are? Just because we got orders to bring these and help you get ready, you can't boss us around. You should be grateful that... ugh..." Ana groaned when she felt an aura pressing on her.

Talia stood up and stalked to Ana.

"Miss Nora, your Omegas have no manners," Talia said. "I remember when you visited, you said that our Omegas lack discipline. How do you explain this?"

Nora's lips trembled as she was suppressing her smile. Nora hoped that Ana would step on a landmine and invoke George's wrath, but upsetting Talia was an unexpected treat.

"I apologize," Nora said with an exaggerated sigh. "We didn't teach them properly."

"Who are you?" Ana asked Talia angrily the moment Talia retracted her aura.

Talia was now standing only a step away from Ana. "You don't know who I am? I must say that I'm disappointed."

Ana's brows came together in confusion. Why did Talia sound like they should know each other? And why was Talia's scent familiar?

Talia watched as Ana's expression changed while pieces fell into place.

"You are the rat who lived in the attic," Ana said in disbelief. "How is this possible?"

"Is it so difficult to believe that a girl you bullied for years is right in front of you?"

Dawn and Zina knew that Talia came from the Red Moon pack, but they didn't know the details.

Dawn's heart ached when she remembered Talia's sorry appearance when she came to the Dark Howlers pack. A small, skinny girl, covered in bruises, quiet... and in the light of this information, it all made sense.

Nora was totally confused. Why did Ana mention the attic? Nora recollected Marcy talking about a girl who stayed in the attic of their packhouse. Nora never paid attention to Omegas, and she never cared about dusty places like a basement or an attic, so she didn't take note of random talk about an Omega who disappeared from there, but... was that Talia?

Talia enjoyed seeing Ana's face losing color as she realized the reality where a nobody from the attic now stood in front of her and was preventing her from moving.

Ana couldn't move a finger, and she knew it was because of Talia.

"You... you..." Ana stuttered while struggling to talk. "You can't do this. Alpha Edward will investigate. He will punish you for harming me."

Talia shook her head. "It seems that a lowly Omega like yourself didn't hear the latest news. I wonder if Alpha Edward will care about an Omega to the point of offending an Alpha he wants an alliance with."

Ana's eyes flashed in disbelief. "An Alpha?"

Zina was happy she got to see that pompous Omega reduced to her size of nothingness, and she bit her lip so she doesn't spill the beans about Talia being not only Damon's Luna but also Alpha Natalia. Those were Talia's news to share, and she will do it in just a few hours, and Zina will be right there to witness it.

"Open the garment bags," Talia ordered Ana, who moved robotically, unable to resist the command.

They all stood in silence and watched as Ana took one by one dress out of garment bags and arranged them on the sofa carefully.

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#### Chapter 917: Preparations for James' birthday party (6) [Bonus chapter]

Dawn was worried about this situation, and she asked Talia through the pack link, 'What will we do now? What if Ana tells Alpha Edward about your previous identity? The rumor is that he is shagging her.'

'Let her talk,' Talia responded. 'People will call her crazy.'

'Are you sure?'

'Will you believe that Alpha Natalia is an Omega from the Red Moon pack?' Talia asked. 'Or will they believe I magically appeared and left this place without anyone noticing?'

Dawn thought how that made sense. Before Dawn could ask her next question, Talia spoke again.

'I still didn't decide if I will let her leave this place alive.'

Dawn swallowed hard. This was not the kind Talia Dawn knew, but Dawn was aware that there was a lot of history between Talia and Ana. No matter what happened, Dawn had no intention of speaking for Ana.

Dawn remembered one thing. 'Can you make sure there is no blood? The carpet is new.'

'I will do my best,' Talia responded.

Talia didn't think that Ana could cause much damage. Ana will probably run to Alpha Edward and say how Talia used to be an Omega in his pack, but there would be no proof since Talia was never an official member, and there were no records of her existence. Chances of Alpha Edward believing Ana would be slim, but even if it happened, what would he do with that information? Force her to come back? Would he dare to approach Alpha Natalia and ask her if she was one of his Omegas? If he did that, it would give Talia an excuse to squish him for the insult.

'Are you planning of letting her go?' Liseli grumbled in Talia's mind.

'I don't know,' Talia responded honestly. Talia didn't want to bully Ana. That would make her fall on Ana's level.

'After all the nasty things Ana did to you...'

Talia released a low growl that covered whatever Liseli said next.

There was no need for Liseli to remind Talia about history related to Ana. Liseli was barely aware of what was going on, but Talia clearly remembered every time Ana came to the attic to assault her verbally and physically. At first, Talia didn't understand why Ana was angry, and later, it didn't matter. Ana was abusive, and Talia focused on curling up to minimize her injuries while hoping that Ana would stop and leave. It became a sick routine that made Talia's stomach churn with anger.

'I don't know if I will let her live, but I assure you that her life will be hell,' Talia said.

Zina was eyeing the dresses, and she clicked her tongue. "I am glad I got my clothes. These would make me look like a middle-aged woman... assuming they can accommodate my assets without bursting." Zina gestured toward her ample chest area.

"Do you need to point out that you have a big rack?" Dawn asked irritably.

"You would do the same if you had some," Zina said teasingly, and Dawn's eyes flashed in outrage.

"There is such a thing as too much," Dawn squeezed through her teeth.

"Right, right. Says every flat-chested girl. The next thing you will tell me is that the beauty is on the inside, like every ugly girl."

"Did you call me ugly?"

Zina raised her hands defensively. "Did I mention your name? It's not my fault if you found yourself in there..."

Nora stood on the side, wondering if she could stealthily leave this villa and pretend she was never here. Dawn and Zina were bickering, Talia was totally focused on Ana, so... maybe?

Nora was tied by a blood oath, so she couldn't betray Talia and Damon. There was also a clause about George, Dawn, James, Cornelia, and anything she witnessed while in the Dark Howlers pack.

Nora could reveal that Zina was in George's villa, but that didn't sound very important. If she gave that bit, her father would press her for more, and she couldn't say more, so it was safest not to say anything.

Nora made a small step backward, and another, and another... and she was almost at the door when...

"Ugh..." Nora suppressed her cry of surprise when she bumped into something solid.

Her head whipped back to see Damon standing there.

"Where are you going?" Damon asked while glaring at Nora, who quickly took three steps away from him, careful to move to the right so she didn't get too close to Talia.

"Why are you here?" Talia asked Damon.

Dawn and Zina stopped talking like someone flipped the off switch. They wondered how much Damon heard. Did they embarrass themselves in front of their Alpha? Probably.

Damon's face was arranged into a frown as he walked toward Talia like no one else was in the room.

Damon could feel Talia's emotions, and he knew she was not happy. She promised only to threaten Nora a bit. Now that he got to see the situation, Damon realized that Talia didn't pay attention to Nora at all. Instead, Talia was focused on a no-name Omega who was bent awkwardly, obviously under the pressure of Talia's aura.

The mood in the room changed with Damon's appearance. Damon looked angry, but Talia knew he was worried.

"Didn't we agree you would stay out of sight and let me handle this?" Talia asked.

"Didn't we agree you won't exert yourself?" Damon responded with a question, and the way he embraced her gently didn't match his stern expression. "You broke the agreement first, kitten."

Talia wanted to protest, but Damon was right. She was upset, and he was more protective as her pregnancy progressed. Talia retracted her aura and leaned on Damon.

"I'm sorry, Damon."

"It's OK," he murmured into her hair. As long as she was OK, it was OK, but he wished that Talia would stop taking risks.

Talia relaxed against him, and Damon could feel that her emotions were still unstable. He turned toward the Omega in question (aka Ana).

"Who is this?" Damon asked.

Ana's mouth ran dry. She didn't recognize Talia because the latter was well dressed, her hair was neatly combed, and her skin was clean, but Ana definitely recognized Damon, the most powerful Alpha in their generation.

Ana was confused. Why was Alpha Damon so gentle toward Talia? There was a rumor that Alpha Damon found his Luna, and... Ana swayed as the whole room spun when she realized that the female she tortured for years was Damon's mate.

"I... I'm sorry," Ana stuttered. "If I knew, I wouldn't..." She couldn't make herself speak further.

"You wouldn't what?" Damon asked while narrowing his eyes at Ana.

Talia released a long breath. "Do you remember the story of how some Omegas bullied me in the Red Moon pack?"

Damon nodded stiffly.

How could Damon forget? Talia didn't tell him much, but what she shared was more than enough. Doctor Travis said that some of Talia's injuries were old, and Talia explained that Marcy was there only for a few days, and before that, it was a group of Omegas who would come to nitpick and beat Talia for the smallest reasons and sometimes they didn't bother with reasons at all.

Talia tilted her head toward Ana, and she said to Damon, "Meet Ana."

"Ahh!" Ana shrieked as she fell to the floor.

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## Chapter 918: Preparations for James' birthday party (7)

Ana was curled up in a fetal position on the floor, and the cracking sounds were her bones shattering under Damon's Alpha aura.

Since meeting Talia, Damon was suppressing murderous urges every time he saw Marcy, Alpha Edward, Elders who were trying to get him married to random women, and anyone who dared to cause grievances to Talia.

He was justifying his lack of action as protecting Talia, but there were times when he wondered if that was the right thing to do.

Damon could not change the past, but now they decided to stop hiding Talia's identity, and Damon wanted to make up for all the times he didn't act how an Alpha should when his mate was bullied.

Damon increased his pressure, and Ana's mouth opened in a silent scream as her vision darkened.

"Don't spill blood on the carpet," Talia said to Damon with urgency. "It's new."

"Who cares about the carpet?" Damon grumbled. "We will roll this trash in it, and I will buy George a new one." He looked at Ana. "So, you are the one who touched my mate? Tell me, how should I punish you?" Damon knew Ana couldn't respond, but he wanted her to know why she was suffering retribution.

Nora looked at this from the side while trying to diminish her presence. Damon was angry, and she didn't want to join Ana on the floor.

Nora thought it was lucky that she never touched Talia, so Damon won't kill her. Hopefully.

Talia put her hand over Damon's forearm. "Let me do it."

Damon looked at Talia dejectedly. Did she forget she was growing his child in her belly? He wanted Talia to save her energy for necessities, and getting rid of one Omega was not a necessity.

"Why don't you rest?" Damon asked Talia.

"If I wanted to rest, I would stay home. I knew that coming here would be unpleasant. Meeting Ana is just a bonus. She bullied me for many years. If you punish her in my place, it will feel empty."

Damon puffed his cheeks and retracted his aura.

Talia looked at Ana who was barely breathing, and Talia got an idea.

"I want her blindfolded."

Dawn stuck her hand between the cushions of the sofa and produced a black leather facemask. It would look like a sleeping mask, but this one was not soft or cushioned, and Talia wondered what Dawn and George did in this living room so that Dawn had such things handy.

Dawn used the facemask to secure Ana's eyes closed, and Ana had no strength to resist.

Next, Talia leaned over Ana and extended her hands which started lighting up with a silvery glow.

Everything was perfectly silent as Talia used her ability to heal Ana's wounds.

Nora craned her neck to see better what was going on. She gave up on the idea of escaping the place.

Ana didn't dare to move as Talia removed the blindfold.

Ana wondered what had happened. She couldn't see a thing, but she felt something soothing, and she was not in pain anymore. Did she imagine it?

"Leave," Talia said.

"You are letting her go?" Dawn asked, visibly confused.

Talia didn't respond to Dawn as she was focused on Ana. "Do you want me to change my mind?"

Ana blinked, and then she scurried out of the door, and she ran through the hallway, out of the villa, into the woods, and she continued running until she was out of sight.

"Why did you let her go?" Zina asked. "She will tell Alpha Edward what happened here."

"I'm counting on it," Talia said. "Dawn, talk to George, so your stories match. Nora came here with Ana. While Nora was helping you with clothes, Ana sneaked out and tried to seduce George, who kicked her out. Fill in any missing details."

They all stared at Talia, and it was Nora who understood Talia's intention. "Ana will tell Alpha Edward that you are here, and she was bullied, but you will twist it into lies Ana

created because George rejected her. Since Ana is Alpha Edward's squeeze, he will be furious that she sought another man, and he won't believe her. Hahaha!" Nora ended with an evil laugh.

Talia had to admit that Nora was right. She wanted Ana to suffer, just as Talia did while Ana bullied her. It was not about the beatings; it was about isolation and no one helping or offering a kind word.

Ana will tell Alpha Edward how Talia and Damon were in George's villa, that Damon's Luna came from the attic of the Red Moon pack, and that Ana's bones were broken, but there will be no proof for any of it.

If Ana was convincing enough, Alpha Edward might send someone to check on George's villa and risk offending George, but he will not dare to act against Alpha Natalia or Alpha Damon solely based on a word from an Omega.

Ana's story will be unbelievable, to begin with, and without proof, Alpha Edward will call her a liar. Like that, Ana will lose the big thigh she was hugging, which will cause others to stop tolerating her because of Alpha Edward's protection. Ana will feel the pain of being shunned by everyone, and then... then Talia will teach her a lesson while others are watching, and no one will come to Ana's aid.

'Good plan, kid,' Liseli praised Talia.

Nora was giggling while talking, "Alpha Edward will discard her. Ana will be punished, and I can't wait to see that skunk reduced to where she belongs."

"It takes a skunk to recognize one," Zina said from the side. No one liked Ana, but they also didn't like Nora.

Nora glared at Zina, and Talia waved her hand to get their attention. "Let's not bicker." She turned to Nora. "Like it or not, you are with us on this."

"I would join hands with rogues if that means getting rid of Ana," Nora admitted her thoughts. "Enemy of my enemy is my friend, so we are friends now."

Talia wondered, how Nora could talk shamelessly about Ana when they were the same? Talia also had a belly full of grievances against Nora, but Nora was a lesser evil when compared to Ana.

"I assume that Alpha Edward sent you here with an agenda," Talia said to Nora. "Work with Dawn, Zina, Owen, and George to come up with a matching story. If you return to Alpha Edward empty-handed, you will be punished, so it's in your interest to cooperate."

Nora had to admit that Talia's point was valid.

Dawn was already on her phone, texting George to come to the living room with Owen. She wondered how the guys would react to this development.

Damon was staring at Talia with an unreadable expression. He didn't know that his kitten could be this devious and calculative, and he didn't hate it, not even a little bit.

Damon was angry at Alpha Edward, Alpha Howard, Alpha Sophia, Alpha Isaac, Cassandra's prophecy, and this whole pack for making Talia believe she was not important. They neglected her to the point of endangering Liseli, yet Talia was a daughter of an Alpha and a Guardian, and she was brilliant in every way possible. Actually, if Talia's background was not so impressive, she would probably die under such circumstances.

Talia turned to Damon, and she wondered why he was frowning. His emotional turmoil didn't make sense. "We should leave in case Alpha Edward sends his people. I assume we have ten minutes, maybe fifteen."

Damon couldn't wait to leave this place. The villa was big, but it felt crowded. Keith and the guys should be close also, so they can all enter the packhouse together and face another set of challenges.

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## Chapter 919: Preparations for James' birthday party (8)

In the packhouse of the Red Moon pack...

The time for the party was approaching, and Damon was in the bathroom, getting ready after shower.

He had black pants and a black shirt with silver embroidery on the chest pocket and collar. His outfit was opposite of Talia's knee-length white cocktail dress with silver embroidery along the neckline that matched the design on Damon's shirt. Couple's outfits!

Talia looked fantastic, and Damon regretted that her stomach was not showing.

Damon picked those clothes, and they represented them perfectly. Damon was the dark, while Talia was his light, and their wolves approved.

Damon ran his hand through his damp hair while nodding in approval at his reflection in the mirror, and then he exited the bathroom.

Damon halted at the door and frowned at the crowded room.

He left Talia on the bed to rest. They both tidied up in the Dark Howlers pack before coming via a teleportation spell, so there was no need to shower, but Nora bumped into Damon earlier, and Damon didn't want to risk Nora's scent lingering on him and upsetting Talia.

Why were Cornelia, Mindy, Gideon, Keith, Arya, Tyler, and Sandy also there? How long did he take in the shower? He was worried that this packhouse was full of bad memories for Talia, so he hurried to get ready, but it seemed he was not fast enough because people invaded their space in his absence.

Talia was sitting on the sofa with Keith and Arya standing behind her in attention. Cornelia was sitting on Talia's left, while Sandy and Tyler were on Talia's right. Gideon was on the sofa chair with Mindy on his lap.

Every pack got two rooms in the packhouse and additional lodging in the side buildings. Since Damon and Talia represented two packs, they got four rooms in total. Damon and Talia shared one room, so they gave one room to Keith and Arya, who were originally assigned a room in the side building. Tyler and Sandy were in the third room and Mindy and Gideon were in the fourth one. That left Cornelia without a bedroom, but she was planning to spend her night with James, so she didn't need a room anyway.

Talia's eyes flashed when she saw Damon standing at the bathroom door with half of his chest exposed, and she moved swiftly to button up his shirt.

"Why are you exposing yourself?" Talia grumbled.

Damon smirked. "Is my mate jealous?"

"Jealous of what? Everyone here is mated," Talia responded. And they were her friends who wouldn't dare to jeopardize their friendship or their lives (if Talia loses it).

Talia realized that her words and actions didn't match. She exhaled helplessly. "Seriously, these pregnancy hormones are messing with my reasoning."

"I love to see you possessively claiming me as yours, kitten," Damon said while leaning for a kiss. "Please, continue. Lock me up and wrap me in a blanket. I won't resist as long as you are wrapped in it with me. If you are this domineering because of pregnancy, I will ensure you are always pregnant."

Talia wanted to respond snarkily or slap his shoulder, but he was kissing her, and it was more than nice, so she ended up hugging him and responding to his kisses eagerly.

Gideon cleared his throat to get everyone's attention, "As we were saying, before Alpha Damon came, we are worried about the security. This is a party, but we are in enemy territory and can't relax. We should stay vigilant and leave pleasure for later."

Gideon was talking in general, but everyone knew he was talking about Talia and Damon, who were still kissing.

"There is no reason for us to skip on fun," Sandy responded. "Even fighting can be fun if it's done right."

"Agreed," Arya said enthusiastically, and then she looked at Talia apprehensively. "I mean... if Luna says so."

Talia couldn't speak with Damon's tongue down her throat, and no one dared to interrupt them.

"Youngsters..." Gideon grumbled.

Mindy poked Gideon's shoulder with her finger. "Why are you talking like you are old? You will be a father in a few short months."

Gideon puffed his chest at Mindy's words. He was the oldest one in the room, by far, but he had a youthful mate and a baby on the way, and that made him feel like a twenty-something years-old guy.

"Did you hear if there will be a ceremony tonight?" Tyler asked.

It was normal for ceremonies to happen on auspicious days like the equinox, the solstice, and the full moon. Birthdays of members of the Alpha family could be classified as important. However, the invitation didn't mention a ceremony.

Cornelia responded, "The Shaman of the Red Moon pack said that the position of celestial bodies was not favorable."

Gideon snorted. "What nonsense. Celestial bodies might change position, but they are never fully favorable. The trick is to tap into nurturing energies while avoiding negativity."

Mindy looked at Gideon with stars in her eyes. "And that's why the Dark Howlers pack is so much better than any other."

Gideon didn't deny it. His wolf was not of Alpha bloodline, but he outlived many Alphas. Gideon attributed that to the ceremonies he performed over the years, each of them boosting his body and his wolf spirit. But Gideon couldn't boast shamelessly. "Every Shaman should know that even though the celestial alignment is not fully supportive, the ceremony will still be beneficial."

"Do you think the Shaman of the Red Moon pack is involved with rogues?" Damon asked. At some point, he and Talia stopped kissing and paid attention to the conversation in the room.

"It's possible," Gideon responded. "However, I wouldn't say that he is involved. More like... aware of it and not approving."

"Explain," Damon demanded of Gideon.

"During the ceremony, everyone focuses on the Shaman, and then there is a post-ceremony buzz that makes you feel high and muddles with perception. If the Shaman suspects that rogues are coming, he might use the unfavorable alignment in the sky as an excuse to avoid the ceremony."

"Do you think we should reach out to the Shaman?" Talia asked Damon, who nodded faintly in response.

The reports of the Red Moon pack barely mention their Shaman, and James and George didn't call him out as either Alpha Edward's supporter or opponent, so Damon didn't think the guy was important.

What if the Shaman is keeping a low profile because he knows things and disapproves of Alpha Edward's doings but doesn't dare to retaliate openly? If Shaman cares about the pack and pack members, he might be willing to work against a destructive Alpha in favor of saving his pack members.

"We should investigate this," Damon said. "Shaman has access to the pack members that's second to Alpha's. Considering the number of guests tonight, I assume their Shaman will attend this party. We should approach him and see how things go. If he disapproves of Alpha Edward's methods, he could be a powerful ally." The guy probably won't work against Alpha Edward, but preventing weak-minded members from retaliating when the fight erupts would be helpful.

Mindy's hand shot up in the air. "My mate and I will be on it."

Gideon frowned. "We will?"

"Mhm," Mindy confirmed with a hum. "As a Shaman, you can approach your fellow Shaman for chit-chat. With your keen senses and wisdom, I'm sure you can dig out something useful."

Gideon's frown eased up, and he ended up smiling at Mindy. How could he decline when Mindy praised him in front of everyone?

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Chapter 920: Liar, liar (1)

In Alpha Edward's study...

Beta Raymond, Alpha Edward, and James were listening to Ana's story about what happened in George's villa.

It was Ana's fifth time recollecting the events. She was frustrated that they were asking her to repeat the same things. Why can't they understand that Alpha Damon's Luna was a skanky Omega from the attic of their packhouse? That same Omega was now in Commander George's villa along with Alpha Damon. And Ana was bullied!

Beta Raymond and Alpha Edward exchanged thoughts through the mind link, and James used this opportunity to ask George without others noticing.

'What happened at your place?'

'I'm sure Ana told you,' George responded.

'How will you handle it?'

'We have a plan.'

'Do you need me to help?'

George thought for a second before responding, 'You were not here, so you don't know what happened. Depending on how it goes, remind Alpha Edward to check with me before doing something that can't be taken back.'

Ana stood in front of Alpha Edward's desk while shifting on her legs impatiently. She was confident that Alpha Edward would send warriors to storm George's villa and start a war with the Dark Howlers pack or something... anything other than this lack of action.

"Excuse me, Alpha Edward," Ana called. "What are you going to do about this?"

Beta Raymond frowned at this. "You said that Alpha Damon and Luna Talia are in Commander George's villa and that they seemed friendly." Ana nodded, and Beta Raymond asked his next question, "Where was Nora?" He didn't care about the part where Talia was an Omega from the Red Moon pack.

"Nora was right there, watching as they tortured me, and she didn't move a finger!"

Beta Raymond's eyes lost focus for a moment, and then he frowned at Ana. "Nora says that she just finished dressing up Lieutenant Owen's mate and her friend who is visiting. She said that other than you bailing out on her shortly after arriving, there were no other incidents. Do you care to explain?"

Ana's eyes moved randomly while she processed this information. "Nora is in cahoots with them!"

"What!?" Beta Raymond shouted.

Alpha Edward raised his hand, indicating to Beta Raymond to calm down.

Alpha Edward knew that Ana's story sounded unbelievable, but he also knew that she wouldn't dare to lie about it. It was not a secret that Alpha Edward was merciless, and Omega deceiving him would be equal to courting death. Ana was greedy and unscrupulous, but she was not stupid.

"Nora spent time in the Dark Howlers pack, and so did Commander George," Alpha Edward shared his thoughts for everyone to hear. "It wouldn't be unexpected that they developed some... friendships."

James watched as his father's eyes moved to scrutinize him, and he knew that he just became a suspect.

"Friendships?" James asked. "I wouldn't go that far. George and Alpha Damon sparred, but I didn't see them socializing outside of that. Regardless of their relationship, I must notice a few issues with Ana's story." James made a dramatic pause before asking questions, "How could Alpha Damon and Luna Talia be in George's villa without anyone knowing? Didn't they arrive half an hour ago with their party? Our warriors saw them exit the garage together. Unless they can magically teleport, I don't see how that's possible."

"Are you saying that Ana is lying?" Alpha Edward asked.

James raised his hands. "I wouldn't dare. I was in my room with the tailor for the final fitting before I came here, so I have no idea what transpired. But I must ask Ana..." He turned to look at the Omega in question. "Let's assume your story is true, Luna Talia was there, and she bullied you while Nora stood on the side. Considering that Nora is returning to the packhouse without raising alarms, we can assume that her visit there went without incidents."

James turned to his father. "We are monitoring all electronic communication. If Nora formed friendships with people from the Dark Howlers pack, they would stay in touch. We know for a fact that there were no emails, messages, or phone calls between Nora and anyone from the Dark Howlers pack. We know that Nora caused an incident there and spent time in their dungeon. It doesn't make sense that a prideful she-wolf like Nora would be friends with people who made her suffer."

James waited for Alpha Edward to nod in agreement before turning to Ana. "Do you think we are stupid? Why would Luna Talia pick to torture you instead of Beta's daughter? Did you reveal information on the packhouse? Did you tell them about my father's schedule?"

Ana shook her head vigorously. "No, no. I didn't say a thing!"

"How is that possible?" James asked while rubbing his chin. "If Luna Talia has Alpha Aura, she could force you to talk."

"She didn't," Ana was quick to say. "She didn't ask me any questions."

"Are you saying that Alpha Damon and his Luna sneaked into Commander George's house to torture you without getting anything in return?"

"They didn't sneak in. They were comfortable, and people there didn't react to their presence."

"You say they didn't sneak in, yet our border patrols didn't report their entrance."

Ana glared at James. "I don't know how border patrols work, but if we have rogues sneaking in, why can't an Alpha?"

"Makes sense," James said. "But it still doesn't explain why they didn't ask you any questions. Did you tell them something sensitive, and now you are trying to cover it up by accusing our border patrols of being faulty?"

"Stop twisting my words!" Ana hissed.

"I am not twisting anything," James said. "I am just repeating what you said and trying to make sense of it. You said that you went with Nora to help two Omegas get ready for the party, but instead, you found three females, one of them was Luna Talia of the Dark Howlers pack. Luna Talia bullied you and exposed herself as an Omega from the Red Moon pack, and then Alpha Damon also appeared, and they tortured you without reason and without asking questions."

"The reason is that I recognized her!" Ana shouted.

James raised his hand, indicating that he was not done. "And then... they let you go. Which part of that makes sense? The one that Luna Talia was working in this packhouse? Or the one where you were tortured by an Alpha just an hour ago, and you are standing here without a single scratch on your body?"

Alpha Edward frowned at this. He had a feeling that Ana was not lying, but James' words made sense.

Alpha Edward never thought of James as a smart kid. Was Ana's story so full of holes that even someone like James could find flaws? Alpha Damon and Luna Talia would know that letting Ana leave after seeing them would be disastrous. And then there was the point of Ana being perfectly fine.

Alpha Edward finally spoke, "Didn't you say that they broke your bones?" And there was something related to people worrying about messing up the carpet.

"They did, they did!" Ana said, and she extended her arms to show injuries, but she realized that her flesh was perfectly fine.

Ana paused. Did Alpha Edward think of her as a liar? That was a possibility. But she was still there, talking, and he was listening, so she was confident that it was not in vain. He will go and check and see that her story was not made up, and then she will become more useful, which comes with more perks!

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