

The Alpha's Bride

#Chapter 933: An Alpha's challenge (1) [Bonus chapter] –

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Talia's insides tightened. Alpha's challenge? Damon versus Alpha Edward? Damon could win with his eyes closed, but Alpha Edward was known for scheming, and Talia couldn't stop worrying. However, if she showed concern, it would be interpreted as her doubt in Damon's abilities, and she had to keep her chin high and her gaze unwavering.

The whole event hall was deadly silent. No one was talking. Even the music stopped.

"Wait a minute," Alpha Edward said. "Let's agree on conditions first."

"Conditions? We will follow the ancient rules. Winner takes it all," Damon spoke with confidence. He didn't want to let Alpha Edward do all the talking.

"Ancient rules it is," Alpha Edward agreed, and Damon's eyebrows shot up in surprise.

"Edward!" Luna Layla hissed while tugging on his sleeve. "What are you doing?"

"Let me handle this," he said to Luna Layla and then turned to speak to the people present. "I ask you to witness this challenge between two packs. As per ancient rules, one won't have an unfair advantage. If one doesn't have a weapon, the other can't use it either." Alpha Edward turned to Damon. "Is that fair?"

Damon confirmed, wondering if it would be this easy. Did Alpha Edward get a boost in strength or in stupidity? Surely, the old guy knew that he had no chance in a duel against Damon.

Alpha Edward continued, "Ancient rules also say that an Alpha can name a champion, per blood relation or ability."

Damon's brows came together. "You want to name someone to fight in your place?"

"Per ancient rules, that's an option."

"It is," Damon had to agree with this. Sure, it was an option, but no respectable Alpha ever went for it.

Damon realized what Alpha Edward's game was. The old guy didn't want to do it himself. But who could fight in his place?

'Can you ask Sandy to check if there are Guardians nearby?' Damon asked Talia.

'She is doing that the whole evening,' Talia confirmed. 'There are no Guardians in attendance.' But that didn't mean that some won't appear suddenly.

James and Cornelia entered the event hall. Cornelia's baby-blue dress was wrinkled, and James was wearing sweatpants and a t-shirt he picked up from one of the clothes stashes next to the packhouse. It was not a secret that those two were rolling in the grass (there was grass in Cornelia's hair).

George was frantically mind-linking James to get his ass back from the moment Alpha Edward called for Owen, Dawn, and Zina to go there. George told James what was happening, and James couldn't believe his father openly challenged Damon. Something was off.

"James, my boy," Alpha Edward called. "You are back in time to see the monumental fight between two packs. Ancient rules apply; the winner takes it all."

Damon had to clarify. "All is... when I win, I get your pack?"

"The one who survives takes it all," Alpha Edward doubled down, and his eyes moved to Talia.

Damon released a low growl. "My mate is not for taking." How dares that lecherous bastard look at Talia like that?

Alpha Edward raised his hands. "Did the day come when Alpha Damon is not confident in his victory? I only wanted to confirm that your mate won't interfere with the fight. After all, she is an Alpha."

"My mate will stay on the side," Damon said stiffly.

Alpha Edward nodded. "Good to know. If one submits, he can keep his life, but he will live in shame forever. It will be up to the losing pack members to decide if they want to follow the winner or become rogues. How does that sound?"

Damon narrowed his eyes while scrutinizing Alpha William and Alpha Richard. The two stood behind Alpha Edward, and Damon didn't miss them exchanging nervous glances. This was not part of the plan. What was Alpha Edward thinking?

A few years ago, there was a scheme for several packs to attack the Dark Howlers pack and to share spoils. Was that what Alpha Edward was after?

'Keith!' Damon called through the pack link. 'Contact Caden and Maya and confirm that things are fine there.'

Keith stepped to the side while reaching for his phone.

'He will try to sabotage you,' Talia spoke to Damon through their mind-link.

Damon had to agree on how that was a possibility. 'Maybe. But... this is a fantastic opportunity to get rid of Alpha Edward. I can't pass on this. Help me keep an eye on him, kitten. Together, we can do this.'

Talia smiled. How could she say no to that?

"I assume you have the fighting area ready," Damon said. "Let us go there without delay."

Maddox, and Tony were by Damon's side already.

Other than Alpha Richard and Alpha William, present were also Alpha Adam from the Silverfur pack, Alpha Peter from the Evenfang pack, Alpha Robert, Alpha Patrick, as well as Alphas from a few smaller packs. Most of them stood neutral, not daring to pick a side. After all, Damon was a powerhouse, and Alpha Edward was the host. If Damon wins, wouldn't they all be stuck in the middle of a headless pack that's thirsty for revenge? They regretted not leaving sooner.

Damon and Talia followed Alpha Edward to the training area that was only a few minutes away. There was a large square etched into the ground. Numerous footprints in that square were proof that was the sparring grounds.

"This will do," Alpha Edward said. "Let's try to keep the fight contained to this area."

Damon looked around to see people taking spots around the border. Other than Alphas, their pack members were also there, and quite a number of warriors from the Red Moon pack. The non-Alpha people stood a bit further away to avoid getting caught in the surge of aura from people fighting.

The air was getting heavier by the minute as everyone was tense.

Talia closed her eyes and sensed the surroundings. 'I don't find anything out of place, Damon.'

'Stay on your toes,' Damon responded.

"Do you plan to use a Champion?" Alpha Edward asked Damon.

Damon was about to refuse. Since he became the Alpha of the Dark Howlers pack, Damon took part in many Alpha challenges, never via proxy. However, if one Alpha decided someone else to fight in his stead, it was expected for the other one to do the same.

If Caden were here, he would be a good candidate to fight as Damon's representative. With the rule of no advantageous weapons used, if one of the opponents was not an Alpha, using the Alpha aura was not allowed. But Caden was not present, and the only warrior whose abilities Damon knew was Keith.

Damon decided to ask first, "How about you?"

"I choose as my Champion..." Alpha Edward made a dramatic pause. "Commander George."

Damon needed a moment to process this. What the hell?

Alpha Edward smirked at Damon. "Don't tell me you don't have a suitable warrior to match my Commander. If not, you can always fight yourself or forfeit."

Damon's mind was working a million thoughts a second. Keith was capable, but was he on George's level? Even without an Alpha aura, George was an Alpha with strength and speed above others. On the other hand, if Damon fought against Commander George, even if he won, it wouldn't be considered honorable. After all, ancient rules were about power and honor. Was that what Alpha Edward was after? Damn it!

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Chapter 934: An Alpha's challenge (2)

"Wait!" James exclaimed, making everyone look at him.

"What are you doing?" Alpha Edward growled.

"Before Alpha Damon decides on his proxy, we should confirm that everyone understands the rules," James said. "The rules say a champion can be chosen, and he needs to be willing to represent the party in an Alpha challenge."

Damon realized that James had just helped him out. "I see. What else do the rules say?"

"The Champion can be an achieved warrior or a blood relative. If willing, he will represent the Alpha, and it's an honorable thing that the other party picks a champion as well."

Alpha Edward smirked at James' words. "That's what I was thinking. George!" Alpha Edward waved at George, who still didn't move from his spot. "You get the honor of representing your pack in this challenge."

Damon raised his hand. "Just a moment. Before Commander George accepts, I want to name my Champion as well."

Alpha Edward gestured to Damon to go ahead.

Talia rolled her shoulders. She was ready for this.

Can she fight against George? She can knock him down with Liseli's help, and people will not notice that Talia used glowing abilities.

Damon noticed that Talia was warming up to something, and he asked her through the mind-link, 'What are you doing?'

'Getting ready to fight,' Talia responded matter-of-factly.

Damon looked at her helplessly. 'Do you think I will send my pregnant mate to fight in my place?'

Talia was a bit disappointed. Other than being unable to shift, she could do everything else, much more than other Alphas! 'I know George is a friend, but if he is fighting for Alpha Edward, we can't take this lightly. Besides, I can knock him out without harming him. Who will you send? Max? Tony?'

"George!" Damon called. "I want you to be my Champion."

Alpha Edward stared at Damon in disbelief. "Are you so afraid that you are giving up?"

Damon raised his hand, indicating to Alpha Edward to stop talking.

"Rules are that the Champion needs to be an achieved warrior and that he is willing. There is nothing to say he needs to be from my pack. What do you say, Commander George? Will you represent me as my Champion?"

George smirked and walked into the fighting area. He turned to Damon and put his hand over his chest. "It will be my honor, Alpha Damon."

Alpha Edward couldn't believe this. "George! What are you doing!?"

"Alpha Damon and I trained together. I know his moves, and he knows mine. Like this... it will be more interesting."

"The rules are clear!" Maddox exclaimed from the side. "Commander George accepted to represent Alpha Damon. Are you going to break the rules, Alpha Edward?"

Damon chuckled. "Don't be a sourpuss, Edward! Pick another one!"

Alpha Edward gritted his teeth. What other one? George was the best! Picking any other warrior from the Red Moon pack would be giving up! And he didn't have anyone from another pack to pick. Could he pick Alpha William or Alpha Richard or their Betas? But all those people avoided his gaze, and he didn't want to embarrass himself with another rejection. What about Beta Raymond? Where the hell did that guy go?

Alpha Edward looked around frantically, and his eyes landed on one person that couldn't say no. "James, my boy. You get to..."

"No," James refused before Alpha Edward could finish.

'James,' Alpha Edward called through their mind-link. 'George is your mentor. He won't harm you. You only need to put on a show so I can cause a commotion and shoot Alpha Damon. I have a gun with...'

'No!' James said. 'A gun? Look how many Alphas are watching. What honor will we have left?'

'Screw honor!' Alpha Edward was livid. 'Who cares about honor if we lose the pack!?'

'You should have thought about it before you challenged Alpha Damon.'

'This will be your pack one day!'

'I don't need it,' James responded.

"James," Alpha Edward called with his voice for everyone to hear. "As my son and the future Alpha of the Red Moon pack, you must represent the pack. Don't tell me that the female by your side made you lose your reasoning. Did she cast a spell on you? You are still young, and you will meet many..."

James tuned out his father. He turned to look at Cornelia, whose hand he held, and she smiled at him with a smile that chased away everything bad in the world. That was his chocolate-colored Goddess, she was pregnant with his pup, and the future was bright as long as Alpha Edward was not nearby.

Did Cornelia cast a spell on him? Maybe she did, but if that was the case, he wanted to stay in that enchantment forever.

"JAMES REDMAYNE!" Alpha Edward roared, not caring about their audience.

James cringed. "Stop yelling." This was not about representing the pack; it was about satisfying his father's greed. "I won't fight in your place because I refuse to fight my Alpha."

Alpha Edward was sure that his ears malfunctioned. "Your WHAT!?"

"I, James Redmayne, denounce the Red Moon..."

"JAMES!" Alpha Edward shouted.

"...and I reject Alpha Edward..."

"STOP!"

"...as my Alpha."

Alpha Edward clutched his chest. What the hell did his son do?

James turned to Damon. "Alpha Damon, is the offer still valid?"

Damon grinned. "Welcome to the family, Gamma James. We will get to the formality of the ceremony as soon as we finish here."

Alpha Edward nearly vomited from anger. "Gamma!? You are abandoning the position of the future Alpha so that you can be a lowly Gamma!?"

James didn't want to respond. He squeezed Cornelia's hand, and they walked to Damon and Talia.

Damon and James shook hands, and Talia gave a hug to Cornelia, and then she hugged James as well.

"You should probably stay in the back," Talia told Cornelia, to which the latter nodded.

"George!" James shouted. "Make sure to do a body search before fighting. You never know if someone might have a weapon on him."

James gave Damon a meaningful look, and Damon understood that James said that for a reason. Did Alpha Edward have a concealed weapon? Of course, he did. Alpha Edward was a sneaky fox, and James never spoke without reason.

Alpha Edward was on the verge of passing out from anger. Did James snitch on him? He turned to Luna Layla. "Do you see this!? This is the son you gave me! Why didn't you stop him?"

"Ha. Ha. Hahahaha..." Luna Layla was laughing hysterically. "To think that I got to live to see this day."

Alpha Edward couldn't believe this. "Are you crazy!?"

"Me? Crazy? I was crazy for being your mate and wasting more than two decades of my life. I am done."

"WHAT!? You are leaving me!? I am the Alpha of this pack! See if you can leave this territory in one piece!"

Luna Layla shrugged. "Without an heir, your pack is doomed for failure. When warriors find out that their Alpha doesn't have a future, they will riot and grab as much as they can before everything collapses. No one will heed your order."

"What about everything we built together? What about our children? James is still my son. He will see reason and come back!"

"You don't have children, dear," Luna Layla said with venom in her voice.

Alpha Edward's eyes flashed when he understood the meaning behind Luna Layla's words. "Impossible!"

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Chapter 935: An Alpha's challenge (3)

Luna Layla sneered at Alpha Edward. "Oh, it's possible. On the first day I arrived here, I spiked your drink with drugs that made you infertile."

Alpha Edward was raging now. "LIES! TELL ME YOU ARE LYING!" His Alpha aura was flaring uncontrollably, but his mark on Luna Layla's neck made her feel like just a breeze was caressing her skin.

She looked at him sadly. "You knew I had a mate, and you still went with the deal and forced your mark on me the moment I reached eighteen years old. Did you really think I

submitted to you? I vowed that your bloodline would end with you. The only pleasure I had while staying here was draining your treasury while buying useless luxuries."

Alpha Edward moved toward Luna Layla in slow motion as possessed. "Marcy and James... who is their father?" His eyes moved randomly, and they flashed dangerously when it dawned on him. "Chester. Your fated mate."

Luna Layla smirked. "I made sure to go to him the moment I felt the first signs of heat. Every. Time. You thought I'm a whore like you? For me, there was only him. You, I endured. Chester, I loved, and I still do."

Luna Layla turned to James. "I have no hope that you and your sister will forgive me. I failed you, and I can't take it back. I sent her away as a child, hoping to protect her from this monster you call father, but he still brought her back and... In my defense, I did what I had to do to survive. I was a horrible mother, but it gives me comfort to know you found your path and that Edward Redmayne can't harm you."

James stared at his mother. He suspected that Alpha Edward was not his father and that their relationship was complex, but this... he was not sure what to think. Who the hell was Chester?

Luna Layla looked at Alpha Edward. "Edward Redmayne, I reject you as my mate and as my Alpha, and I denounce the Red Moon pack."

Alpha Edward fell to his knees, and he gasped for air. He heard that breaking the bond was torturous and could kill the wolf, but this was not so bad. Was it because they were not fated mates? Or because his wolf was stronger than others? It didn't matter.

He had no intention of accepting the rejection. He will keep her with this half-ass bond forever and use it to track her and punish her, just like all others that dared to turn against him!

Alpha Edward didn't look up as Luna Layla walked away. No one stopped her.

After Luna Layla's footsteps faded, the only sound was the rustling of the leaves under the night's breeze.

'PAK!'

Damon clapped loudly, and several figures jolted.

"Now that we got that out of the way, how about we go back to the challenge?"

Alpha Edward looked at Damon. "You want to hit me while I'm down?"

Damon stuffed his hands into his pant pockets. "You are the one who issued the challenge, Alpha Edward. I don't remember you asking me if I had any family issues that might impact my state of mind. I came for a birthday party and ended up with a challenge on my hands. You don't hear me complaining. As Alphas, we deal with whatever comes. The moment we agreed to the conditions, the challenge began. So, how about it? Will you fight, or do you forfeit? We have so many esteemed Alphas to bear witness to what's happening tonight. Even the reporters from the WW Magazine are here."

Alpha Edward shuddered. Why was this evening getting worse by the minute? "You want us to fight?"

Damon shrugged. "Someone should fight to settle this challenge. You can pick another man to represent you, and feel free to choose if you will go against my Champion or against me."

"Damon!" Tony called with a warning in his voice, and Damon raised his hand.

"I know what you are going to say," Damon said. "Commander George is not an Alpha. However, he is a capable warrior, and the rules state that one won't use weapons the other doesn't have, which means that Alpha Edward won't use his Alpha aura. I trust that Alpha Edward will follow those rules, and I trust that Commander George won't go easy on him just because he belongs to the Red Moon pack."

People looked at Damon like he had lost his marbles. Since when was Alpha Edward following rules? And how can a Commander fight against his Alpha?

But it was Damon's fight, and George was in the fighting area, and it was not theirs to meddle.

Of course, Damon knew that Alpha Edward would use anything available to secure a win, cheating included, but Damon also knew that George was an Alpha, motivated by the thirst to avenge his parents.

Alpha Edward pressed his lips into a line while thinking about the best course of action. Sure, his wolf got a few blows with Owen, James, and Luna Layla leaving the pack, and Luna Layla rejecting the bond, but it was not hopeless. He was the Alpha of the Red Moon pack, and George was not. George was a member of the Red Moon pack, which meant that Alpha Edward had authority over him.

If he defeats George, isn't that like defeating Alpha Damon?

With this, Alpha Edward's spirit soared.

Yes, yes. He will defeat George, and then he will punish Owen, James, and that traitorous woman (aka Luna Layla). Who cares about a little setback? What matters is

who will stand at the top last, and that will be him. With Alpha Damon defeated, the Red Moon pack will be the largest in North America. He will snatch Zina and Dawn, and even Alpha Natalia will admire him. Maybe Alpha Natalia comes to comfort him because of Luna Layla's betrayal?

The more he thought about it, the better it sounded.

Alpha Edward pushed himself to stand. "I accept. Me against George. The fight ends with death or when one side accepts defeat. The winner will decide if he will show mercy."

Damon didn't need to look at George to know that the latter was barely containing his Alpha aura from bursting with bloodlust.

"One thing, first!" Damon exclaimed.

Alpha Edward balled his hands into fists impatiently. "Now what?"

"Let's not forget body search for weapons," Damon said. "Just in case. My men will search Alpha Edward and you..." Damon gestured toward Alpha Edward, "... can pick who will search Commander George."

Keith and Owen were quick to go to Alpha Edward and pat his clothes. Keith found a gun, and Owen found a knife.

George moved to the side to give his shirt to Dawn.

Alpha Richard patted George, and he found George's cell phone; Dawn was quick to snatch it from Alpha Richard's hand. It had racy text messages between the two, and Dawn didn't want to risk anyone seeing those. Those were private.

George looked at Dawn, and he regretted not having a mind-link.

"Be careful," Dawn said.

George's jaw ticked. To hell with secrets and everything. After this fight, he will come out as a victor or loser. In any case, there will be no need to hide.

George was confident that Damon and Talia would protect Dawn if the worst happened. With that, George made two quick steps to Dawn and wrapped his arms around her as his lips crashed on hers with urgency.

"Watch me win, my love," George said, his voice barely above a whisper.

"I will," Dawn responded. "Your parents will be watching too."

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Chapter 936: An Alpha's challenge (4)

Alpha Edward closed his eyes and took deep breaths while chanting to himself that he can do this. Sure, he didn't fight in ages, and using his aura was not allowed, but he could always use a small burst, only to obstruct George's movements.

George was a Commander for a reason. He was the best warrior of the Red Moon pack, but Alpha Edward was still the Alpha of that same pack, and no one should take him lightly.

Alpha Edward heard people whispering about three people leaving the Red Moon pack, right in front of their Alpha, two of them part of the Redmayne family. Alpha Edward was never this humiliated in his life, and to make everything worse, the wretched reporters were documenting everything!

It didn't matter. He will turn this situation around. As long as spectators don't get too close to feel his Alpha aura, it will be fine. Actually, George was his Commander, the most faithful warrior. Will he dare to fight seriously against his Alpha? With this thought, Alpha Edward's confidence soared.

Penelope watched the scene of people gathering around George and Dawn, who held each other.

Penelope remembered how cold George was toward her during the party, yet Dawn was cocooned in George's arms for everyone to see. No man ever held her like that, passionately, possessively, in front of people. And George was shirtless and undeniably handsome.

And then there was Damon. Tall, muscular, powerful... with Talia by his side.

She saw them all during the party. Sandy and Tyler, Keith and Arya, Alpha Maddox with Tatiana, Alpha Anthony with Kalina, Owen and Zina. Everyone had someone. Even young Alpha James was holding onto an unknown woman.

Penelope released a frustrated breath. Were all Alphas taken?

Talia's words still echoed in her mind. Was she incapable of doing anything without her identity as the princess of the Night Sentinel pack?

From the corner of her eye, Penelope saw a figure moving away from the fighting area. It was Nora.

Penelope moved swiftly to catch up.

"Are you not interested in the fight?"

Nora froze. Why was this female blocking her? The whole evening, Nora kept a low profile. Her father told her she had to attend, so she did, but now that things had reached this point and her father was not in sight, Nora decided to make her exit.

Maybe others didn't know who George was, but Nora saw plenty while in the Dark Howlers pack, and she knew that Alpha Edward was screwed. Nora was on her way to her room to pack her belongings and scam before the whole pack went to hell, but she couldn't say that to Penelope.

"What is there to see when the outcome is obvious?" Nora asked.

"You don't want to watch your Alpha showing dominance?" Penelope asked. "I thought the two of you are... close." She gave her a meaningful look.

Nora smiled nervously. "I saw Alpha Edward showing dominance many times. Since it's novel for you, you should watch it. I am Beta's daughter, and I have important things to do. If you excuse me..." And just like that, Nora dashed toward the packhouse, leaving confused Penelope behind.

George exchanged nods with Alphas that gathered around him, and then he moved to stand in the fighting area.

"Where is Mindy?" Maddox asked while looking around.

Talia responded, "Mindy and Gideon went with the Shaman of the Red Moon pack to talk to the pack members. No matter how tonight ends, people will be unsettled."

Kalina and Tatiana exchanged a few words, and then Kalina asked Talia, "Can you tell us where Mindy is? I'm sure they could use help."

Talia called Arya and told her to take them where Mindy and Gideon were. Like this, everyone had a task. Talia wanted to go as well, but she didn't want to leave Damon's side. Damon agreed.

"Are you sure this is the right thing to do?" Tony asked Damon while pointing with his chin toward George.

Damon was sure. Almost.

Damon never relied on others to fight in his stead, so this was a first. Of course, Damon investigated the history of the Frostcrest pack, and George's story matched it.

Alpha Conor and Luna Eliana had a toddler boy who disappeared at the time when their pack was invaded by the Red Moon pack, with Alpha Howard leading it. Damon believed that George was that boy, but he was unsure if George's desire for revenge was still intact. Twenty years was a long time to change one's mind, and George was too young to remember his parents and life in the Frostcrest pack. What if George accepted his position as a Commander of the Red Moon pack? Without a pack of his own, that was the highest George could go, and George expressed his lack of interest in leading a pack, so maybe he decided to settle with what he had and to leave the past in the past...

"I believe in George," Talia said to Damon and for everyone else to hear. "He is a man of his word."

Damon looked at the little woman by his side and smiled. He knew she could feel his doubts creeping in.

Damon pulled Talia closer to him and pressed his lips on her forehead. "Thank you, kitten."

Talia loved the feeling of Damon's lips against her skin as he spoke, and she loved how caring and open he was about expressing his thoughts and emotions.

In the fighting area...

Alpha Edward removed his shirt and threw it on the side. He looked like a man in his late forties, with a notable physique that reminded everyone he was an Alpha. Muscles covered every inch of Alpha Edward's body with a dust of chest hair that trailed down to his navel.

Now that Alpha Edward stood close to George, everyone noticed that George's physique was not lacking. Actually, George was bigger. But this was not about the mass of one's body. It was about confidence and the bloodlust that showed George was not at a disadvantage.

The air tensed as George stood in front of Alpha Edward, and the world around them faded.

This was it. Alpha Edward was not the one who killed his parents, but he continued the vile practices of his father. Alpha Edward benefited from the spoils they took from many packs that fell under the Red Moon pack as it expanded. Werewolves without a place to flee who didn't want to become rogues accepted their fate in the Red Moon pack as lower than Omegas.

They took numerous kids under the pretense of providing a home to orphans, but they conveniently forgot to say that the Red Moon pack was the reason why kids like George and Owen were orphaned in the first place!

As far as George could remember, he watched Omegas being treated as dirt in a pack where the stronger ones rule without mercy and where the concept of helping each other didn't exist. It was a sickening and brutal place. They raised kids with teachings on how that was the way everyone became stronger, but it was just brainwashing to conceal the fact that the ones at the top suppressed weaker ones for their own agenda.

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Chapter 937: An Alpha's challenge (5)

Alpha Edward called through their pack link, 'George, let's not drag this. We will exchange a few hits, and I will end it quickly.'

George didn't get it. What did that mean? 'You will end it quickly?'

'We need to cooperate. I don't want to hurt you seriously. I know you accepted Alpha Damon's request to benefit the Red Moon pack.' This was the only explanation that worked in Alpha Edward's mind.

'Alpha Edward, you should know I take every challenge seriously.'

'Don't be stubborn. I don't want to harm you. I will need a capable warrior like you to subdue rebelling units of the Dark Howlers pack when this is over. You can attack first. I will dodge, and then I will counterattack and take you down. Let's make it believable. You admit the defeat, and I assume that Alpha Damon won't go down willingly. I will provoke him to make a fuss and then use the rules of the Alpha challenge for other Alphas to support us. In the worst case, he will retaliate, and we will subdue him together.'

George needed a moment to process this information. Was that why Alpha Edward didn't panic? He believed that George was one of his loyal dogs.

George looked left and right and met the eyes of many from their audience. How many of them were loyal to Alpha Edward? Not many. Most of them stuck to Alpha Edward because of fear and benefits.

George assumed a fighting stance. "I apologize for any future offense I make, but I must take this challenge seriously, or my reputation as a Commander will be damaged."

Alpha Edward nodded magnanimously. "I understand. You do what you need to, and I will do the same. Do you want to get the first... UGH!" Alpha Edward couldn't finish that question as George was already in front of him, and Alpha Edward swayed awkwardly to avoid George's fist directed at him.

Dawn held her breath and her eyes were open to the point of hurting.

'It will be OK,' Zina's voice sounded in Dawn's head through their pack link. 'Owen told me that George is the best warrior in the pack. He can do this.'

'Thanks, Zi,' Dawn responded without removing her eyes from George who was attacking Alpha Edward.

Three fists missed, but the fourth one landed in Alpha Edward's abdomen, propelling him backward. Before Alpha Edward could recuperate, George's kick reached Alpha Edward's knee, and next was a punch in the shoulder.

Alpha Edward curled down to roll away from George. He needed a breather. He was hoping that George would put up a good show, but wasn't this too realistic?

Before Alpha Edward could regain his bearings, a kick landed on his lower back, and he fell to the ground face first. How embarrassing!

'George!' Alpha Edward roared in the pack link, but there was no response. 'You are taking this too far!'

"Get up!" George growled, and Alpha Edward raised his head to see George standing above him.

Alpha Edward pushed himself up to jump at George. His attack was cut short when his face collided with the sole of George's elegant black shoe.

George got those shoes with the intention of dancing with Dawn, but there was no dancing because he couldn't disclose that Dawn was his mate. Because of Alpha Edward!

The stinging pain told Alpha Edward that his nose was broken. What the hell!?

Alpha Edward's vision blurred, and he shook his head before stumbling to his feet.

'George! You need to stop this. Now!'

Alpha Edward was still half bent when a heavy blow landed at the base of his neck, and he fell down to his knees.

Alpha Edward froze. He was kneeling. An Alpha was kneeling! And so many people were watching!

A ferocious growl ripped from Alpha Edward's chest as humiliation mixed with helplessness, and he was determined to wash away his grievances with blood. No price was too high to make this go away!

A violent surge of Alpha Aura burst from Alpha Edward, making everyone in the audience gasp in shock.

Owen hugged Zina, and James shielded Cornelia with his body, but they still groaned under the energy that made it difficult to breathe.

Talia waved her hand, calling them to stand behind her. James moved with Cornelia, and Owen carried Zina, whose legs refused to budge, and they all visibly relaxed when they got there. It was like Talia had an invisible shield that repelled Alpha Edward's aura. They never saw anything like it!

"I feared this would happen!" Tony shouted while anxiously pointing at George and Alpha Edward. He would go there, but he was not sure if he would be able to help or just get in the way and embarrass himself. Tony practiced hard, but a few months of training can't replace the years he missed because his father denied him the preparations other young Alphas had.

"This is against the rules! We need to stop this!" Maddox was about to enter the fighting area, but Damon's hand landed on his shoulder to hold him back.

"Wait. Let George handle this," Damon said. Now that he confirmed George was serious, Damon had no concerns.

Everyone stared at the scene of George standing straight in front of Alpha Edward like he was not bothered by the pressure.

"An Alpha," Maddox said under his breath. "And a strong one." He shot a side-glance at Damon. "You knew."

Damon smirked smugly. The fact that he was the only one in their group who knew, made Damon feel important.

Maddox moved closer to Damon and asked in a low voice, "Is he stronger than I am?"

Damon shrugged. "You will need to spar to find out."

Talia couldn't believe it. Was everything a competition? Will they ever grow up?

Alpha Edward stared at George as possessed. What the hell was going on? "You... you... who are you?"

"You will die today because you don't have the answer to that question," George responded icily.

Alpha Edward's eyes flashed in realization. This was serious. Screw the rules! He already broke them by using his aura, and there was only one more move left.

With a deep growl, Alpha Edward's clothes exploded, and a massive gray wolf appeared in his place.

'What's going on?' Talia asked, unsure why Damon's anxiousness spiked. She could feel him tensing by her side.

'Alpha Edward is cornered. In these challenges, the one who shifts first admits he is at a disadvantage. Unfortunately for George, Alpha Edward's command over the pack is stronger when he is in wolf form.' Damon wished that George had left the Red Moon pack before taking this challenge.

Talia's brows came together in concern. 'Will Alpha Edward be able to influence George?'

'It will depend on George's willpower. Alphas spend years polishing their skill to command their wolf and pack members, and George didn't have a chance to practice this. No matter how skilled he is in fighting, this is like a veteran warrior facing a child who trained with video games.'

Talia swallowed hard. This didn't sound good.

Talia and Damon had an advantage because their wolves could talk. It was easier to communicate. Others mostly go based on reading emotions, requiring more time to figure out the dynamics between the human and the wolf parts.

'Lis?' Talia called.

'There is nothing we can do about his willpower,' Liseli responded right away. 'But I can sense that his wolf is strong.'

'Let's hope he is strong enough.'

George's face contorted in a grimace.

"George!" Dawn shouted desperately when Alpha Edward pounced on George, who stood frozen.

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Chapter 938: An Alpha's challenge (6)

Dawn muffled her cry with her palm when the gray wolf tumbled with George, who moved just in time to protect his neck from sharp teeth coming at him.

Growls, grunts, and yelps overlapped from the human and the animal as the cloud of dust rose around them, and everyone stared there anxiously in the hope of seeing what was going on.

Damon was tense like a string on a bow. He was not used to being a spectator, and this situation was nerve-wracking.

'Damon?' Talia called through their mind-link, and she let him sense her worry. Why was George not shifting into his wolf? Did Alpha Edward use some underhanded method to incapacitate George?

The dust was so thick now that they couldn't see what was going on there.

'Trust in George,' Damon said to Talia. 'He is fighting for his past, present, and future. He won't fall easily.'

With a high-pitched squeal, the gray wolf flew out of the cloud of dust, landing heavily on his back and leaving a trail on the ground as he slid backward.

Everything was silent.

The gray wolf stood up and snorted. He shook his head before narrowing his eyes on the cloud of dust that twirled in front of him.

A long second later, a dark brown wolf emerged from there, sneering to show his long canine teeth. Ruffled fur sticky from blood revealed claw marks on his left hind leg, but George's pain was numbed by the adrenaline.

Owen's eyes were open wide in disbelief. He and George had been friends from childhood, but Owen never saw George in his wolf form.

As Alpha Edward stood there, Owen confirmed that George's wolf was bigger between the two.

If anyone doubted if George was an Alpha, those doubts were gone now. One could impact their muscle mass by exercising and eating a protein-rich diet, but the size of the wolf was proportional to power. Only Alphas could grow to such size.

Alpha William sucked in a sharp breath.

"What is it?" Alpha Richard asked.

"The mark on the boy's head."

Alpha Richard narrowed his eyes to see the light brown patch of fur on top of George's head that resembled a five-pointed star. "What about it?"

"That's the mark of the Frostcrest pack," Alpha William said. "I knew Alpha Conor. He had the same mark. It runs in their family."

"Are you saying," Alpha Richard spoke in a low voice, "...that's the young Alpha of the Frostcrest pack?"

"Not young. With Alpha Conor gone, Commander George IS the Alpha of the Frostcrest pack. And Red Moon pack is responsible for their demise."

Alpha Richard was unsettled. "What does that mean for us?"

Alpha William was not sure. "If George were just a warrior, Edward's win would be certain. However, now that we know he is an Alpha, things are tricky. Alpha Conor was not a fighter, but his wolf was strong. If this boy inherited his father's disposition, and he sharpened his potential with the training of a warrior, Edward is in trouble."

"What should we do?" Alpha Richard asked in an urgent whisper.

Alpha William shrugged. "There is nothing for us to do. Edward challenging the Dark Howlers pack was not part of our plan. Since he did that on his own, win or lose, we are just witnesses."

"Can we do that?"

Alpha William snorted. "Do you think we will benefit if Edward wins?"

Alpha Richard shook his head, and Alpha William continued, "Since you know that's the case, why do you think we will suffer if he loses?"

Alpha Richard knew it made sense, but it was not a secret that the two of them were closest to Alpha Edward. Will other Alphas just let them be?

In the fighting area, gray and brown wolf circled slowly while releasing low growls and observing, measuring, and deciding.

Damon was scrutinizing every movement of two wolves while talking to Talia through their mind-link.

'They are suppressing the other with their aura in order to gauge where they stand in terms of power. However, using aura too much takes concentration, and they need to strike a balance. George's aura is stronger than Alpha Edward's, but George had limited training in his wolf form because he couldn't reveal his wolf here.'

'Where did he train?' Talia asked.

'At the Dark Howlers pack. I taught him a few moves.'

'You did?' Talia asked.

'I tried, but then he found Dawn and ended up screwing her most of the time.'

Talia didn't want to think about what George and Dawn did in the privacy of their bedroom. 'Are you telling me that George's wolf is stronger, but Alpha Edward has more practice?'

Damon confirmed. 'Correct. This is a game of skill, instincts, and strength. George has an advantage in terms of strength, while Alpha Edward is better if we look at their skills. As for instincts, it's a coin toss because both of them are under pressure. Every move could be deadly.'

Talia nodded in understanding. She noticed that audience was barely breathing, and no one was blinking.

The reporter stopped taking photos since George's wolf appeared.

It was intense.

The gray wolf snapped his maw and sneered, and the brown wolf jumped at him.

There was a collective inhale as two wolves rolled together, each trying to bite the other's neck and end the fight.

"Ahh!" Dawn cried when the gray wolf bit the brown one's front leg.

George's wolf managed to move and avoid fatal injury, but the amount of blood flowing showed it was serious.

Alpha Edward's wolf had no intention of letting go, and George's wolf whined while twisting his body, and then he bit the hind leg of the gray wolf.

With one jerk of his head, the brown wolf had a mouthful of fur and flesh, and the gray wolf yelped.

The brown wolf used this chance to move away and bite the gray wolf again, this time going for the neck. It was close.

The gray wolf kicked and snapped his maw, but it was in vain.

George's wolf was biting harder and releasing low growls as George's aura flared to suppress Alpha Edward's movements.

Damon released the breath he was holding, and Talia knew it was over.

It was like time stopped as everyone looked at the scene in front of them.

Eventually, George's wolf stepped away from the gray wolf, who twitched on the ground, unable to get up and continue fighting.

"AWOOOOO!"

An earth-shaking howl ripped from George's wolf as he raised his head to the moonless night sky.

George groaned as his form changed into one of a man.

His deep brown fur covered up the injuries, but his slightly tanned flesh was now mostly deep red from blood and engraved with cuts and gashes everywhere. The worst one was on his shoulder, which was bleeding profusely.

"Shift back," George said to the gray wolf.

There was no response.

George inhaled forcibly. "SHIFT BACK!" An Alpha command echoed, and Alpha Edward's form was revealed after a few painful seconds.

"Woah!" Alpha William exclaimed. "Conor's son has the strength to command another Alpha."

Alpha Richard swallowed hard. George was in human form, and he forced a command on an Alpha wolf. That can't be good. What if he turns on them?

George swayed a bit before steadying himself and looking down at Alpha Edward, whose body was soaking in the pool of blood.

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Chapter 939: An Alpha's challenge (7)

Dawn wanted to go to George, but Keith blocked her way.

"The fight ends when one of them dies or forfeits," Keith reminded her. "If you go there, people will doubt the validity of George's victory. Is that what you want?"

Dawn bit her lower lip and shook her head. She didn't think about the stupid challenge. Her mate was there, injured and bleeding, and she wanted to be by his side.

"Conor Shaw and Eliana Shaw," George said. He didn't speak loudly, but everyone heard him. "My parents. They died because of you."

Alpha Edward blinked while trying to focus. What did George say? The pain was numbing all of his senses.

"I never heard of those names," Alpha Edward responded weakly.

George's jaw ticked. "Alpha Conor Shaw and Luna Eliana Shaw, of the Frostcrest pack. The Red Moon pack invaded us, your father killed my father, and my mother died of heartbreak soon after. Your warriors plundered my treasury and did unspeakable things to the females. You took my territory, imprisoned my people, and whoever dared to object was killed on the spot."

George spat a mouthful of blood on the ground next to Alpha Edward. "I was a toddler, and not many knew what I looked like, so you took me in as an orphan."

George sneered. "The reward for surviving diabolical conditions was another hell you called training to be the warrior of the Red Moon pack and die with bullshit nonsense how it's for the glory of the pack. There is nothing glorious about dying!"

"I raised you. Without me, you would be no one!" Alpha Edward sprayed blood from his mouth.

George squatted and looked at Alpha Edward mockingly. "Now you know who killed you and why."

"Traitor!"

George released some of his aura and Alpha Edward groaned. "In order to be a traitor, one must be loyal at some point. You never had my loyalty. If there is such a thing as hell, tell your father that I look forward to the day when we will meet."

Alpha Edward's mouth opened in a silent scream as George increased his aura, and the cracking sounds were heard like someone was snapping twigs.

Alpha Edward's body contorted as his bones and internal organs burst, and the pool of blood under him was rapidly increasing even though the thirsty soil was soaking it in.

George looked at the lifeless body. He imagined this moment many times, and in his mind, it was more dramatic. Music? Fireworks? Special effects? There was nothing extraordinary about Alpha Edward's death. It was unremarkable.

George stood up and looked at the moonless sky that was speckled with countless stars, and George wondered if his parents saw this.

He did it. He avenged their deaths. Now what?

Soft fabric covered his midsection, and he felt a pair of arms snaking around his waist from behind. He didn't need to look back to know it was Dawn. Only she smelled of cinnamon, and her touch came with the addictive sparks of their bond.

"It will be alright, George," Dawn said. "Alpha Edward is gone, and we don't need to hide anymore."

George wished it was so simple. He looked around to see many Alphas staring at him, and he remembered where he was and why.

"Alpha Damon," George called. "As your Champion, I defeated Alpha Edward. It was my right to decide if I will show him mercy, and I decided against it."

"You did good, Alpha George," Damon said. "In the name of the Dark Howlers pack, thank you. If you ever need assistance, you can consider us your allies."

George lifted his chin. "Thank you, Alpha Damon, Alpha Natalia." For keeping his secrets and for allowing him to avenge his parents. George had Dawn now, and he had no regrets.

James stepped forward and addressed the people gathered. "For the ones who didn't hear it clearly, Commander George is the son of Alpha Conor and Luna Eliana. He is the Alpha of the Frostcrest pack." James turned to George. "Alpha George, do you know what you will do now?"

George wrapped his arms around Dawn. Other than being with her, he didn't plan anything else.

"I think the bigger question is what will happen to the Red Moon pack," Alpha William said, and everyone turned to look at Damon.

Damon's eyes moved in slow motion over everyone present, and he paused when he saw people emerging from the forest on the North side of the training grounds.

Mindy, Gideon, and the Shaman of the Red Moon pack were at the front, and Arya, Tatiana, and Kalina were with them. Little by little, a dozen people became hundreds, and they all had the same lost expressions of uncertainty. They felt the pack bond breaking when Alpha Edward died and were unsure what to do.

'People need a guarantee that they won't be abandoned and that they are not moving from one thralldom to another,' Gideon's voice sounded in Damon's head.

"This is a lot of land for me to manage, and I don't need more members," Damon said loudly so everyone could hear him.

James frowned in disapproval. "If we just leave this, it will be chaos. Other packs will fight for the territory, and people will either be enslaved or become rogues."

Damon raised his hand, indicating to James to be patient. "The Dark Howlers pack territory is far away from here. It doesn't make sense for me to modify the borders of other packs to connect two territories or to have two separate regions to manage. Since it's in everyone's interest to suppress rogues and avoid chaos, I suggest that all Alphas present join me in discussing an acceptable solution."

Damon looked at Alpha William and Alpha Richard. "Based on the rules of the challenge, this territory and everything on it is mine. If you agree to compensate me, I am willing to trade you for it."

Damon turned back to James. "As for people, I want to give them the freedom to choose which pack they want to join. If they want to join the Dark Howlers pack, they will need to relocate. I have a lot of unused land. Accommodations and jobs will be provided."

James nodded in agreement and turned to the crowd that was still swelling.

"People of the Red Moon pack!" James called in an official tone. "As you can see, Alpha Edward fell. The Red Moon pack as we know it is no more. I accepted Alpha Damon's offer to be his Gamma. The Dark Howlers pack is known to provide fair treatment to all members, and they accept anyone who comes in peace. I won't tell you what to do next. Think for yourself. This is your chance to decide which pack you want to join. You can approach the Alpha of your chosen pack and ask if they will take you in. If you have family elsewhere, you can go to them. If you don't have anyone, you won't be discarded." James glanced at the time. "I expect to see your decision by eight o'clock in the morning. We will arrange for people to write down lists for each pack, so you can come and give your names and occupations..."

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Chapter 940: Reorganization (1)

James quickly organized everything, and people followed his orders without hesitation because he was a familiar face, their young Alpha James. The reality was yet to sink in.

George had a number of his people ready, a mix of warriors and Omegas. Warriors took over the security of the packhouse and surroundings, and Omegas were led by Estelle to work in the packhouse. Per James's advice, George prepared dozens of cell phones, and they distributed them to their people so they could communicate. It was less effective, but it worked.

Owen volunteered to keep an eye on border patrols.

They acted swiftly and decisively because if hostile units found out that Red Moon pack members didn't have their pack link anymore, hell would break loose. Unfortunately, the Red Moon pack had a lot of enemies.

They called a medic to tend to George's wounds and clean him up, and several warriors carried Alpha Edward's body away from prying eyes.

Lunas stayed with the people of the Red Moon pack in order to provide advice about resettling in different packs and to help document everything.

Talia led the way to Alpha Edward's study. They planned for all Alphas in attendance to meet there, but Talia paused at the door and scrunched her nose.

She looked at Damon, whose brows were together in a frown. He also picked up a thick scent of blood.

Damon entered the study first, and they found Ana's mangled body on the floor. She was naked, and every inch of her flesh was covered in bruises, and there were numerous cuts. The tan carpet under her was now dark red due to the blood it soaked in.

Keith approached the body to check. "She is not dead."

A second later, Ana confirmed it with a groan. If she were human, those injuries would kill her.

Seeing no one moved, Tony asked, "Should we call a medic?"

Damon looked at Talia, and he squeezed her hand. He recognized Ana from the encounter in George's villa.

Ana's eyes fluttered open, and she hissed when she saw Talia.

"You," Ana said. "It's all your fault." She came to tell the truth, but Alpha Edward didn't believe her. He beat her brutally, and then he left her there so he could attend the party. Ana was a she-wolf, and she wouldn't die from that, but she could feel pain, and it hurt like hell.

Talia didn't know how to feel. There was no glee or happiness she assumed would come when facing Ana's suffering, but Talia didn't feel sorry for the female either. It was an unknown numbness that made Talia uncomfortable.

Ana's eyes moved over people who milled in the study, and she swallowed hard when she realized too many Alphas were looking at her questionably.

"Is she a spy?" Maddox asked.

"No," Talia responded. "She is an Omega working here."

"Do you want to send her to the dungeon?" Damon asked. He guessed that Talia didn't want to grant relief of death to Ana.

Talia shook her head and said to Keith and Arya, "Take her to the attic."

"Attic?" Keith asked.

"That's the place where I suffered because of her. Now it's time to swap places."

Ana's eyes flashed, and she turned to James. "Young Alpha James! Did you hear that? This confirmed that my story was true. She is not Luna Talia or Alpha Natalia. She is an impostor, a lowly Omega who used to work here. She was hiding in the attic and was everyone's doormat and... Ahh!"

Ana shrieked when Arya grabbed a fistful of Ana's hair and lifted her off the ground.

"Don't you dare badmouth my Luna!" Arya said angrily.

"Young Alpha James!" Ana cried for help, and her stomach dropped when she realized James was totally focused on the female wearing a baby-blue cocktail dress by his side.

Keith looked at Talia with a complex expression, remembering how skinny and bruised she was when he saw her the first time. Was it because of Ana? It looked like it. Talia's gaze was firm, but Keith guessed that Talia's emotions were unstable.

"Arya and I will take care of this trash," Keith said, and then he asked Damon through the pack link, 'Are we allowed to kill her?'

'Don't make it easy on her.'

Keith bowed, and then he and Arya walked out while dragging Ana behind them.

"Are we supposed to have a meeting here?" Alpha William asked with a grimace while looking at the bloody stain on the carpet. It reeked of blood.

"There is a conference room at the end of the hallway," James said, and he turned to Cornelia. "Are you hungry? I didn't see you eat much." His mate was pregnant, and he wanted to feed her.

"Let's take half an hour break before we meet. I'm sure everyone could use a few minutes to process what happened here." James said, and then he gestured toward the big map on the wall. "This is the territory of the Red Moon pack. Alpha Damon said that he was not interested in land, but he was willing to trade for it. I suggest you think of the area you want and what you will offer in exchange for it..."

...

Damon followed Talia to the third floor. That's where the master suites were, which belonged to Alpha Edward and Luna Layla. Talia knew there were two suites as Alpha and Luna of the Red Moon pack didn't share a bedroom.

Damon thought that she would go to the suite belonging to Alpha Edward, but Talia went to the door across the hall.

Talia knocked on the door, and she waited for "Come in" before letting herself inside. Damon was right behind her.

Luna Layla was packing a suitcase. She looked up warily. "I'm getting one suitcase of clothes and toiletries to last me a few days until I figure out what to do. I left jewelry and things of value behind."

Talia waved, indicating that was not important. "We are not here to check what you are taking."

"You should be," Luna Layla said. "I assume Edward is dead. I could feel the bond break fully, and I'm confident he wouldn't let me go willingly. Everything here belongs to you now. Do whatever you want to with clothes, but this..." She reached for one purple palm-sized box. "It belonged to my grandmother and her mother before that. Can you ensure Marcy gets this?"

Talia pressed her lips into a line, and she didn't accept the box. "Luna Layla..."

"Just Layla. I am not anyone's Luna anymore."

Talia looked at her sadly.

'She deserves to know,' Liseli said, and Talia agreed.

"Marcy is dead."

Luna Layla's brows came together. "Dead? How?"

"She was in the Blue River pack when rogues attacked after Luna Tatiana's ceremony. Marcy was one of the casualties. I am sorry for your loss."

"Rogues? I was there and... I didn't know..." Luna Layla said absentmindedly. "In a way, it was Edward's fault. If he didn't meddle with those people..." She shook her head.

"Do you know something about people Alpha Edward worked with?" Talia asked.

Luna Layla shrugged. "He didn't confide in me. But I saw things. Recently, he was super secretive. Once, he was talking drunk, and he said how he will be young again. I don't know from where that came, but Beta Raymond might know. Edward didn't share much with his Beta, he was always selfish, but Raymond had a way of gathering information."

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