

The Alpha's Bride

#Chapter 941: Reorganization (2)

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When Luna Layla mentioned Beta Raymond, Damon remembered... "Beta Raymond is missing. Do you know where he might be?"

"If he guessed that Edward would challenge you and lose..." Luna Layla paused. "In the basement, there is a secret door. At the end of the hallway, on the right, there is a brick with irregular patterns. If you press it, it will expose a lever that opens the door. I saw Edward sneaking there more than once in the last few weeks. If I saw him, Raymond saw him as well."

Talia turned to Damon. "You should check it out. Take Sandy and Tyler with you, and be careful."

Damon knew they shouldn't delay this as Raymond might be destroying evidence or stealing important things, assuming that he didn't do the damage already and fled. But Damon couldn't leave Talia alone.

"I will be fine, Damon," Talia assured him. "I want to talk to Luna Layla a bit, and then I will rest until the meeting starts."

'Do you think anyone can harm me?' Talia asked through their mind-link.

'Trust in mate,' Sapa grumbled in Damon's head.

Damon puffed his cheeks. Even his wolf was set on separating him from Talia!

Reluctantly, Damon left.

Talia turned to Luna Layla, who was hugging the purple box to her chest. When she noticed Talia's eyes on her, Luna Layla quickly wiped her moist cheeks with the back of her palm. "You probably think I'm a failure."

"I don't," Talia said. "You did what you thought was the best at that time. I didn't stay here to talk about the past."

"Why are you here, Alpha Natalia?"

Talia looked around. "Are you sure you want to leave?"

"Even if you allow me to keep it, this is not my home. There are too many bad memories here."

"I was told that the way to erase bad memories is to replace them with happy ones," Talia said.

"This pack is done. I heard Omegas talking about how Alpha Damon won't take over. Are you telling me to stay here and wait for rogues to come?"

"Damon won't take over, but he won't leave this land unprotected. Land can be divided, but this packhouse is only one, and it will be left empty."

Talia had an idea on her mind. She didn't understand how Luna Layla could be such a wasteful Luna who only cared about glitz and glam while neglecting her children. However, after hearing the truth, Talia realized that Luna Layla suffered and endured for more than two decades. Overall, Talia's opinion of Luna Layla rose and she thought of giving the woman a purpose.

"Why don't you seek Chester and come to live here? If you do so, I will assure this piece of land will remain neutral. You can keep the third floor as your living quarters, and the bottom can be an area for Alphas to meet, similarly to how Guardians are providing facilities for the Council of Alphas."

Talia didn't want to rely on Guardians anymore, but Alphas needed a neutral location where they could meet. This place would serve the purpose perfectly.

"Damon and I will announce that you are under our protection. No one will dare to bully you. With your experience as the Luna of the Red Moon pack, you will be perfect for the role that requires management, style, and firmness when dealing with willful Alphas. You are free to pick trustworthy people to work here and stand guard; if you don't have any, we will help you pick."

"That's very generous. Why would you do that?" Luna Layla asked. "I'm sure there are many others who would do that job."

Talia shrugged. "James is now Damon's Gamma. James is a smart male, but he is lonely. If you consider yourself as failed in motherhood, it's not too late to fix it. Create good memories for yourself and James."

Luna Layla smiled a little. "James is lucky to have you and Alpha Damon."

"Not only us. James made quite a few friends, and he has George and..." Talia couldn't bring up Cornelia. That was James' to share or not. She looked at the purple box. "I know Marcy is gone, but maybe you will want to give that to James' mate."

"You are assuming James will want to talk to me."

"Right now, James is confused, but eventually, he will look back and... Chester might want to meet his son."

Luna Layla cocked an eyebrow. "Your arguments are improving, Alpha Natalia."

Talia's eyes flashed in glee. "Are my arguments good enough to convince you to stay here? What do you say?"

"I will think about your proposition, Alpha Natalia. Can I get a week?"

"Sure," Talia responded. "When you are ready, just come here. No one will touch this packhouse or things in it until you return." Talia remembered that they wanted to search for things related to witches, so she added a disclaimer, "We will confiscate things belonging to Alpha Edward and the Red Moon pack, but your assets will remain yours."

...

Sometime later, Alphas met in the conference room with the goal of discussing the division of the territory that belonged to the Red Moon pack. Cristian and a few more Alphas attended the meeting via conference call.

Damon returned from his exploration in the dungeon, and he told Talia that he had found the secret door that opened to a long and winding hallway. Eventually, he discovered several doors, but they were all locked, and he didn't want to risk breaking stuff and potentially damaging what was inside. Knowing Alpha Edward, those things would be booby-trapped. They decided to revisit that location after the meeting with James.

Damon didn't catch a whiff of Beta Raymond, so he instructed Sandy and Tyler to check security footage and figure out when and where the guy disappeared because he was not in the packhouse, and no one had seen him from before the Alpha Challenge.

Talia felt awkward for being the only female in the conference room, and she wanted to go outside and help with resettling Omegas. However, Damon told her that she needed to represent the Midnight Guardians pack regardless of if she was interested in any territory that was about to be divided. Also, he wanted to keep her in his visual range. His kitten was a magnet for trouble.

Before anyone spoke, Damon announced that the Lightclaw pack and the Blue River pack were getting a sizeable chunk of land, which would connect them, and in extension, it would connect the Spring Leaf and the Dark Howlers pack also.

What most of the Alphas didn't know was that this area included the portal to the Midnight Guardians pack. Like this, Damon was at ease, knowing that Tony would control that area, and since they were allies, Damon could send there patrols from the Dark Howlers pack without arousing suspicion. The Midnight Guardians pack will be safer.

Talia looked at Damon gratefully, and she spoke through their mind-link, 'Thank you, Damon.'

Damon smirked. 'I will do anything to make your life easier, kitten.'

Talia knew that. Damon always put her first, and she wanted to kiss him until her lips turned numb. 'Remind me to reward you after this meeting.'

His eyebrows shot up. 'I can call for a break right now.'

Talia stifled a giggle. Damon was outrageous and naughty and hers, and she loved it. She loved him.

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Chapter 942: Reorganization (3) [Bonus chapter]

The territory of the Spring Leaf pack was next to get a boost in size.

Maddox, Cristian, and Damon agreed to discuss at a later time if this would impact their internal division of land. Since the last social mixer, many of their pack members crossed borders to be with their mates, and the interaction between the three packs became smoother.

Tony had concerns about accepting additional land since he didn't have enough manpower to secure it, but Maddox and Cristian assured him they would work it out together.

Despite his worries, Tony was eager to join the open-borders coalition. He was the youngest Alpha among the four, and he was looking forward to additional backing that Damon, Cristian, and Maddox would provide. Also, he was sure that Kalina would be ecstatic to hear that she was closer to her sisters now.

With that settled, Damon turned to his next ally.

"Alpha George," Damon called. "I believe you have members of the Frostcrest pack who are willing to follow you. Do you want to settle in a specific territory?"

Seeing that George didn't respond, James pointed at the map. "This belonged to the Frostcrest pack. If you want to continue the legacy of your ancestors, you should go there. The packhouse was demolished more than a decade ago, but we can allocate resources from the Red Moon pack's treasury so you can rebuild the packhouse and other necessary structures."

George pressed his lips into a line. He was not attached to any particular piece of land, and he also had another concern. "There are about seventy people from the Frostcrest pack here. Less than half are warriors. Even if we call people who found refuge in other packs two decades ago, and they agree to follow me, I won't have more than one hundred pack members with able bodies." There might be more, but George didn't have their loyalty.

Many were like George, without memories of the Frostcrest pack, and they would be no different than picking up random people. There was also an unknown number of survivors who were old, which meant that George would need to provide for them.

George had no experience in leading a pack, and he didn't want to get more than he could chew only to collapse on him. The bottom line was, "That's not enough people for a pack. If I take over the land and rogues find out about it, they will come at us, and we will be helpless." He would be stuck in defending the land he didn't want in the first place.

If it were up to George, he would spend the rest of his days with Dawn, having sex and cuddling.

"Five or a thousand, what matters is that you have people who are willing to follow you," Maddox said. "As an Alpha, it's your duty to lead them."

George was feeling guilty at the thought of Estelle, Adele, and other Omegas working at his villa, but it was simply not enough. He was about to argue with Maddox when James asked, "What if you can lead your people without worrying about safety?"

"How?" George asked.

James gestured toward Damon. "Alpha Damon has land that's not utilized. You can get your pack members to occupy an area within the territory of the Dark Howlers pack with reasonable autonomy. We can work out the details of what you will do in exchange for Alpha Damon's protection. It can be mining, hunting, or trading. As long as you accept to do your part, the warriors of the Dark Howlers pack will assure the safety of your pack members."

James pointed at Maddox. "Alpha Maddox seems eager to help you. He can take the territory of the Frostcrest pack and accommodate refugees that are transitioning. Once you feel ready to grow, you can negotiate with him."

Maddox's brows came together. Did James just volunteer him for this?

George looked at Damon questionably, silently asking for Damon's opinion on the matter.

Damon shrugged. "If my Gamma says that an alliance in such form is possible, then you should trust him. Alpha Maddox is a man of his word. If he says he will take care of some land and people for you temporarily, he will do so."

Maddox didn't like this. He didn't agree to anything! Damon would always dump things on him, private or pack related. Because of Damon, Marcy ended up in the Blue River pack, and Maddox was stuck with mentoring Tony. And there were more. Much more. Preposterous!

James asked everyone to focus on the map of the Red Moon pack as he marked areas that were still available.

He made a circle around the packhouse of the Red Moon pack and turned to speak to the people in the conference room.

"Alpha Natalia expressed a need that this packhouse and the surrounding area stay neutral. This building will be repurposed to host meetings when multiple packs are involved, and we don't want anyone to have an advantage of the home territory. As long as you agree to keep this as a non-conflict zone, you will get contact information on how to summon other Alphas here for a meeting. Alphas and their proxies can request a meeting, regardless of their pack's size. Any objections?"

No one said anything, and James continued, "I believe each of you got his eye on a piece of territory. Step forward, speak your mind, and be clear on what you will give in return. No decisions will be made until all offers are heard. If two offers are similar, the one presented first will get priority."

Damon admired James more and more. His Gamma thought of everything! At this rate, Damon can take Talia on vacation for real. Ah, the possibilities!

Just as Damon was silently praising himself for his foresight about James' potential, Alpha Richard stood up and spoke to Damon, "Alpha Damon, is it alright for young Alpha James to be here?"

Damon noticed that Alpha William was nodding in agreement with Alpha Richard.

"Is there a problem?" Damon asked.

"Considering the state of the Red Moon pack, and Alpha Edward's demise, I'm sure young Alpha James is in shock and..." Alpha Richard's voice trailed, and he gripped the edge of the table while struggling to remain standing when Damon released his Alpha aura.

"You are talking about the Gamma of the Dark Howlers pack," Damon said in a dangerously low voice. "James is the most familiar with the land we are discussing, and I trust him. No one is forcing you to be here, Alpha Richard." Damon retracted his aura, and Alpha Richard plopped back into his chair.

Damon's eyes moved over other Alphas present. "Your status gives you the right to be present here. However, I won't allow anyone to undermine my pack and my people. Is that clear?"

James' lips stretched into a smile. Damon stood up to him, and he said that he trusts him. It was a good feeling. James couldn't wait for this meeting to be over so he could tell this to Cornelia. She will be proud of him and praise his decision to join the Dark Howlers pack. Definitely.

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Chapter 943: Reorganization (4)

"Who will go first?" James asked, and Alpha Peter was quick to raise his hand.

Interested Alphas took turns speaking, and James was taking notes on what they wanted and what they offered to the Dark Howlers pack in return.

Several packs offered regions within their current territories that bordered the Dark Howlers pack in exchange for expansion on the other side, into the unclaimed land of the Red Moon pack. Of course, they were hoping to gain more than they parted with, effectively increasing the size of their territories.

Some offered resources, valuables, business deals, and connections with influential humans, while others offered monetary payments that would stretch for generations in the future.

Everyone knew that with every next offer, the Dark Howlers pack was getting larger and stronger, but what choice did they have? Damon toppled Alpha Edward without lifting a finger, and it was obvious that George, Maddox, Cristian, and Tony stood by Damon. And then there was Talia. If those six came together, they could wipe out every other Alpha and take over their packs.

It was a monumental meeting where a handful of Alphas effectively changed the balance between packs and rewrote maps of the werewolf society.

Reporters of the WW Magazine were waiting eagerly outside of the conference room to get their scoop. This was huge!

After confirming that no one was left waiting to strike a deal, James glanced at his notes before announcing, "Alpha Damon will share his decision by the end of the day." James already took notes of deals that should be made and only needed Damon's approval.

"What if we disagree with his decision?" Alpha Patrick asked.

"In case of dispute, the strongest Alpha will break the tie," James responded. Seeing that Alpha Patrick and a few others frowned, James asked, "Is there a problem?"

Alpha Patrick cleared his throat. "How will Alpha Damon give us a fair judgment when he is the one who came up with the original decision?"

"Did I mention Alpha Damon? I was talking about the strongest Alpha," James said and gestured to the only female in the room.

Several Alphas in the room froze while processing what James said. Did he imply that Talia was the strongest Alpha? She was a female and a skinny one! Was Alpha Damon showing blatant favoritism to his mate?

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Damon asked Alpha Richard, who looked like he had swallowed a fly.

"Can I speak openly?"

"I wouldn't expect anything less from an Alpha," Damon responded and gestured to Alpha Richard to go ahead.

"Alpha Natalia is your mate. It is obvious that contesting your decision will be in vain."

Damon smirked. "If we are going to talk openly, I will do the same. You don't have the right to contest anything. This is not about you making a bid for unclaimed land. Alpha George won the challenge as my Champion, which means that the land belongs to me. I have the freedom to decide who will get it. If you have an objection, you are welcome to issue an Alpha challenge."

Alpha Richard's lips twitched. Alpha challenge? He was not happy with the situation, but he was not suicidal, alright?

Damon turned to Talia. "As my Gamma said, Talia will be the tiebreaker if there is conflict."

"Why should we listen to her?" Alpha William asked.

Damon couldn't believe this. "Are you doubting she is the strongest Alpha? Is it because she is female or because she is half your age? Did you forget what she did with the Sphere of Power during the last Council of the Alphas?"

Alpha William remembered because he was there, but some other Alphas were left puzzled, unsure of what Damon was talking about.

Damon pulled the collar of his shirt to the side to expose the left side of his neck. "Or do you need more proof than this?"

Talia stared at Damon. It was one thing to praise her in private, but now he said she was more powerful than him. And he said it in front of witnesses.

Talia cleared her throat. "Damon and I are equals." She exposed her neck to show his mark. "We have our packs, and we help each other when needed."

"You won't merge packs?" Alpha Patrick asked suspiciously.

"At this point, the Midnight Guardians pack is not ready to step into the open."

"But it might happen." Alpha Richard was emboldened to speak. "Do you think that's fair? You are aware of our locations and borders, yet you stay hidden. Is there a reason for it?"

Talia could see from where Cassie got her bravery and foolishness.

"Alpha Richard," Talia called and released her aura for everyone to feel, but she focused on pressing down Alpha Patrick, Alpha William, and Alpha Richard. Those three were most rebellious during this meeting. Didn't they get that Damon was giving them options and doing what was best for people?

The territory of the Red Moon pack was second only to the land belonging to the Dark Howlers pack. Damon didn't want to occupy it and stretch his warriors to protect another massive area because that would weaken the Dark Howlers pack.

Damon's options were to plunder treasury and whatever resources from the Red Moon pack he could carry and to leave people and land behind for rogues and other packs to fight over; or he could do what he was doing, to give others a chance to claim the land peacefully (for a certain fee).

"How is any of your business if my pack and any other will merge in the future?" Talia asked. "What gives you the courage to question methods other packs are using to stay safe? My pack doesn't have an interest in invading other territories. However, if you keep testing me, I might change my mind. After watching Alpha George fight, I'm restless, and I'm considering challenging someone. Will you be the lucky one?"

Alpha Richard was now visibly sweaty, and he stared at Talia in horror. She talked casually, yet he couldn't move a muscle!

"Well? Are you challenging me to a fight?" Talia asked, and Alpha Richard managed to shake his head weakly.

"I thought so," Talia said and retracted her aura. "I will say this only once, so listen carefully. Every time someone doubts me, they are doubting the Midnight Guardians pack, and I will consider it as a challenge to my position."

Damon looked at Talia with sparkles in his eyes. That was his kitten!

After the meeting, most of the Alphas dispersed to eat, rest, and process recent events while waiting for Damon's decision. Reporters were right there, eagerly waiting for a chance to get interviews, but Alphas agreed not to disclose details until Damon's decisions were final.

Maddox and Tony went to meet with their mates, and they promised to stick around and help Damon and George with whatever was needed.

James estimated that it would take about one day to direct refugees to their new destinations and for new agreements to get people moving. The key was to act swiftly and not give a chance to rogues to attack.

General Jordan was representing the Spring Leaf pack, and he organized people from the Red Moon pack who wanted to go there. Michelle was making necessary preparations for newcomers. Jordan and Lidia will stay to help, and that will give Lidia extra time to spend with her sisters. Cristian was sending several units of his warriors to serve as security until the division of land was completed.

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Chapter 944: Reorganization (5)

James and Damon stayed behind in the conference room to discuss deals that Damon should accept, and Talia went out to get some fresh air and to see what the situation was with resettling people.

The sun was rising. It was late morning already.

People filled the event hall and spilled into the garden. Tables that last night hosted a fancy party were now occupied by people who were having serious conversations in whispers.

Gideon and the Shaman of the Red Moon pack were surrounded by people who listened to their stories.

Estelle, Zina, and several other Omegas were busy bringing sandwiches and drinks for everyone.

Tatiana, Kalina, Mindy, Cornelia, Lidia, and Dawn were sitting at tables and talking to people who approached them in groups to discuss conditions in various packs and to sign up for which pack they wanted to join.

Alpha Adam, Alpha Maddox, Alpha Peter, and a few others were there also, but Omegas didn't dare to approach them.

Sandy emerged into the garden with a pitcher of lemonade in her hands. She kept it on the nearest table and went to Talia.

"The meeting is over?"

"Mhm," Talia confirmed. "Did Tyler find out something about Beta Raymond's location?"

"Shortly after the birthday cake was distributed, Beta Raymond went into the garden and outside of the range of security cameras." Sandy pointed at the forest on her left, indicating the direction where Beta Raymond went. "Tyler is now looking to see if he appeared on any other recording after that. Owen sent warriors in that direction to see if they could pick up anything. So far, there is nothing."

Talia wondered if Beta Raymond had fled to avoid the aftermath of the Alpha challenge. But it didn't make sense. He left before the challenge. Why would he run? There was no point guessing.

Talia got an idea, "What about Nora?"

"We caught her trying to flee with two suitcases of clothes and jewelry," Sandy said. "We didn't know what to do with her, and you were in the meeting, so we kept her in the dungeon."

Talia wondered if Beta Raymond was with Nora, but since that was not the case, "Ask her if she knows where her father might be. If she doesn't... keep her in the dungeon." Talia didn't have the capacity to come up with how to deal with Nora, so she decided to leave Nora to James and George to figure out. Those two knew Nora best.

Sandy went to deal with Nora, and Talia approached the table where Mindy was. She waited for two Omegas to leave before she spoke to Mindy, "Things look busy here."

"Many of them still need to decide what they want to do," Mindy said with a pout.

"That's understandable," Talia responded. "After a lifetime of no choices, people don't know what to do when they are presented with one."

"We can't leave them here. The Red Moon pack isolated them, and they had no idea what was going on outside. Omegas were influenced by stories about how everyone hates the Red Moon pack, and if they try to flee, they will be hunted. Currently, most of the brave enough to decide are opting to go to the Blue River pack because they heard stories about shelters. Unfortunately, the Blue River pack can't handle this surge of people. Dark Howlers pack has space and the ability to host them, but they think of us as the Devils, and I heard some saying that they would rather try their luck with rogues than follow the Black Demon."

"Black Demon?" Talia asked.

"That's what they call Damon."

Talia would think it was funny if it was not serious. People's lives were at stake, but how could they get them to accept going where they could get housing and jobs if they thought of it as hell?

Talia pursed her lips. James gave them until eight o'clock, and that time passed. "We need a marketing campaign."

Mindy looked at Talia in confusion. "How do we do that?"

"We have videos from the Summer Solstice festival and the recent mixer. The Red Moon pack didn't participate, and I'm sure they don't know about those. We can play those videos for these people to see."

Mindy's eyes lit up as she understood what Talia was talking about, and she got another idea. "We can also organize Omegas from the Dark Howlers pack to be available for video calls to answer questions. Talking to people on their level will have a bigger effect than if they talked to high-ranking members."

Talia approved. "Let's create hype about this and then organize a lottery. Make it sound like whoever gets the Dark Howlers pack gets a good deal. Since they don't know where to go, we might as well assign them to the pack that can accept them. I will talk to Alphas and get an estimate of how many people they can take in, so we do the lottery accordingly."

Talia and Mindy took a moment to admire their idea. It will work. It had to.

"While you talk to Alphas, I'm going to find Tyler," Mindy said. "He can help set things up."

Talia watched Mindy walk away with a spring in her step. It felt like the day became brighter.

A small breeze from the back brought Talia her favorite scent of the forest and dark chocolate.

"What are you thinking, kitten?" Damon's voice sounded close to her ear.

Damon was an expert in sneaking and stalking, and if not for the breeze, Talia would have been startled.

"So many things changed." She turned to face him. "Are we doing the right thing?"

"Alpha Edward was a bad man, and because of him, the whole Red Moon pack suffered. Uprooting this corruption was the best way to go."

Talia looked at the packhouse. "We should see if we can find Alpha Edward's secret documents."

Damon knew that Talia was referring to the stuff related to witches. "Let James handle it."

"James did plenty. He should rest and spend time with his mate. Once we return to the Dark Howlers pack, he will have a lot of work."

"Look who is talking," Damon said while giving Talia a meaningful look.

Talia was unsure if she could rest, but the food was right there. "How about we eat something?"

Damon had no objections.

He grabbed a plate with food and two glasses of lemonade, and the two of them walked to the side to sit on the soft grass under a tree.

While munching on sandwiches, Talia told Damon about the idea of promoting the Dark Howlers pack, and he approved.

"I see that getting Mindy as your assistant was a good move," Damon said. "You should make her your Beta. Make it official before she slips." As long as Mindy doesn't go back to gifting dildos, Damon was fine with her.

Talia didn't want to talk about Mindy. "I'm surprised that people are not running away from here."

"Giving them a choice is a good thing to do, but in practice, it doesn't work that way. Omegas are submissive by nature and inclined to follow orders, and Alpha Edward created an environment where even their basic will was broken. Right now, these people feel lost, and they are waiting for someone to tell them what to do."

"Do you think we are wasting time and energy while trying to soften their image of the Dark Howlers pack?" Talia asked.

"You are not wasting anything, kitten. Putting them at ease is what a good Luna would do. But the real relief will come in time when they realize that it's real. It will be an adjustment for everyone. You are doing wonderfully."

Talia leaned on Damon and closed her eyes. While thinking about her past self, she could relate to Omegas from here.

"It feels strange. I would come here sneakily, always wary that I would be caught and punished. It feels like that was something from ages ago, yet also fresh, like it was yesterday."

Damon couldn't imagine the hardships Talia went through before they met. She wouldn't talk about it often, and he didn't want to be nosy and make her uncomfortable, knowing that it was hard for her to go back to that time, so he waited to see if she would say more.

When he confirmed that was it, Damon kissed her temple. "I am proud of you."

Talia smiled. She was proud of herself as well.

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Chapter 945: Reorganization (6)

Maya and Caden had their hands full preparing for the newcomers and organizing a mass pack-joining ceremony. Damon gave them less than twenty-four hours to handle a boatload of tasks that included housing, clothes, meals, and support groups. Luckily, Zack, Erik, and Petra were there to help and ease the workload.

Trisha was overwhelmed when she realized how big the event will be, and she was ecstatic that Stephanie had come to help. With decades of experience, Stephanie quickly came up with a variety of side dishes, and she asked Caden to organize warriors to go hunting because the main meal would be grilled meat. It was the easiest way to feed a large number of people.

They had more than two hundred people coming from the Red Moon pack, and members of the Dark Howlers pack would attend as well. There will be a lot of mouths to feed; Stephanie estimated more than a thousand.

Why so many? With Maya and Caden figuring out accommodations, the news spread that the Dark Howlers pack was expanding in territory and members.

This caused many to ask Maya and Caden for more information. The Beta duo told curious minds that Alpha Damon would share more information in the evening and that if they wanted to contribute to this monumental event, they could talk to Stephanie.

It was fortunate that everyone was willing to help, and they got organized in record time.

Restaurants and bakeries in Darkbourne offered to provide food, and Stephanie reached out to Chef Page, who was ready to prepare many portions of his pack-famous ramen. Jane was set to be his sous-chef. She still didn't talk, but she would respond with nods or other non-verbal cues.

Jane was Chef Page's company, and he was her safety. Jane took good care of Cinna, and Chef Page taught Jane to cook the most delicious ramen. They shared silence, and she listened to his stories, and they would grieve together.

While Maya, Caden, Stephanie, and Trisha were preparing things at the Dark Howlers pack, Damon and Talia worked in the Red Moon pack.

After the lottery, where they decided the destination of Omegas who couldn't pick on their own, every pack got at least a dozen of newcomers; most of them were close to fifty, while some crossed one hundred. With more territory, they needed more people.

The biggest load fell on the Blue River pack and on the Dark Howlers pack, which got more than two hundred new members each.

The Blue River pack had in place a system of shelters and programs that provided therapy and various courses. Maddox believed that about one-half of newcomers would move to other packs within the next few months, so he was not worried. The territory of the Blue River pack was neighboring the Red Moon pack, so Tatiana and Maddox got a few units of their warriors to escort refugees by foot while their belongings were transported via trucks.

Estelle, Zina, Dawn, and several other Omegas from George's villa got busy preparing lunch packs for people who were set to travel so they don't go hungry.

It was sad to see that many Omegas could carry their possessions in their hands. They had so little.

Luckily, that was something money could fix. Damon and James made several phone calls, and soon trucks came from nearby human towns bringing supplies that included food, blankets, toiletries, clothes, and shoes.

Talia, Sandy, Mindy, Tatiana, Cornelia, and Kalina started preparing care packages and distributing them.

At some point, Keith and Arya joined, and no one mentioned Ana. Talia didn't want to know. If she never heard of Ana again, it would be too soon.

As things were settling down, Talia remembered one person: Nora.

Even with James' help, Damon had his hands full, but he made sure to escort Talia to the dungeon. There was no way he would let her go there on her own.

The dungeon of the Dark Howlers pack was a nasty place, but the Red Moon pack doubled down on nastiness.

The air was heavy and filled with the scent of blood, feces, and rotting flesh. It was gross, and Talia barely held her lunch down.

There were so many people inside, and Damon ordered Keith and Arya to investigate why those people were imprisoned, to let go of the ones who only committed offenses against the Red Moon pack, and to get someone to clean the wretched place.

Damon stopped Talia as they moved down the hallway of the dungeon and asked warriors to bring Nora out for questioning. He didn't want to risk endangering Talia's health by exposing her to whatever was festering in that dungeon.

Nora didn't know where her father could be, and Tyler was unsuccessful in locating him. Beta Raymond walked into the forest during James' birthday party, and no one saw him afterward. His phone was offline, and with Alpha Edward gone, the pack link was gone as well, so they couldn't contact him.

"What will you do?" Talia asked Nora. "Human city? Will you risk turning rogue?" It was common knowledge that when a werewolf is without a pack, they are in danger of their wolf turning feral, making them unable to join a pack and function as a part of a community, hence, turning them rogue.

Nora was not sure where to go next. "My father was my only family. I was thinking of making my exit and contacting him when things cool off." But it seemed that Beta Raymond vanished.

Nora looked at Damon. "Can I come to your pack?"

A low growl ripped from Talia's chest. How dares that bedclimber ask to be close to Damon!? "You have nowhere to go, so you should do the same thing others like you are doing."

Nora didn't get it. "What?"

Talia got her phone and made a call, "Tanya, are you still here? There is one more Omega for your shelter."

Nora's face fell when she realized that Talia was talking about her. Did Talia say, shelter? And there was one more point... "Omega?"

"Would you rather that I call you ex-Beta's daughter?" Talia snapped, her patience running thin.

"I was never..." Nora's voice trailed.

"You were never what, Nora?" Talia asked. "Your father was a Beta. He got his status because of the ceremony. Without it, he would be an Omega, a warrior at best, and you... his daughter. Unless there is Alpha blood in your veins, you are an Omega. You need to live with it."

Nora's chin trembled. "I did so much for you. I helped."

"And that's why I'm letting you live," Talia said dryly. "You should recognize that this is not punishment. This is an opportunity for you to start over. I recommend you take it."

They didn't let Nora take the suitcases she packed to flee with. They were filled with designer clothes and jewelry that were expensive and could feed a family for many years.

Nora protested, "I am Beta's daughter. Those are my things. What you are doing is stealing!"

Damon had enough. "Do you know what happens to the high-ranking members of a pack that was occupied?"

Nora shook her head, and she froze when Damon continued talking.

"They are all killed in front of their pack members as a symbol that their pack is gone. Should I detach your head from the rest of your body in a public spectacle?"

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Chapter 946: Expansion of the Dark Howlers pack (1)

Nora didn't want to part from her fancy things, but she also had no intention of getting beheaded. "Let's not rush into things. Talia said..."

Damon narrowed his eyes at Nora. "How did you call her?"

Nora felt chills down her spine, telling her she was in danger. She quickly lowered her head. "Luna Talia said I'm just an Omega. As such, I'm not a high-ranking member." And she can keep her head on her shoulders.

"Good that you know," Damon said.

Nora released the breath she was holding. Her insides tightened when Damon continued talking.

"Omegas don't have these kinds of clothes and jewelry. Which one will it be? Are you going to part with them willingly? If you insist on keeping them as Beta's daughter, I will be magnanimous and bury you with those so you can wear them in the afterlife."

Nora felt like crying, and she cursed herself for not thinking ahead. If she had fled the pack earlier, if she had moved faster... she would escape and not be stuck in this situation.

"It's not all bad, Nora," Talia said. "We won't take away your personal bank accounts. Once you pass the rehabilitation program in the Blue River pack, you will get access to those."

"Will you allow me to pass?" Nora asked bitterly. How she saw this, she knew too much, and Damon and Talia would never let her go.

"That will depend on you," Talia said. "The programs at the Blue River pack are great. Do you know that Marcy died while protecting a ten year-old orphan girl?"

Nora was not happy to think that the pinnacle of her existence should be to sacrifice her life for an orphan. What kind of nonsense rehabilitation programs are those? And did Talia say that Marcy was dead!? How could that be a good thing?

Nora prioritized her life over everything else, and she ended up joining the group of people who were set to leave for the Blue River pack. She was officially Nora, an Omega. It was a bitter pill to swallow.

After Alphas confirmed deals with Damon, they went to their respective territories to prepare for the official handoff while taking with them new pack members.

As time passed, the area around the packhouse belonging to the Red Moon pack was clearing of people, leaving the group for the Dark Howlers pack last.

The trip via land from the Red Moon pack to the Dark Howlers pack would take a whole day (with minimum stops). Considering that they had more than two hundred people moving, Damon didn't want to waste time. He rented an airbus that could seat everyone. The pilot was included as Damon didn't want to waste four hours of his life in flight that could be reduced to a few seconds with Cornelia's magical help.

If they didn't conceal the existence of witches and magic, everyone would move via a teleportation spell, but they were not ready for that step, so Damon's wallet bled for this.

The plane rental was an easy part. Securing antinausea medicine and antidepressants for more than two hundred people was a problem. Omegas would normally freak out while in flight because their instinct was to feel the solid ground under their feet. Antidepressants would numb their senses to the point of not caring where they were. The shaking would still make them puke their guts out, so Damon thought of getting antinausea medicine as well.

Renting a plane (and a pilot) was costing him a fortune already, and he didn't want to pay for deep cleaning of the airplane's interior on top of it.

Mindy, Gideon, Owen, and Zina traveled via plane to provide comfort to Omegas in flight.

Damon, Talia, Keith, Arya, Sandy, Tyler, James, Cornelia, George, and Dawn stayed behind to organize warriors that arrived from allied packs. Until the official handoff of territories was completed, they needed to protect the borders.

With so many things to do, Talia and Damon didn't get to search for Alpha Edward's secret stashes of documents, but Talia didn't think it was a big deal.

"Those secrets are there for decades, maybe more," she said. "One or two more days won't make a difference. Our warriors will protect this place, and we will return here after the ceremony."

Damon was not so optimistic about the timelines. "It will take some time for newcomers to settle into a routine, and we should be present to ensure things go smoothly. Also, you didn't check on your pack in a while."

Talia realized Damon was right. "Axel would contact me if anything urgent is going on there. As for the Dark Howlers pack... I can come here for a few hours with Cornelia or Amelia and check out stuff while you are busy with your Alpha duties."

"Let's talk about it later," Damon responded. He didn't want to tell her that she shouldn't come, but he didn't want to part from her. On the other hand, Keith and Arya proved themselves as loyal and capable, so maybe a few hours would be fine.

Mindy texted them that the plane was getting close to landing in the Dark Howlers pack, so Cornelia prepared a teleportation diagram that would come in handy for the days to come. She was also interested in finding information about witches being used for experiments.

...

~ the Dark Howlers pack ~

The evening descended on the packhouse, and the garden was filled with people.

Gideon stood on the podium in front of an altar where flames danced while releasing exotic fragrance into the air.

Next to Gideon were Mindy, Damon, Talia, Maya, and Caden, all dressed in ceremonial clothes.

On the side were Elders, ready to witness the ceremony of more than two hundred new members joining the pack at the same time. Other than the influx of pack members, they all heard that the territory of the Dark Howlers pack had expanded. It was a big deal.

The crowd moved in an organized line toward the podium. One by one, they cut their palms to release a few drops of their blood into a metal chalice that had engravings of wolves.

Dawn stood by George's side, and Zina was with Owen.

James was there also, with Cornelia by his side. He was staring at the scene unfolding and squeezing Cornelia's hand excitedly every few seconds.

James couldn't believe that this was happening. He was with his mate, in front of people, without hiding. It was surreal. If this was a dream, he didn't want to wake up.

When the crowd reached about halfway, Gideon called James and Cornelia to step forward.

"James Redmayne," Gideon called solemnly. "Do you reject all ties to your previous pack and pledge your loyalty to the Dark Howlers pack?"

"I do," James responded seriously.

Gideon turned to Damon. "Alpha Damon, do you accept James as a member of our pack?"

"I do," Damon said with a smile.

Since James was set to become Gamma, he needed a separate ceremony. Cornelia was James' mate, so they decided to include her as well.

"Cornelia of the Silverflame Coven," Gideon called, "Do you accept the Dark Howlers pack as your home and family?"

Cornelia glanced at James. "I do."

Gideon turned to Damon. "Alpha Damon, do you accept Cornelia as a member of our pack?"

"I do," Damon responded.

Gideon handed James a knife, and James cut his hand. Next, Cornelia took the knife and cut hers. They had no idea how this would go because it was unheard of a witch participating in a werewolf ceremony and joining a pack, but the worst thing would be that it would fail. At least, that's what they hoped for.

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Chapter 947: Expansion of the Dark Howlers pack (2)

Cornelia and James joined their bloodied hands, pressing their wounds against each other and above the flames.

The blood dripped into the flames that danced on the altar. One drop, two, three... and then it happened... James and Cornelia sucked in sharp breaths as a wave of energy assaulted their bodies.

James felt the moment when the pack link got established, giving him the clarity of thousands of minds connected into one. He could feel the difference compared to the pack link of the Red Moon pack he had previously, and he knew that he had made the right choice of coming here. Damon was a good Alpha. His people followed him willingly; they admired him, and so did James.

Cornelia was a witch, so she didn't get the pack link, but she could feel the energies of the people gathered and many others who were not nearby.

"You are now bound to the Dark Howlers pack as its members, to live and prosper together and help each other in times of need," Gideon announced.

"Welcome to the Dark Howlers pack!" Damon exclaimed, and then he raised his head to the sky.

"AWOOO!"

Damon's howl shook the air, and everyone else joined him, "AWOOO!!!"

James was staring at Cornelia, and they had matching smiles on their faces, but this was not over.

"James of the Dark Howlers pack!" Damon called, "I'm offering you the position of my Gamma. This role comes with honor and responsibility, and it can't be broken as long as the pack exists. Do you accept to work with me for the benefit of the pack?"

"I do," James responded with confidence.

"Cornelia of the Dark Howlers pack," Talia called. "You are James' mate, a member of the Dark Howlers pack by blood, and I consider you my friend. I am offering you the position of my Gamma, to be my advisor and help me take care of the pack. Are you willing?"

"I am willing," Cornelia responded solemnly.

Gideon started chanting unintelligibly as he threw some aromatic herbs and powders into the flames, and Cornelia couldn't stop staring at James. She never saw him this happy, and she was happy as well.

James and Cornelia gasped when a gust of energy rushed into them, tightening and expanding their bond with the pack.

James could feel his muscles swelling with the boon of a Gamma. The ceremony tapped into the power of the pack, giving James a boost to protect and serve. The larger the pack, the stronger the effect was, and James' skin visibly stretched to accommodate his larger physique.

Cornelia would admire the transformation of her handsome mate, but she was in a daze of her own as her skin prickled with energies.

Cornelia was a priestess in the Silver Flame Coven, a high-ranking witch second only to Evanora, and this ceremony boosted her perception of nature to a new level. It was like, so far, she had the ability to climb a tree and use its branches, but now leaves were opening up to provide insight into secrets that were unreachable until now.

Talia and Liseli watched Cornelia carefully, making sure that this ceremony didn't jeopardize her baby.

'Cornelia might be stronger than the high priestess now,' Liseli said.

'You think she might be stronger than Evanora?'

Liseli confirmed. 'After mating with Axel, Yasmin became stronger than her mother.' And after Talia taught her to use energies as a Guardian, Yasmin grew further. 'I believe that Cornelia is now as strong as Yasmin.'

Talia liked this news. It was good for the pack, and for the Gamma pair also.

James was from the Red Moon pack, and many will question Damon's decision to make him a Gamma. It will take some time for people to forget about James' origins.

And then there was James' age which put him in the middle of his teens. People who didn't know of James' brilliance would think he was too young for the position. Talia

didn't miss suspicious and disapproving looks from many Elders, but she knew that James would be able to deal with them.

Considering that people respected power, James and Cornelia getting stronger would help them establish themselves, and now they were not alone. Damon and Talia were ready to back them up, and there were also George and a few others, and that meant a lot.

James and Cornelia moved to the side to stand behind Damon and Talia, next to Maya and Caden.

They were both Gammas now, and their rightful place was with high-ranking members of the pack.

James took Cornelia's bloodied hand to examine, and he frowned at the cut that didn't show signs of healing. He remembered that Cornelia healed his cut in the Silver Flame Coven. Why didn't she heal herself now? Was it because of the pregnancy?

He leaned lower, and Cornelia thought he was about to kiss her. She gasped when she felt his tongue on her palm. The ceremony made her extra sensitive, and somehow... his action was sexy beyond belief.

James smirked when he picked up Cornelia's emotions, and he continued licking her wound diligently. His nostrils flared at the scent of Cornelia's arousal, and that only spurred him to lick her more. He really wanted to push her down, discard that flimsy ceremonial outfit that covered her private parts so that he could lick all the wild berry infused juices her sweet pussy produced. However, they were on the podium, and an important ceremony was going on. Licking Cornelia's body will need to wait a bit.

"Mindy of the Dark Howlers pack!" Talia called. "You don't shy from telling me how it is, even if it's unpleasant. Before you joined this pack as Shaman Gideon's mate, you were my friend. Shortly after we met, you asked me if I would be interested in working as your assistant." Talia smiled while remembering the scene at the town square during the Summer Solstice festival. "As you can see, I am a busy Luna, and I can't be your assistant. I want to use this opportunity to ask you in return, are you willing to be my Beta and help me lead this pack into a better future?"

Mindy bowed her head. "It will be my honor, Luna Talia."

Gideon smiled at his pumpkin-infused princess. Light from the flames danced on her perfect skin, and he wanted to kiss and caress her all over. Mindy was glowing from happiness, and there was his pup inside her belly also. Life didn't get better than this.

Gideon put extra effort into this part of the ceremony where Mindy got her official role. She was Beta of the Dark Howlers pack, equal in status to Maya and Caden, who were respected by everyone who ever heard of the Dark Howlers pack.

Damon held his chin high while pulling Talia closer to him. The Red Moon pack was gone, the Dark Howlers pack was growing in territory and members, their recent deals gave them extra resources, and they even grew in terms of the number of high-ranking members.

These were huge changes for the better, and Damon knew that none of these would happen if not for Talia. She was the catalyst to many events, and she gave him guidance and strength to do the right thing, even when she was unaware of the effect her existence had on him.

Talia looked up at Damon and smiled brightly, lighting up his world and silently telling him that things would be alright.

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Chapter 948: Expansion of the Dark Howlers pack (3)

After Mindy (now Beta Mindy) stepped to the side, George and Owen stood in front of the altar. Dawn and Zina were by their sides.

Elders were staring at the scene in front of them while exchanging questions through the pack link if anyone knew what was coming next. They were stunned that the young Alpha of the Red Moon pack and a female of unknown origins were their Gammas. Mindy becoming a Beta was not surprising because everyone knew that Mindy and Talia were close and that Mindy was a capable she-wolf with an Alpha bloodline, but why was a Commander of the Red Moon pack highlighted now? And who was the guy next to him?

They heard that the Red Moon pack fell and the Dark Howlers reaped benefits, but no one told them any details, damn it!

"Are you sure you want to go through this?" Damon asked George.

George confirmed. "There is nothing to prevent one Alpha to serve another. It's not an exaggeration to say that I owe you and Luna Talia my life, and I know that my wolf agrees. Thanks to you, we survived; I found my mate, avenged my parents, and saved members that are loyal to the Shawn bloodline. They need a pack, and I am not ready to give them one, not on my own. I am asking you to take care of my people and me. In return, you will have our loyalty as we accept the Dark Howlers pack as our own."

They talked about it. George could survive for a long time without a pack link because his wolf was strong, but the Omegas and warriors following him were another story. It was a matter of days before wolves of weak-minded ones would start turning feral, and George didn't want to risk it. At the same time, George didn't see anything wrong with him being a member of Damon's pack. He didn't remember his parents, and he had no

desire to lead a pack. As George saw it, it was too much paperwork and politics, and he was more of a hands-on guy.

"Alright," Damon said. "Alpha George Shawn of the Frostcrest pack, I invite you to join the Dark Howlers pack as the first Commander the Dark Howlers pack ever had. Your position will come with land and autonomy. You and people willing to follow you will be required to obey the rules of the Dark Howlers pack without exceptions. In terms of the pack hierarchy, you will be second to Luna Talia and me, equal to our Betas and Gammas, and above Generals. You can count on my assistance, and I expect the same from you in return. Are you willing?"

George confirmed. "I am willing."

Damon turned to Owen. "I hear you will be Commander George's second in command. That will make you a General."

Owen lifted his chin proudly. A General! Finally! "Yes, Alpha!"

Damon raised his hand, indicating to Owen to wait. "Your title of a General is in name only until you prove yourself in the arena against my high-ranking warriors. You will need to undergo training as a warrior of the Dark Howlers pack, and demonstrate to me and Commander George that you have the capacity to lead warriors to victory without recklessly endangering their lives. Are you willing?"

"I am willing!" Owen exclaimed, and he smiled when Zina excitedly squeezed his hand.

Gideon started the pack-joining ceremony for George and Owen, and George felt like he could finally breathe. Dawn was by his side, holding his hand, and there was no need to conceal his background and Alpha aura.

George and Dawn will stay in the packhouse until the buildings for them and the people from the Frostcrest pack are completed. Caden estimated that it would take a month before the first dwellings were move-in ready. When all gets done, Dawn and George will have their villa, and about a hundred other Omegas and warriors will get their homes which will be a mix of individual homes and apartments. It will be a small werewolf-inhabited city with several stores, a town square, a restaurant, a coffee shop, a market, and a paved road connecting it to Darkbourne.

A small part of George wanted to lead a pack. He was an Alpha, after all. But he thought about the situation rationally, and he decided against it.

No one ever taught him a thing about being an Alpha or leading people. A good Alpha was taking care of people and their needs, finances, security, safety, and so many other things that George didn't want to think about. He would make decisions based on his instincts, and that would make him a horrible Alpha.

Like this, people from the Frostcrest pack can still be a separate community that was part of something greater, and George was fine with that.

George will be the highest-ranking warrior in the Dark Howlers pack, with several units of warriors and the responsibility of guarding a long stretch of the border. In a way, it was similar to the arrangement he had in the Red Moon pack, but now they didn't need to hide. People loyal to George will live in a small settlement, and they will be free to walk outside without fear of being bullied.

An additional bonus was that Dawn could be with him and stay close to her friends and family.

It was a win-win, no matter how George looked at it.

Zack volunteered to help George with town management, making Zack something like a town mayor. Zack will need to balance his current duties with the new ones, but the teen was up for the challenge.

Seeing that James was one year younger than Zack, and was Gamma with a mate already, Zack felt the need to step up.

The ceremony culminated when the blood of new members was brought to the altar by Amelia, Arya, and Daria.

Gideon chanted in an ancient language no one could understand as Amelia, Arya, and Daria helped pour the blood into the flames slowly.

With the last few words, the flames rose, and Talia's heart tightened as wave after wave of emotions washed over her. Uncertainty, doubt, fear, insecurity, the sense of being lost and abandoned. It was all there, and she could feel them like they were hers. And they were hers only a few months back.

Talia stepped forward as her eyes flickered in the silvery light. She raised her arms, and her hair fluttered behind her while turning silver.

A pulse of warm energy exploded from Talia to spread around every new member, providing a gentle embrace that whispered of safety and better days ahead.

'Welcome to the Dark Howlers pack,' Talia addressed them through the newly established pack link. 'Damon and I will do our best to take care of you. Our Betas, Gammas, warriors, and every other member is your family now. There is no need to be afraid. We won't harm you. This is your home.'

Sobs were heard from several directions, and a few Omegas that were closest to the platform fell to their knees. More than Talia's words, it was the sincerity that flew through

the pack link and the soothing sensation of her aura that was like a long-forgotten mother's embrace.

There was still a lot of negativity, but there were hope and relief as well.

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Chapter 949: Expansion of the Dark Howlers pack (4) [Bonus chapter]

Damon stood behind Talia, and he embraced her from behind.

"Good job, kitten," he murmured close to her ear.

Talia turned her head, and her silvery eyes met his blue ones.

"Did I reveal too much?" Talia asked. She acted on an instinct in her desire to comfort them, and only now she realized that she looked like a walking lightbulb.

"No," Damon responded.

With the Red Moon pack out of the picture and with the addition of James and George, they were by far the strongest pack.

On the other hand, members of the Midnight Guardians pack were coming out more often, and then there were Cornelia, Amelia, and other witches mingling. It was a matter of time until the concept of people with abilities became normal.

Werewolves were used to keeping their existence a secret. Witches and abilities were just additional flavors of what humans shouldn't know about.

In addition to all that, Damon observed that Talia was awesome, and he was determined to use everything at his disposal to keep her safe. Talia will never ever hide in the attic or anywhere else. Her spot was right there, on the podium, at the top, with Damon, assuring their people that things would be alright. Talia was the beacon of hope, forgiveness, and acceptance. She was proof that powerful people don't turn into self-serving assholes. That was his kitten!

Damon stood next to Talia and spoke to everyone in a loud voice.

"As you can see, the Dark Howlers pack is a place where you will experience unusual things. In general, members of the Dark Howlers pack are accepting of newcomers as long as they mean no harm, and we expect that everyone follows the same rules regardless of if they were born here or if they joined recently. Keep an open mind and give yourself time to adjust to the diversity we have here. If someone gives you a hard time or you have questions, you should reach out to any of the high-ranking members.

This packhouse is open to everyone. If you can't get what you need through regular channels, come here and seek help."

Damon gestured to the area where the Elders were. "These are the Elders of the Dark Howlers pack. Their job is to provide guidance to youth and newcomers. Use them."

Next, Damon gestured toward where Zack, Erik, and Petra were. "These three are young, but don't let that fool you. They are knowledgeable about the pack, and they are on their way to becoming high-ranking members."

Zack, Erik, and Petra lifted their chins proudly.

Damon turned to Talia to meet her silvery eyes smiling at him.

"And this right here is your Luna," Damon said. "She will do whatever she can to make your life better, but her most important role is to keep me in check."

Talia's heart swelled from emotions. "I don't need to keep you in check. You are a wonderful Alpha, and our people are lucky to have you leading them."

'And I am lucky that you are my mate,' she added through their mind link.

Damon smiled. "You bring out the best in me, kitten."

Talia got on her toes, and Damon lowered his head, and their lips met halfway.

The silvery light spread from Talia to envelop her and Damon, forming a cocoon that pulsed in the rhythm of their matching heartbeats.

People held their breaths while staring at the magical spectacle.

With every passing second, the light increased around Talia and Damon, making everyone squint in anticipation of what was to come.

The light silently exploded, and people gasped as the wave of gentle energy washed over them.

Damon inched a fraction and looked at Talia, whose eyes were now back to her usual honeyed ones. He took a lock of her copper-colored hair and twirled it with his finger. He had an urge to scoop her into his arms and find privacy, but they just had a big ceremony, and they should stay with their people a bit more. Just a bit more.

Seeing that many people were still staring at Talia and Damon, Gideon stepped forward and shouted, "The Moon Goddess blessed us!"

"Yeah!" Elder Agatha exclaimed excitedly. Ever since Talia's Luna ceremony, she could feel changes in her. She couldn't pinpoint what it was, but she was more energetic. Now the blessing happened again, and she was confident that this would trigger her ability to manifest itself.

Caden and Maya raised their heads and howled at the sky.

"AWOOO!"

Everyone joined to release their pent-up emotions. Joy, anxiousness, excitement, uncertainty, pride, hope. It was all there.

Damon and Talia howled as well, and so did George, Dawn, Owen, Zina, Mindy, Gideon, James, and even Cornelia went with it and howled the best she could do.

The noise settled, and people spoke in excited whispers, wondering what was next.

Damon's eyes lost focus for a moment, and he turned to see Stephanie standing at the door of the packhouse. She was reminding him that everyone was focusing on ceremonies and the food was ready to be served for a while.

The inside of the packhouse was not big enough to accommodate everyone, so they had tables set up outside. The food was offered buffet-style with stalls that kept it warm. There was a large selection of grilled meats, and there were also salads, pastries, fruits, pasta dishes, cakes, and many more. One of the stalls served ramen with Chef Page and sous-chef Jane behind it. There was something for everyone.

Damon nodded at Stephanie and then spoke to the people again, "Now that the ceremonies are over, you should enjoy the food that members of the Dark Howlers pack prepared to welcome you. Feel free to approach them, thank them for their efforts, and ask questions about the pack and life here. In about one hour, warriors will be available to lead you in groups so you can familiarize yourself with the territory."

Maya stepped forward next. "Just a moment! Before you disperse and dive into food, I want to remind you that Elders prepared for you an event tomorrow morning. The pack will provide you with clothes and other necessities. The event will start with breakfast at nine o'clock in the morning at the town square of Darkbourne."

Elders were bobbing their heads. Finally, they got to do something as well. Some of them hoped that this was a sign of Damon giving them more authority, but none dared to ask about it openly.

People started moving in the direction from where the delicious aroma was wafting, and James looked around to see Dawn and George staring at each other. Similarly, Owen and Zina held hands and didn't move. James guessed that those two couples were

communicating through their newly established mind links, and based on their heated gazes, it was naughty talk.

James was a bit jealous because he didn't have the mind link with Cornelia, but he comforted himself by saying how it's not all bad. Actually, he had everything other than the mind link with his mate, and he should focus on the positives.

If anyone should feel the lack of the pack link, that would be Cornelia. James couldn't talk secretly to her only, but Cornelia couldn't talk mentally at all. He hoped she wouldn't be upset because of that, and he decided to put in the extra effort, so she didn't feel like an outsider.

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Chapter 950: Still friends

James was about to ask Cornelia to grab some food when he heard a voice calling...

"Gamma James!" It was Petra. Zack and Erik were with her.

James' instinct was to flee, but he didn't want to appear like a wimp in front of Cornelia. James was avoiding those three out of fear that they would look down on him or be upset after finding out that he lied about being of the Alpha bloodline.

WW Magazine published an article about the events that happened at his birthday party, and they had special coverage of the Alpha challenge where Alpha Edward was defeated. They wrote about Luna Layla leaving and how Alpha Edward was infertile, and that made James an impostor.

Petra, Zack, and Erik approached James and Cornelia, and they bowed a little.

"Gamma James, Gamma Cornelia, we want to welcome you to our pack," Petra said.

James nodded stiffly, and Erik rolled his eyes. "What? Now that you are Gamma, you think you are above us? Maybe I can't whoop your ass on my own, but if I join hands with Petra and Zack, you should be concerned for your safety."

James blinked. "You mean it?"

Erik frowned. "I will bet my next month's salary that we will whoop your..."

"Not that," James interrupted him. "The welcome. Aren't you upset that I'm not the next Alpha of the Red Moon pack?"

Petra made a face. "You are still the same person, no matter who your bio parents are. Besides, none of us liked Alpha Edward, and we still hung out with you. Now that we know you are not related, we might like you more."

Before James could recover from this blow, Petra was talking to Cornelia. "It's great to have more high-ranking females. You should plan to visit the school and address the girls. They are worried if they are pretty enough, fast enough, strong enough, smart enough, and now that we have a Gamma without a wolf, I'm sure that many will be looking up to you. You can rely on me if you need assistance. I know everything about this pack and..."

Cornelia smiled while listening to Petra, and she snuggled closer to James, whose arm was at her back, and his hand held onto her shoulder firmly.

James' heart was full. He worried if Erik, Petra, and Zack were still his friends, but now he realized that he worried for nothing.

James raised his hand to interrupt Petra's excited chatter.

"Can we continue the talk over food?" James asked and looked at Cornelia. "My mate is hungry, and she is eating for two."

Erik's mouth was wide open, and Petra's eyes formed perfect circles when they understood the meaning of James' words.

"By the Moon Goddess!" Zack exclaimed breathily. "You will have a pup! I will never catch up to you."

James chuckled. "It's not a competition, but I am winning."

Talia watched as four teens and an ancient witch moved together, and she smiled. The turbulent events were monumental, but they didn't feel like disturbances. Instead, it felt like things were falling into place like this was how it was supposed to be.

"What are you thinking?" Damon's question pulled Talia out of her thoughts.

"This. People mingling and accepting each other." Talia looked at Damon excitedly. "Do you think other packs will adopt our open borders policy?"

"Let's take this one step at a time," Damon responded.

Damon loved Talia's optimism, but his experience told him that not everyone was friendly. People would shake hands and smile while plotting how to backstab him. It was a cruel world, and not everyone could be trusted.

Damon could feel numerous power-hungry eyes directed at the Dark Howlers pack. The more they prospered, the more danger intensified. Damon had an urge to tighten their security, and opening the borders was the opposite of that.

And there was Talia, his most precious person, his whole world. Damon was painfully aware that her brilliance attracted greed and envy. But he didn't want to spoil it for her. He and Sapa agreed that they will let Talia and Liseli do their thing, and males (aka Damon and Sapa) will protect females (aka Talia and Liseli). That's what mates do.

"How about we eat?" Damon suggested. "You should feed our pup. She must be hungry."

"Will you hate him if it's a boy?"

"No," Damon responded right away. "But I will demand equal attention. If I don't get cuddles from you, he can't get cuddles either. Actually, this will be the case no matter if our pup is a boy or a girl."

"What about breastfeeding?"

Damon's face fell. "Breast what?" He didn't think about that! Can he bear the thought of someone else sucking on Talia's body? And they were talking about breasts!

Talia burst into giggles. Somehow, she could envision Damon throwing a tantrum while she fed their baby.

"Don't worry, Damon," Talia said. "I will make sure to leave some for you. You can share with your child, right?"

Damon swayed as the ground below his feet became wobbly. Did she say that she would LEAVE something for him? Didn't that mean he would be second? And there was another thing, "Do you really expect me to share you?"

Talia was surprised at Damon's insecurities she could feel through their mate bond.

"Of course not," she said. "I am yours, and yours only. I am your mate, your woman, but I will be a mother to our children. It will be another role I will take on, and we will do it together."

Damon was not sure how to respond to this. Her words made sense, and there was nothing for him to complain about, but... there was that 'but' which was nagging at the back of his head. He decided to leave it for later.

"Let's put some food in you and keep that pretty mouth busy before you say something else that will worry me," Damon said while ushering Talia in the direction where food was being served.

...

The next day was busy with ensuring that newcomers settled into their temporary housings.

Dark Howlers pack had some vacancies in existing apartments and houses, but they were not ready to accept more than two hundred people in one go.

The first and second floors of the packhouse were completely filled, and existing members of the Dark Howlers pack offered their empty bedrooms and pull-out sofas in the living rooms. It was a temporary solution.

Caden and Maya started construction on additional dwellings right away, but it will take months until everything is ready.

George, Dawn, Owen, Zina, James, and Cornelia went to the Red Moon packhouse to ensure no one took advantage of their absence. They left warriors there, but someone needed to guide them.

Talia wanted to go to the Red Moon packhouse and join James and Cornelia in searching for documents Alpha Edward left behind, but she had to prioritize Dark Howlers pack.

Omegas were abused in the Red Moon pack, and Talia's presence brought ease and a sense of security, so she ended up postponing going there.

Keith and Arya moved as Talia's shadows. As for Damon, just knowing she was nearby gave him a sense of ease.

Damon was swamped with work, and if he went with Talia, the pack would suffer. Caden and Maya could handle most of that work, but everyone had their hands full, and Damon had to pull his weight.

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