

Chapter 21 - The Girl In The Attic

Damon climbed to the attic faster than the wind and his lips curved into a smile when he inhaled the scent of freesia he was craving for.

The girl was there.

He stared at the closed door in front of him and took a moment to compose himself.

Damon thought how he went all around the Red Moon pack's properties in search of the girl. Why didn't he think of checking the packhouse thoroughly?

He already knew that the girl was not in the common buildings because she came to the kitchen in the packhouse.

Now that he was standing in the attic, he realized that obvious places would be to check the basement and the attic, as well as any isolated places where guests don't venture. It seems that his mind was muddled and he didn't think straight.

Well, it doesn't matter.

The time has come. She is right there. Behind that door. Hopefully.

Damon knocked on the door lightly and waited. Nothing.

He knocked again, this time with a bit more force.

Damon thought that he heard some shuffling from inside, but he was not sure because his heart thundered in his ears. He was never this anxious.

He gave it another knock and then turned the door handle.

The dawn gave barely any light through the small windows, but Damon's Alpha sight was enough for him to see the scarce furniture and the girl sitting on the edge of the futon, in the corner, hugging her knees and looking at him with her big doe-like eyes.

Damon stood at the door frozen, locked in some kind of a staring contest with Talia, overwhelmed by his emotions that were amplified by the joy of his wolf.

Her head was buried in her knees, and he could see only her eyes between the strands of the copper-colored hair that fell over her face, but he knew she was watching him.

'Say something!', Damon's wolf snapped, startling Damon out of his daze.

"Hi...", Damon said awkwardly. "You are probably wondering why I'm here."

Yes, she was wondering why he came to the attic.

Did he come to hurt her? Or is this some prank? Since Olivia left the pack, no one came to the attic with good intentions.

That's the scary Alpha who was the reason she got beaten twice. The first time because she peeped when princess Marcy was between Alpha Damon's legs, and the second time because she complained how princess Marcy hit her the first time.

Well, the first time she was not peeping on purpose, and she definitely didn't complain to anyone, but it didn't matter. She still got beat twice and the only conclusion Talia had was that nothing good comes from being associated with this big scary Alpha.

And now he is here, in the attic, bringing more misfortune with him.

With every next second of Damon's presence in the attic, Talia sensed a calamity approaching, a calamity in the form of princess Marcy wanting to kill her.

Talia didn't say anything and Damon stepped inside.

She pushed with her legs, getting further into the corner while trying to increase the distance between them.

'You are scaring the girl again...!', his wolf growled in his head.

Damon lifted his hands, palms facing Talia. "I won't hurt you."

'Yeah, you won't hurt me, but others will because of you.', Talia thought.

In slow movements, he closed the door behind him and approached her carefully until his feet touched the edge of the futon.

He went down into a squat so that they are on the same level, but she was still much smaller than he was.

"My name is Damon.", he put on his bestest non-intimidating smile, but she saw it like a beast showing teeth before devouring its prey.

"What's your name?", Damon asked.

Talia's eyes darted to the door and then went back to him.

"Please, leave.", she said in a shaky voice, and his heart ached.

He finally found her and there was no way he will leave just like that.

Damon was not sure what to do. Why was she so scared? Why was she chasing him away?

"I won't hurt you.", he assured her. "I'm here only to talk."

"Say what you have, and leave.", Talia said and gestured toward the door, her hand moving enough for the sleeve to hitch higher and expose her swollen wrist.

Damon grabbed her hand and pulled it toward him.

Delightful sparks formed upon contact, catching him by surprise. The sensation was stronger than he remembered, and he inhaled a shaky breath.

He focused mightily on inspecting her injury.

"What happened? Don't tell me that you fell again." His expression darkened. "Is it Marcy? I will teach her a lesson."

Talia panicked. "Please, don't. If you say anything, she will hit me more."

Damon paused and observed her face which was now peeking above her knees, and he noticed a few more bruises compared to what he saw the previous night.

Rage rippled through Damon at the thought that Talia got hurt again, and he was right here, in this packhouse, oblivious to her sufferings. It happened on his watch!

Damon was enraged, and his wolf was as well. One fury amplified the other and Damon radiated inexplicable violence that was tangible.

At the sight of Talia shivering in fear, Damon forced his rage down. Settling scores will need to wait.

"Did Marcy hit you again?", Damon asked Talia, and the way she avoided him made him suspect another thing. "Was it because of me?"

Talia's eyes widened and that was enough for him to confirm how his intuition was right.

He knew that Marcy was a white lotus. There was no way Marcy would forget that Talia saw her in a compromising position (between Damon's legs, sucking him off). And when Damon told Alpha Edward that Marcy is hitting Omegas, Marcy probably connected how his comment was about Talia.

In a way, it was his fault that Talia got hurt. Twice.

He clenched his teeth as another wave of rage swelled within him. "I will kill her."

"Don't.", Talia pleaded. "Can you just leave and pretend that you didn't see anything? Don't come here and everyone will leave me alone."

Damon's heart cracked. Even if everyone leaves her alone, how the hell was he supposed to do that?

Doesn't she know that he went nearly mad when he didn't know where she was?

Without a word, Damon sat on the futon next to Talia and wrapped her in his arms, pulling her to lean on his chest.

The feeling of Talia against him made Damon's whole body hum in pleasure. Delightful sparks overtook his senses, and he was lost in a daze.

Talia froze. She was not used to physical contact of any kind. It took her a moment to collect herself and start squirming to get out of his hold.

"Shh...", Damon coaxed Talia to calm down, unwilling to let go of her. He is not a hugger, and he never cuddled with a woman, but this girl was different. He wanted to hold her, and her resistance hurt. "I won't harm you. Can I hold you like this, just for a minute?"

No, not a minute. He wanted an hour, or at least until he gets immune to these sparks that are making him crave to devour her. But if he said that aloud, she would definitely freak out.

Talia stopped struggling. Not because she agreed, but because she realized that he was too strong, and her struggle made her injuries ache more.

Talia resigned herself to her fate. There was nothing she could do. Even if he wants to harm her, she could only endure it. She was weak to fight for herself and if she shouted for help, no one would come.

Damon smirked when he felt that Talia relaxed. He wished to move her to sit on his lap, but he feared that it might be too much.

With his arms around her, Talia appeared tiny and fragile, and Damon was confident that he can carry her around with ease. Or maybe he should stuff her into his pocket, so that she stays close to him all the time.

Lost in the moment, Damon ran his fingers through Talia's coppery-colored hair and inhaled the sweet citrusy scent of freesia, and his world was at peace.

Damon closed his eyes, his enjoyment amplified by the sounds of yips and whimpers his wolf made in pleasure.

"Hey...", Talia called after some time. "When are you going to let me go?"

"First, my name is Damon. Not, hey.", Damon said with amusement in his voice. It's been a while since he heard someone speak to him this casually (other than Caden), and the lack of respect didn't bother him.

"And Second...", he drawled. "I'm thinking about it." If it was up to him, never.

To make his point clear, he tightened his hold on her, making sure he doesn't crush her.

Feeling that she was stiff again, he asked, "Am I hurting you?"

Talia was absolutely confused with this development. "Well... no... but..."

"Then, it's fine.", Damon cut her off. He didn't want to hear any buts.

Chapter 22 - The Girl In The Attic (cont.)

As much as Damon enjoyed this newfound feeling, he couldn't ignore Talia's injuries. The scent of dried blood disturbed the sweet citrusy scent of freesia, telling him that she was not OK.

Damon took Talia's hand in his and observed a cut that was on top of a nasty bruise. It was scabbing, but it still looked fresh.

'Mate's healing is slow because she doesn't have her wolf', Damon's wolf explained.

Damon raised Talia's hand toward his lips and licked the cut.

Talia jerked her hand away, but Damon's reflexes are top-notch, and he increased his grip, preventing her from doing so.

"What are you doing?", Talia asked in panic.

No one ever licked her before, and this is a scary Alpha! Will he eat her?

"Shush! Don't you know that our saliva has analeptic properties? I'm helping your wound heal. You should say, thank you, and not complain.", Damon said and grimaced. Considering her sweet scent, he assumed that she will taste sweet also, but... "Why is it bitter?"

"I applied an herbal paste, so it doesn't get infected.", Talia said in a small voice.

Damon observed her face and noticed that she was beet red. Is she sick?

He touched her forehead. It was not warm, but he still asked, "Do you have a fever?"

"No.", Talia responded with urgency. She had no intention to admit she was flustered because a scary Alpha came, hugged her (and is still hugging her!), and then he licked her hand.

Damon guessed that she didn't see a doctor. It was obvious that she didn't get proper first aid.

"Did you make the medicinal paste yourself?"

Talia confirmed with a nod.

He was about to lick her hand again and paused. "Is it poisonous?"

Talia was not sure if she should laugh or cry. "You should ask that before you put things into your mouth."

"I was treating your wound and I didn't see that there is medicine...", he grumbled, and then he licked her again.

"Can you stop doing that?", Talia protested. His coarse tongue touching her skin made her feel funny.

Damon looked at Talia like he had no idea what she was talking about, and then he licked her again.

Talia exhaled helplessly while wondering what game Damon was playing.

He is an important guest, an Alpha, yet instead of mingling with the elite of the Red Moon pack, he was huddled in the corner of the attic, holding her close to him, and licking her hand.

It didn't make sense no matter how she thought about it.

Is this the part where Marcy barges in and they all start laughing at her? Actually, if they only laugh, that will be good. Maybe Damon will join Marcy and the two of them give her another beating?

Talia was anxious and she wanted this charade to be over.

"When are you leaving?"

Damon was not sure if she asked him about leaving the attic or the Red Moon pack. In either case, his answer would be the same. "Why are you eager to chase me away?"

"Because this is where I stay. You are in a fancy bedroom, with Alpha, and Luna, and your future wife."

"My future wife?", Damon asked in confusion, like he heard about it for the first time.

"Princess Marcy told me that you will get married when she came here and...", Talia didn't finish, but Damon understood.

When she was hitting Talia.

"She will NOT be my wife in this lifetime or in any next one.", Damon said grimly.

Talia shook her head. "Maybe you should tell that to her, and not to me. Your relationship with her is not my business. Can you, please, leave?"

Damon was lost in her big honey-colored eyes that looked at him pleadingly and he wondered if he can leave. Can he? Yes, but only in one case.

"Come with me."

Talia was sure that her ears malfunctioned. She asked him to leave the attic before anyone can see them in this inexplicable situation, yet he wants her to join him? "What? Where?"

"I am the Alpha of the Dark Howlers pack. Come with me to my pack."

Talia's brain paused.

She thought that Damon invited her to his room, to clean up or maybe to make fun of her, but now it seems he was asking her to leave the Red Moon pack. With him. "Why?"

"I will make sure you have a room, better than the ones downstairs. I will get you clothes that fit, and you can eat anytime you want and as much as you want. For every scratch and bruise, there will be a pack doctor to take care of you and if anyone gives you a hard time, I will deal with them. No one will bully you in my pack."

'Our pack!', his wolf added eagerly. Unfortunately, only Damon heard him.

Talia blinked. Now she was not wondering if her ears are tricking her, but if this last beating messed with her brain.

Or maybe something was wrong with him. Did he ate a funny fruit and is talking gibberish? There are some herbs that can make people say things they don't mean. Or did he confuse her with princess Marcy?

It's not that Talia didn't think about leaving the Red Moon pack.

Every time Anna and her henchmen bullied Talia, Talia thought about escaping, but she didn't know where to go.

And here was an Alpha, offering her a new home with all the luxuries she ever dreamed of. Assuming that this was real and both of them were sane.

Talia wondered if this was a prank, or if she was imagining this whole conversation, or maybe she was sleeping and the Cinderella story mixed with her dreams because Damon definitely looked like a prince. A handsome prince that smells of the forest and dark chocolate.

"Will you come with me?", Damon asked when his patience cracked.

"Why do you want me to come?"

"Because...", the words got stuck in his throat.

Can he tell her she is his mate and that when he sees her harmed, his soul is aching? No. That would only freak her out.

Can he tell her that staying away from her is practically impossible? If she doesn't come willingly, he will kidnap her or maybe move in with her into this attic. Ah! He sounds like a creep to himself!

Damon was exasperated. All this would be simpler if she could feel the bond and the delicious sparks that make him feel alive.

"Because...", he repeated. "I feel responsible. You got hurt because of me, and it's not right. Let me help you. It will make me feel better." This was the truth. Part of the truth, at least.

"Do you take to your pack every girl who gets hurt?"

Not really. But he is not the guy who would look away from injustice. However, he couldn't tell Talia that she is special either.

"When you come to the Dark Howlers pack, you will see for yourself that we accept everyone who comes seeking help without bad intentions. I promise that if you don't like it in the Dark Howlers pack, I will help you resettle at the location of your choice."

With his index finger, Damon made a cross over his chest where the heart is, to confirm his sincerity, but his silent promise had an additional clause how he will make sure she is treated well and she never wants to leave.

Talia bit the inside of her cheek while considering her options.

One was staying at the Red Moon pack. Anna's bullying was escalating, and Marcy started picking on her also. Yesterday Marcy came to the attic and Talia got a beating for something she didn't do.

The second option was to go to the Dark Howlers pack. Alpha Damon said that in his pack people are accepted. Can it be worse than here? Probably not.

Of course, there was also the third option for Talia to leave on her own somewhere, but that option was scary and uncertain, and it will exist even if she goes with Alpha Damon.

Damon saw that Talia was considering it and he spoke with urgency before she could decline his offer. "Grab your things. You only need to say that you reject the Red Moon pack and Edward Redmayne as your Alpha, and the mind link will break. With that, you are free to go, and they can't find you."

Talia shook her head. "I don't have the mind link. Alpha Edward's father brought me here as a child, and I never went through the ceremony."

"Good!", Damon exclaimed louder than intended. She doesn't belong anywhere, and he was more than happy to give her a home. With him. "Get your things."

"Just like that?"

Damon nodded. "Just like that."

Talia paused and decided to ask the question that was bothering her from the moment he came to the attic. "How do I know that you are not tricking me?"

Damon stood up and Talia felt chills surround her when his body separated from hers.

He extended his hand toward Talia, palm up. "Let me prove it to you."

She looked into his icy blue eyes that stared at her with anticipation and... she believed him.

Chapter 23 - Leaving In A Hurry

"How come you are leaving so suddenly?", Alpha Edward asked while rushing to catch up to Caden and Maya who were descending the stairs with a suitcase each.

'How am I supposed to know?', Caden grumbled in the mind link for Maya to hear.

"Something unexpected happened and we need to leave.", Maya lied with a straight face.

Actually, it was not a lie. Neither Maya nor Caden knew what's going on other than Damon telling them that they are leaving.

Since they arrived at the Red Moon pack, Damon's mood was all over the place, like a woman on a period.

Caden and Maya lost count of how many times Damon told them that they are leaving, only to change his mind shortly after that.

However, they never reached the point of actually packing their things, so Caden and Maya believe that this is it and they will finally return home and find some sense of normalcy.

Earlier that morning, Damon woke them up through the mind link, with instructions that Caden should park the car on the side of the packhouse, pack their things (Damon's included), tell Alpha Edward that they are leaving, and meet with Damon outside. In that order.

Damon also included a clause about how all that needs to be completed within fifteen minutes.

Maya and Caden agreed that Damon finally lost his marbles, but they were happy to return home with the hope that Damon's mood will stabilize because everything crazy started since they arrived at the Red Moon pack.

Just as Caden and Maya reached the main door with Alpha Edward hot on their tails, Marcy dashed out of her room while pulling a robe over her nightgown.

Her father told her to get downstairs as soon as possible, so she didn't have time to dress up.

Damon waited for them outside, leaning on the car that was now in front of the packhouse.

Just as Caden was going to the trunk to keep the suitcases, Damon told him through their mind-link, 'Keep the suitcases in the back seat and start the car.'

Caden did as he was told without objections. He would never question Damon in front of outsiders.

Damon turned to Alpha Edward. "Something came up and we need to return to our pack."

"What about finalizing the marriage agreement between you and Marcy?", Alpha Edward addressed the point that was important (for him).

Damon glanced at Marcy who looked at him anxiously while clutching her robe.

Agreeing to a marriage with Marcy was out of the question, but Damon knew that if he says that, Hell will break loose, and he will need to do damage control.

Damon wanted to leave this place as soon as possible, however, leaving without an explanation might cause problems as well.

Luckily, he thought about this and his farewell speech was ready.

"Alpha Edward...", Damon spoke solemnly. "Marriage is a commitment for life. We shouldn't decide after only a day or two. Miss Marcy and I met, and now we should take some time to think about our interactions, expectations, and decide how we will proceed from here. No matter how eager we are to conclude this matter, a successful Alpha and Luna should know that some things can't be rushed."

Alpha Edward wanted to object, but what should he say? That he wants to rush his only daughter to marry a guy she met two days ago? Ah, this is a nightmare!

Without anything good to say at that time, that would solidify the marriage between Marcy and Damon, Alpha Edward responded with a stiff nod.

Damon raised his hand, giving a sharp wave before going to the back seat, next to the suitcases.

'Drive...!', Damon told Caden as soon as he closed the door behind him.

"Are we finally leaving?", Caden asked while driving down the driveway.

"Get us out of here. Did you pack all my stuff?"

Caden snickered. "All except two pieces of lacy fabric that used to be panties. I assumed you won't need those souvenirs, so I tucked them under the bed."

Damon didn't want to talk about some strange fabric. The only thing on his mind was to get out of the Red Moon pack's territory.

Caden and Maya were glad to leave as well, so they didn't question Damon's abrupt decision to pack and head out. They only feared that he will change his mind again and ask them to go back.

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Back at the Red Moon pack, in Alpha Edward's study...

"Are you sure that nothing happened? You didn't offend him?", Alpha Edward asked Marcy who looked at him helplessly.

There was no way Marcy will admit how on the previous day Damon told her to strip and he was touching her, and she said outrageous things while he recorded all that only to leave her hanging.

It's not that the scene itself was an issue. After all, werewolves are promiscuous by nature, and Damon and Marcy are to be married. Kinky games among couples are common. However, Damon barely acknowledging her existence after that, IS a problem. A big one. And Damon said that she needs to earn any further intimacy. What the hell was that supposed to mean?

"I told you, daddy. After dinner, he said that he was tired, and he went to his room. He doesn't like to be disturbed, so I waited in the lounge on the first floor, in case he comes out, but he didn't, so I went to sleep. The next thing I know, you woke me up

through the mind-link in order to come out because he was leaving. It must be that something happened at the Dark Howlers pack during the night."

Alpha Edward exhaled in frustration. No matter how he looks at this, Damon escaped.

He had issues bringing him here the first time, and getting him the second time will be even more challenging.

He wanted to scold Marcy for incompetence, but it seems that she didn't do anything to offend Alpha Damon, so he swallowed it down.

"I want you to stay in touch with Alpha Damon. He left, but the two of you are officially in a relationship. Act like a girlfriend. Text him, call him, make sure he doesn't forget about you and if he finds a way to get out of this marriage, it will be on you. Do you understand?"

Marcy nodded. If marriage between her and Damon doesn't happen, she will be punished.

She thought that this was it, but then Alpha Edward raised his index finger.

"One week."

"For?", Marcy asked reluctantly.

"If in one week there is no progress, you will go to the Dark Howlers pack, and don't you dare return without a wedding date. If you do your moves right, you won't return at all, but we will come for the Luna ceremony."

"Yes, father.", Marcy responded, and she didn't hesitate when Alpha Edward waved that she can leave.

Marcy faked confidence in front of her father, but now that she was on her own, Marcy was deflated.

If Damon ignored her in person, how is she supposed to get his attention long-distance?

One week is too short.

Does she really need to go to the Dark Howlers pack in order to seduce him?

She had the home territory advantage and failed. Trying something at the Dark Howlers pack will only make it more difficult.

Marcy wondered if she offended Damon somehow.

He seemed interested, but then he wasn't.

That evening, when she went to his room, Marcy was confident that Damon wanted them to roll in the sheets, yet she made a mistake and hesitated. The next morning, he told her that she needs to earn it.

Marcy concluded that she probably hurt his ego.

No woman rejected Alpha Damon, and even though she wanted to do some things, in a way, she rejected him.

Marcy remembered that steamy session. His kiss was domineering, and his hands moved skillfully. He definitely knew what he was doing. And the way he ripped her panties... it was hot.

Panties!

Marcy dashed into the guest bedroom that Damon used. She needs to retrieve her panties before some Omega sees them. She was already seen sucking him off, and she doesn't want those blasted servants to have more gossip material.

Marcy checked the floor, and she didn't see her panties. Did Damon discard them? She checked the trash can in the bathroom.

Maybe he took them with him? No... he wouldn't keep a reminder of rejection. Where are they?

Marcy got on her knees and looked down and her eyes lit up when she saw a bunched small fabric under the bed.

Bingo!

Wait a minute... Why are there two?

Marcy recognized one as hers, but what about this other one?

Reluctantly, Marcy sniffed unknown panties and her face turned ugly. Nora!

Chapter 24 - Kidnappers

Based on the strength of the scent that was still present on what used to be Nora's panties, Marcy concluded that they were recently worn.

They can't be more than one-two days old, and that was the time when Damon was using this room!

What are Nora's panties doing in Damon's room?

With a single glance, Marcy spotted that both panties were ripped in a similar way.

Marcy was sizzling with anger as the reality dawned on her.

That bitch! Nora was pretending to be sweet and supportive, while sneaking into Damon's room when Marcy was not looking!

Was Nora the reason why Damon ignored Marcy yesterday?

Marcy remembered that after Damon touched (and recorded) her, Marcy went to steam her anger on Talia. Alpha Edward contacted her through mind link, but she brushed him off that she was busy. When Marcy finished with Talia, her father told her that Nora went to accompany Damon while touring the Red Moon pack.

At that time, Marcy didn't think much about it, but what if Nora gave Damon a very personal tour?

Marcy grit her teeth while cursing Nora. It's all her fault!

Marcy stormed out of the bedroom and nearly bumped into Nora.

"What are you doing here?", Marcy asked Nora.

"Is it true that Alpha Damon left?"

Marcy forced a tight smile on her face. "Something came up and he had to leave. I just escorted him. We will resume our marriage talks later."

"I see..." Nora couldn't hide her disappointment. She came after hearing that Damon is gone, in order to retrieve her panties, but with Marcy here, she can't do it. Nora eyed Marcy who was still in her robe and nightgown. "I guess you will dress up for breakfast. I will see you there."

Marcy looked after Nora's retreating back and fumed. 'You will pay for this, bitch!'

Marcy gritted her teeth while coming up with various scenarios to make Nora suffer.

Since she came home from Paris, nothing went right.

Marcy found her mate, but he ended up being an Omega. Her father scolded her more times than she wishes to remember. Before she could recover from meeting (and rejecting) George, Damon showed up as her groom and played some game of hot and cold with Marcy while shagging Nora.

Marcy didn't get anything other than insults and embarrassments, and she was confident that even Omegas are laughing at her because that filthy girl saw her sucking off Damon.

'Yes... that girl in the attic...!', Marcy's eyes shone maliciously as she made her way upstairs.

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It took Caden, Maya, and Damon about half an hour drive to get out of the Red Moon pack territory.

"Stop the car.", Damon said and Caden pulled over reluctantly while silently praying to the Moon Goddess that Damon didn't change his mind and wants to go back to the Red Moon pack.

Damon grabbed the suitcases that were next to him and went to the back of the car with urgency.

Caden and Maya turned to see what Damon was doing, and they both gaped at the sight of a girl emerging before Damon put suitcases in the trunk.

Damon held her hand, and even opened the door for her!

'Since when is Damon such a gentleman?', Caden asked Maya through mind-link, and the latter shrugged in response.

Of course, Damon is NOT a gentleman. Never was, never will be... at least that's what Maya and Caden thought. Until now.

Talia and Damon sat in the back seat and Damon told Caden to resume driving.

Caden didn't react.

Both Maya and Caden observed Talia curiously.

"Aren't you going to introduce us?", Caden asked Damon who frowned at him.

After a second of hesitation, Damon glanced at Talia and gestured toward the front of the car. "That's Caden, my Beta, and Maya, his mate." He turned to Caden. "There you go. I introduced you. Now, can you drive?"

Caden and Maya were both visibly confused. What about the girl's name?

The truth is that Damon didn't know Talia's name, however, he didn't think that was important and he didn't want to waste time on pleasantries. The important thing was that the girl was next to him, heading to the Dark Howlers pack. There will be plenty of time for them to talk. Also, they were still close to the territory of the Red Moon pack, and Damon felt pressure to keep moving.

Caden saw that Damon's mood was not good, so he resumed driving.

Now that he saw Talia, Caden understood why all the rush to leave. Alpha Edward, Marcy, and others were jolted awake and too confused by the sudden development to notice the scent of the girl that was in the trunk. Heck, even Caden didn't realize that there was another person in the car and he wondered if something was off with his nose.

When they were back on the road, Caden spoke to Damon and Maya through the mind-link. 'Is there a reason why we kidnapped a girl from the Red Moon pack?'

'It's not kidnapping.', Damon responded.

'She came out of the trunk.', Maya stated the fact. 'We are officially kidnappers.'

Damon couldn't refute this. Talia came out of the trunk, but she was there only in order to avoid drama if Alpha Edward, Marcy, or someone else, sees her.

'Why did you beat her?', Caden asked.

Damon was outraged. Since when is he a woman-beater? Damon would never raise a hand on a woman, unless she is coming to kill him.

'I didn't.', Damon responded grumpily.

Before they could ask more questions, Damon quickly said, 'The girl is here out of her own will. She was badly treated, I offered her a way out, and she took it. Now, can you focus on the road? She doesn't have the mind link, but that doesn't mean someone won't come after us if they notice her missing.'

Damon didn't want to explain more than that, and he was not ready to say that the copper-haired girl is his mate. He was still adjusting to that fact himself.

He glanced at Talia who was looking out the window with her eyes half-closed. It was obvious that she was about to fall asleep at any moment.

Damon touched Talia's shoulder, to get her attention, and then patted his, "Lean on me if you want to sleep."

Talia shook her head while mumbling how it's not necessary.

She was overwhelmed with all this and sitting so close to a scary Alpha made her uneasy. She wanted to go back in the trunk.

Earlier that morning, in the attic, Talia was tired and achy and her mind was muddled, and she accepted this crazy idea of leaving the Red Moon pack. But now that she is actually in the middle of this escape adventure, she was not sure if leaving was a good idea.

Talia was mentally and physically exhausted. She was used to doing her chores at night and sleeping during the day, and the last two days she was getting beaten, which means that she didn't sleep.

"Aww...", Talia cried softly when her forehead bumped into the window. It seems that she fell asleep without realizing it.

Damon put his arm around Talia's shoulders and pulled her to lean her back on him.

She struggled to sit straight, but his grip increased, pressing her against him.

"Don't be stubborn and sleep."

Talia exhaled helplessly. Damon was more comfortable than the hard glass window, but she was not used to leaning on people no matter how warm they are, or how good they smell.

And this was the second time in a day for the scary Alpha to pin her to lean on him.

His sturdy arm was high on her chest, as he held her shoulder tightly without hurting her.

Talia glanced at Damon and wondered if this was his way of being kind. Does he act like this with everyone? Probably. She didn't see a single reason why someone so powerful and handsome would single her out.

"Thanks...", Talia said softly and relaxed against him.

With slight vibrations of the car, Damon's warmth, and his scent of the forest and dark chocolate, Talia fell asleep in less than five seconds.

Chapter 25 - A Baby Monitor

Maya and Caden were throwing glances at Damon and Talia through the rearview mirror and observing how Damon cradled Talia in his arms gently, like she was made out of glass.

'Since when is our Alpha so kind to victims of abuse?', Maya asked Caden through their mind-link.

'You wanted to ask: since when is our Alpha so kind. Period.', Caden corrected her and asked, 'Did you know about this?'

'Nope.', Maya responded. 'Damon was always fast in picking up women but bringing one home is a first for him.'

Maya pointed at the rearview mirror, indicating for Caden to look.

Caden's eyes shifted just in time to see Damon adjusting his position so that Talia is more comfortable as she slept while leaning on him.

'It seems that Damon's taste in women changed.', Caden said.

Maya agreed. 'I thought he goes for curvaceous mature women. I remember him saying how he gets a kick of seeing boobs bouncing in the rhythm he sets with his hips, and that the only good ass is the one that has ripples when spanked. For someone who emphasizes that he likes them experienced, it's strange that he chose a skinny teenager.'

'I can hear you.', Damon grumbled and both Caden and Maya shrunk.

'If you want to badmouth me, ensure the mind-link is just between the two of you.'

Damon couldn't confirm if Maya and Caden stopped their gossip, or if they just tuned him out. He knew that they were not malicious.

Their comments were not in good taste, but only because this was his mate. If it was any other woman, he wouldn't care.

It was normal that they had questions about this unknown girl who suddenly popped out of the trunk, but Damon was not ready to talk about her. Actually, even Damon barely knew anything about her.

However, he knew that she is his mate, her scent is addictive, and delightful sparks prickle his skin when they touch... She was badly treated, and Damon needed her close and safe.

And that was enough for him. For now.

Damon was pleased that Talia agreed to come with him to his pack (and he didn't need to resort to kidnapping or figuring out how to move in with her).

In the Dark Howlers pack, no one will dare to mistreat her, and he will make sure that she gets whatever she needs and wants.

Damon will never forget the fear in her eyes, and how pitifully she looked in that attic.

Damon decided to take her with him on a whim, and he had no plans for tomorrow or the distant future, but he knew that he would make sure Talia's life going forward is a happy one.

He observed Talia and frowned at her injuries.

'Find us a hotel nearby. Something further from the main road.', Damon said through the mind link to Caden and Maya.

'Are you so eager to shag her that you can't wait?', Caden asked with disapproval. They still have a long way ahead of them and the girl is hurt and tired.

Damon grit his teeth in frustration. Why did Caden assume the worst? OK. Damon's reputation with women is not the best, but Talia is obviously in need of care and rest. He is not an animal!

'She needs first aid, and we can have breakfast.', Damon responded while suppressing his rage. He didn't want to snap and wake up Talia.

Maya and Caden agreed with this. Food was a good idea. They left in a hurry on empty stomach.

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Per Damon's instructions, Maya booked two rooms. She assumed that it will be girls in one room and boys in the other one, so she asked for two rooms with two beds each.

'Buy medical supplies for tending to cuts and bruises. Order breakfast in your room for me also. Let me know when it's ready.', Damon sent them a message through mind-link.

Maya and Caden gaped at the sight of Damon who carried Talia princess style inside a room, and he closed the door behind him.

Damon placed Talia on the bed gently, happy that she didn't wake up.

She frowned a bit when her back touched the mattress and he wondered if she has an injury there also.

He sat at the edge of the bed and looked at her sleepy face full of bruises and cuts. Her upper lip and left cheek were swollen, yet she still looked beautiful.

He took her hand in his and smiled when delightful sparks prickled his skin.

After an unknown measure of time, Damon asked his wolf, 'Now what?'

'What do you want to do?', his wolf responded with a question.

'I want to hold her and... I shouldn't.'

His wolf snorted in disapproval. 'Why are you resisting?'

'You know what will happen if others find out she is my mate. Everyone will target her. She is weak and she already suffered too much.'

Damon's wolf didn't agree that Talia was weak. Anyone who can have so many injuries and not dissolve into sobs, must be strong.

His wolf felt Damon's conflict and he decided to help Damon understand his current situation.

'In that case, there is only one thing to do.'

'Which one?', Damon asked.

'Reject her.', his wolf said, and they shared a piercing ache in the chest area as the invisible bond between Damon and Talia was protesting the idea.

His wolf spoke again. 'You can't do it because you know it won't do any good. That's why you couldn't leave her behind.'

Damon released a slow breath. 'What should I do? I can't let her go, and I can't be with her either.'

His wolf was already pleased that Damon didn't reject Talia in the spur of the moment. He knew better than anyone how much Damon craves control. That was Damon's way of dealing with the harsh reality, but this was one thing where Damon can win only by letting go and allowing the bond to guide him.

'I can feel your anxiousness, boy. It will be fine. Don't rush this. For now, keep her close and keep her safe. In time, you will know what to do...'

'Food is here', Caden's voice through the mind-link jerked Damon out of his thoughts.

Damon checked the time and realized that he lost about half an hour. That never happened before.

He was staring at sleeping Talia and lost track of time. He concluded that this bond is messing with his mind big time.

'Damon?', Caden called after a minute.

Damon knew that he should leave, but he found it difficult to separate from Talia. What if something happens? What if she disappears again?

He got an idea.

'Caden, answer the call and keep it on...', Damon instructed and took his phone to call Caden for a video chat.

Damon placed his phone on the TV stand so that the camera points at Talia, and with this video call, he can keep an eye on her from another room.

"Give me your phone.", Damon demanded from Caden as soon as he entered Caden's and Maya's room.

He nodded in approval when he saw Talia sleeping on the screen of Caden's phone.

Damon muted the call so that they don't wake up Talia accidentally.

"That's called a baby monitor.", Maya said to Damon.

"What?"

"When you have a camera pointing at the baby while she is sleeping so that you can see her from other parts of the house. A baby monitor.", Maya explained.

"Or stalking.", Caden added. "Will you tell us what's the deal with this girl?"

Damon sat on the chair and took one plate that had eggs, bacon, and sausages. "Let me eat first. I'm starving."

He was shoving food into his mouth while stealing glances at Caden's phone (aka the baby monitor). Knowing that Talia was there, sleeping, gave him peace.

Damon narrowed his eyes and focused on the phone in order to confirm that Talia's chest is rising and falling as she breathed. Other than breathing, she didn't move a muscle, and he needed confirmation that she was alive.

"We got the first aid supplies.", Maya said and pointed at the bag that was next to Damon who didn't respond.

"Damon?", Caden called.

"What?"

"The first aid supplies are there.", Caden repeated what Maya said previously, and then gestured to the empty plate in Damon's hand. "You said that you will tell us about the girl after food."

Damon didn't realize at what point he finished food. He spaced out again while staring at Talia. Whatever symptoms he has, it's getting worse.

Chapter 26 - A Cover-up Story

Damon thought about how to explain Talia's presence to Caden and Maya.

"I'm responsible for her.", Damon said which got him raised eyebrows from Maya and Caden who obviously wanted more information.

"Marcy was in my room and this girl... interrupted. Because of that, she ended up in her current state."

Maya connected the dots. "Is she the Omega you mentioned, that got a beating from Marcy?"

Damon nodded.

"Why are you making it sound like you are responsible?", Caden asked. "If Marcy has a temper, it was only a matter of time before she snaps, regardless if you were involved."

Damon raised his hand, indicating to Caden to be patient. "That was the first time. Then, I went to Alpha Edward and told him that some Omegas are being punished physically and that he should talk to Marcy about it, and after that, this girl got another beating."

Maya and Caden exchanged looks, feeling that something is missing from the story.

Sure, Talia got hit because of Damon twice and even though he was involved, he didn't do it on purpose. These are internal dealings of the pack. As an Alpha, Damon should know that any Alpha won't tolerate others meddling in how rewards and punishments are given to his people.

Taking her away sneakily is stealing. Alphas consider their pack members like their belongings, because a pack builds strength with numbers. By taking away Talia, Damon indirectly weakened the Red Moon pack. Sure, she is not a warrior, but every member counts.

"You know that Alpha Edward can turn hostile if he finds out that she is with us, right?", Caden asked.

Damon rubbed his face with force. He knew that but... "You didn't see where she stays. I found her in the attic, bruised and bleeding among broken furniture and rags. No one cares about her."

"And you do?", Caden snapped. "You are aware that our relationship with the Red Moon pack is tense, and that Alpha Edward is working in the shadows while trying to topple you, and you just gave him a reason to go openly against us. Is she worth jeopardizing the Dark Howlers pack? Are you aware that this might cause a war!?"

Damon growled and his face contorted in anger. "What do you expect me to do? To leave her there to rot while waiting for another beating?"

"That's not what Caden said.", Maya interrupted with urgency while her eyes darted from Caden to Damon.

She can't go against her Alpha, but she didn't want her mate to end up fighting with Damon either.

Seeing that she got both Caden's and Damon's attention, Maya resumed talking calmly.

"We need to do this right. So far, Alphas who complained about us accepting their pack members were silenced by Elders after we provided them with testimonies of how they came to us willingly. We can't tell them that we smuggled her in a trunk. Only the three of us know how she ended up with us and we can't keep this under wraps because our pack members will see the newcomer. We need to come up with a cover-up story that will make sense because when Alpha Edward notices her missing, we will be the first suspects and he might send people to look for her."

Damon frowned at the thought of anyone from the Red Moon pack coming and searching for Talia. What if they take her away?

He got an idea.

"She didn't have the mind-link. She was brought to the Red Moon pack as a child and she never went through the acceptance ceremony, so technically, she is a rogue. We can say that she grew up with her grandparents and when they died, she came to this area and we found her on our way home accidentally."

"Who will believe that?", Caden asked.

"Make it believable!", Damon snapped.

"Alright, alright...", Maya said while waving her hands for Damon to calm down. "She is a rogue we picked up on the way. We will fill that with a few details to make it believable. How do we explain why she came to us and not to some other pack?"

"Something is off with her wolf.", Damon said. "Not many packs will accept members who are not in top form."

Maya thought that this is something they can work with. But... "Will she cooperate and confirm the story?"

"If she doesn't, it will bring trouble for us, and she will go back to the Red Moon pack.", Caden said and looked at Damon with disapproval. "I wish you spoke to me before stuffing her in the trunk. Considering that she is just an Omega and that Alpha Edward doesn't find value in them, we could have made a deal to take her with us, without risking complications."

"I didn't stuff her anywhere. She got in on her own.", Damon said irritably. Why are they making it sound like he kidnapped her?

Damon was with Talia in the attic and he didn't want to stay there a minute longer than necessary, so he came up with the idea to leave right away while smuggling Talia with them. He didn't have time for strategy meetings, but it worked, they are out, and they only need to come up with a coverup story and things will be fine. Why is Caden raising a fuss?

'THUD!'

A sound came from Caden's phone and Damon's eyes widened in panic when he saw an empty bed.

Talia disappeared!

Damon dashed out and ran frantically to his room.

He let out the breath he was holding when he saw Talia sprawled on the floor, sleeping.

She fell off the bed.

Damon shook his head helplessly because she was adorable while hugging a pillow, and he panicked like an idiot for no reason. Why did he think that she disappeared?

He walked to Talia slowly and carefully pried the pillow from her hold before lifting her up.

Talia stirred a bit while adjusting in Damon's arms to a more comfortable position, and he stood still like a statue as delightful sparks shoot through his body.

Damon laid with Talia on the bed with a plan to leave Talia sleeping so that he can return to Caden's and Maya's room. After all, with Talia's arrival at the Dark Howlers pack, they needed to make necessary preparations so that she has a place to stay.

However, Talia's head rested on Damon's shoulder and her warm breath fanned his neck as wonderful sparks overtook his senses, making him tense and relaxed at the same time, and he was unable to let go.

Talia was exhausted, and Damon didn't sleep for two nights in a row either.

Damon stared at Talia, engraving every curve of her face into his memory, and he didn't realize that his eyes were closing gradually.

In Caden's and Maya's room...

The couple stared at Caden's phone.

"Did Damon develop a split personality, or did we bring an impostor from the Red Moon pack?", Maya asked.

Caden chuckled. "Maybe they really drugged him with something that makes a man lovey-dovey and Marcy is now pulling her hair out because he left before drugs took full effect."

"You are not worried about this?"

Caden shrugged. "It seems that he cares about the girl. Why would I worry? That should be a good thing."

"Yeah. It should.", Maya said thoughtfully. "But this is Damon. Remember, our Alpha Damon? The one who uses the word 'girlfriend' as a cussword. The one who doesn't get close to a woman if she has clothes on. Are you telling me that suddenly his tender side is showing? I'm not buying it. This is too sudden, and that girl is NOT his type. Something is not right."

Caden had a thoughtful expression. "It's not sudden. This change happened shortly after we arrived at the Red Moon pack. I realized Damon's behavior is strange when he asked me how I felt when we met."

Maya blinked rapidly. "Damon was interested to know more about mates?" She looked at the phone where Damon slept while cradling Talia in his arms and Maya's eyebrows went up in slow motion. "Call me crazy, but I think that girl is his mate."

"You are crazy.", Caden said right away. "Damon hates everything about mates. If she is his mate, he would reject her and run for the hills, and not cuddle."

Maya smirked knowingly and pointed at the phone. "And how would you explain THAT?"

Chapter 27 - Awake

Caden's mind was unable to accept that Damon found his mate, but Caden didn't have an alternate explanation for Damon's bizarre behavior. "If that girl is Damon's mate, why didn't he say something?"

Maya rolled her eyes. "Because that's Damon. He will not admit it even if you ask him outright. But think about it. Erratic behavior. One moment he wants to leave, and the second one we are staying. Didn't he show us the video of Marcy naked, humping his hand while begging him to take her, and he left her like that? Since when is Damon the one who refuses a free meal? He requested a tour of the Red Moon pack, and you

know that he always avoided those because when he saw things he didn't like, Damon never stayed quiet. And in the car, Damon was sticking to the girl and we both saw how gentle he was with her. The only explanation is that he found his mate." Maya pointed at the phone.

"Caden, you know better than anyone how much Damon cherishes the Dark Howlers pack. He wouldn't risk provoking the Red Moon pack by smuggling a random girl. She is either his long-lost sister or his mate."

Caden remembered how when he met Maya, the only thing he wanted was to be with her, and nothing could get in his way. Not even war.

Everything Maya said made sense and pointed to the possibility that the girl who came from the trunk is Damon's mate. Maya was always the smart one.

Caden chuckled with a hint of evil sparkling in his eyes. "Damon doesn't want to admit that the girl is his mate? Let's see how long he can pull that off."

Maya had a bad feeling about this.

She would never consider going against Damon, even if it's a joke. However, Caden doesn't have problems with it.

"What do you have on your mind?", Maya asked reluctantly.

"Let's observe, for now.", Caden said while rubbing his chin with the tips of his fingers.

Caden didn't want to share too much with Maya, knowing that she will not approve and probably worry. But Damon is giving a hard time to Caden ever since he found Maya, and Caden thought how this is a great opportunity to get even.

Caden noticed one more oddity. Assuming that Talia is Damon's mate, something was not right. She was indifferent toward Damon, is it possible that she doesn't know Damon is her mate?

Damon said how something is off with Talia's wolf, but based on her scent, Caden knew she is definitely a werewolf and he concluded that nothing is wrong with her. She might be a late bloomer.

If Talia IS Damon's mate, there are so many things Caden could do to rile up Damon, and if Damon is hiding the truth, it will only make things easier for Caden.

Caden's smile widened while he thought of wicked ways to mess with his Alpha. He can try to separate them. Or to make Damon believe he has competition. Caden would pay big money to see Damon drowning in jealousy. Ha! This will be fun!

Maya observed Caden's expression that was changing rapidly, and she knew that Caden was coming up with something Damon won't like.

Damon and Caden are at the helm of the largest pack in North America, yet the two of them sometimes behave no better than toddlers.

However, that childish and playful attitude Damon shows only toward Caden and for anyone else, Damon has a nasty temper. If that girl is really his mate, Damon will only be more irritable if anyone messes with her.

Maya disconnected the video call so that Damon and Talia have privacy.

Maya was happy for Damon. Finding a mate is wonderful for any werewolf. They give each other comfort and purpose in life, and she is aware of how Damon is lonely under that grumpy facade.

Will Talia be a good Luna? Well, if Damon and Talia are mates, Talia will be their Luna, regardless of her readiness for the job but Maya was not worried. Everything can be learned as long as there is a will, and Maya would be happy to hand over her current duties to Talia so that she can focus on helping Caden as a Beta.

At the same time, Maya felt sorry for Talia. Damon is not an easy man to be with, and Talia will definitely have a hard time.

"I don't think Damon will wake up the girl.", Caden said. "That gives us probably a few hours."

He wiggled his eyebrows mischievously while inching closer to Maya in slow motion.

Maya's expression lit up when she realized that Caden was talking about carnal pleasures.

Ah, they will make good use of their time in this hotel.

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Talia dreamt that she was in a forest.

It was light and airy, despite the massive trees that surrounded her.

She picked up a delicious scent of dark chocolate, and her tummy rumbled. She was hungry.

Talia started moving about, trying to locate the source of that scent. It's been years since she ate chocolate the last time, and she really wanted to have some now.

She walked slowly, at first, but then she broke into a run as the scent became more potent, inviting her to enjoy the smooth sweet delicacy.

Suddenly, a tree appeared out of nowhere, and Talia slammed herself into it, just like in cartoons, with her arms and legs around it.

"Aww...", Talia cried softly, and her eyes fluttered open.

There was no forest and no tree. Damn it, it was a dream. A potentially tasty one.

She wished that it lasted only a few more seconds so that she can get a bite (or two) of that delicacy that called for her. Maybe if she closes her eyes, she can resume that dream and find the source of that mouthwatering scent.

Talia thought how something was not right. She ascertained that she was awake, however, she could still smell the forest and the dark chocolate, and she was definitely hugging something hard and big.

Talia blinked and her drowsy state turned into panic immediately.

She was in an unknown room and the thing she was hugging was not a tree, but a scary Alpha.

What the heck!?

Why are their legs one over the other? And why is his biceps her pillow?

Talia carefully removed her hands from Damon's body and tried to move away from him, only to realize that she was stuck.

Ah! His arm was around her and she couldn't budge!

She felt like crying. This was the third time in the same day that the scary Alpha was pinning her against him.

When Damon told her to come with him, he mentioned a room, and clothes, and food, and a doctor, and there was no mentioning of this... hugging.

Talia wondered, how did she find herself in this situation?

The last thing she remembered was dozing off in the back of a car. How did she end up in a room, in the bed, with a scary Alpha pinning her against him?

Talia wanted to go back to her attic, or maybe into the trunk of the car. Anything was better than here!

She noticed the even fall and rise of his chest and she concluded that he was sleeping, so she relaxed a bit.

Talia looked up at the man beside her and her breath hitched at the sight of Damon's gorgeous visual.

His unruly raven-black hair fell over his forehead... long eyelashes, full lips, strong jaw... everything about him was handsome, even the small bump at the base of his nose and a day-old stubble.

'It should be illegal to be this attractive', Talia thought. 'No wonder princess Marcy was raging at the thought that Alpha Damon might think bad of her.'

Talia shook those thoughts away and chided herself. She should not think of Alpha Damon as attractive. Actually, she should not think about him at all.

Talia was painfully aware of her non-existent background and if she allows herself to see Alpha Damon as anything more than her benefactor, as someone who took pity on her, she will only deceive herself and end up hurting.

Chapter 28 - Awake (cont.)

Talia glanced around, how much her current position allowed, and she observed the hotel room. It was nice and clean.

She spotted a second bed which added to the confusion of why she was sharing a bed with Alpha Damon.

What about the other two people?

She concluded that this was not the Dark Howlers pack. Did they make a stop along the way?

Maybe this is the part where she finds out how Damon tricked her, and he is about to sell her kidneys and liver, and then discard her in the forest for beasts to eat her!

She didn't dare to wake Damon up and she couldn't get out of his hold without big movements either. She was stuck.

Talia resigned herself to the current situation and she slowly returned to her original position, with her head on Damon's arm, but this time, she kept her hands to herself. Just thinking that her arm was draped over his firm abs made her blush profusely.

Talia took a deep breath and savored Damon's scent of forest and dark chocolate. It was nice and for some unknown reason, it relaxed her.

She closed her eyes in the hope of falling asleep and dreaming of that chocolatey forest again. Maybe this time she gets to eat something.

Talia let out a long exhale, and in the next moment, Damon shifted sideways, entrapping her completely in his arms and holding her so close that her face was stuck to his chest.

His breath seeped into her scalp, making her hairs stand on ends.

Talia couldn't see when Damon's lips lifted into a smile. He was content that she gave up on leaving.

From the moment Talia woke up, Damon was awake as well, but he stayed still while waiting to see what she will do.

Damon was aware Talia had wounds that needed tending, and that she was probably hungry as well, but he wanted to extend this moment in bed for just a bit longer.

Damon cradled Talia in his arms, and he enjoyed the sweet citrusy scent of freesia that somehow got amplified by the sensational sparks wherever his body touched Talia's even through their clothes.

His palm held onto her tiny waist, and he confirmed that Talia is delicate and fragile.

He had an urge to feed her.

It's not that he minds Talia's skinny frame, but he would prefer if she is stronger and not in danger of being carried away by the wind.

Ever since she entered his sight, two days ago, other than cuts and bruises from Marcy's beating, Talia hit her head in the refrigerator, she bumped her forehead in the window of a car, and she fell off a bed, and those are only things he saw.

Damon is convinced that Talia is prone to injuries.

He never saw such a clumsy werewolf.

Adorably clumsy.

When he held Talia's hand, the sparks were more intense than over the clothes and he wondered how it would feel if they increased the skin-to-skin surface.

Damon thought of removing his shirt. And her sweatshirt.

Nudity among werewolves is not uncommon. After all, they end up naked whenever they shift into their wolf form, either because they undress or rip their clothes in the process, and anyone who is nearby, gets a good view of everything.

But Talia seemed uncomfortable around Damon, and he had a strong feeling that if he removes his (or her) garments, she might freak out.

His wolf was silent, but Damon could feel the happiness that radiated from the ancient creature.

One excitement amplified the other, and Damon really-really wanted to touch Talia more.

His hand which rested on her waist gradually sneaked lower while pulling the edge of her sweatshirt higher, bit by bit, just enough for his fingers to slip under her top. And then Damon's fingers crawled higher, in search of Talia's skin and he felt his heart thundering against his chest.

Damon chided himself. Why the heck was he so nervous? His hand was on Talia's side, away from her private parts, and he touched many women everywhere. This was definitely not a big deal... but somehow, it was.

His index finger brushed her skin, just above the waistband of her pants and he jolted upon contact. The sparks were like an electric current, catching him by surprise, and he cursed internally when Talia stirred.

Talia was drifting in and out of sleep and she was not sure if she dreamed about his hand moving about in her waist area.

Talia slowly lifted her head, and she froze when she spotted icy blue eyes which observed her intently.

She thought that she might be imagining it, or that he was doing it in his sleep, but this... just what is this?

Talia didn't think that she compares to any of the pretty girls, and a guy who is handsome and powerful like Damon will definitely have plenty of beauties around him.

It never crossed her mind that Damon might be interested in her.

Talia became painfully aware that he was holding her. They were both lying on their sides, facing each other, and his arms were around her... and he was watching her.

She wanted to move away or to say something, anything, but her tongue refused to cooperate, and she felt the heat seeping into her cheeks.

"Did you have a good sleep?", Damon's deep voice shook the silence away.

Talia responded with a small nod.

Damon hummed in approval. "How do you feel? Are you in pain?"

"It's fine...", Talia responded in a small voice and forcibly inhaled, to get some oxygen in her system and snap out of her daze.

Right! She is Talia, no one... She escaped the Red Moon pack, and she has no idea where she was heading, but she knew that at that moment she was in bed with a scary Alpha and she felt the urgency to increase the distance between them.

No matter how handsome he is, or how good he smells, this was not proper.

"Hey... Do you...?"

"I have a name.", he cut her off sternly.

Talia realized that she called him 'hey' again and that he didn't like it.

She grew up in the Red Moon pack, but due to her special circumstances, Talia was not exposed to the strict hierarchy that werewolves follow, so those things were not ingrained in her, however, she was familiar with the protocols.

"I apologize. Alpha Damon..."

"Damon.", he interrupted her again. It didn't sound right when she used his title to call him. "Just Damon."

Alpha is the title that represents strength while reminding others of respect and submission, and he didn't feel that was appropriate for her.

"Damon...", Talia said awkwardly, and Damon smiled victoriously.

"Can you let me go, please?"

Damon's smile fell when he heard her question.

"Why are you making it sound like I'm holding you against your will?", he asked with a slightly pitiful expression.

Talia was confused. Did she give him permission to hold her? That could happen only if she did it in her sleep. Ah! Did she throw herself at him?

Damon saw Talia's frantic expression and he chuckled.

"You fell off the bed. I'm holding you so that you don't get another bruise on top of existing ones."

"Oh...", a sound escaped Talia's lips. "Well, thank you. I'm awake now, so... can you let me go?"

Damon cocked an eyebrow and ignored her question. "Do you want to freshen up? While you shower, I can order some food."

"Will you let me go if I agree?", Talia asked helplessly.

"Not necessarily.", Damon responded with a straight face.

Talia swallowed hard. "If you don't let me go, how will I shower?"

"We can shower together."

Talia's eyes widened in horror. How can he say that like it's a totally normal thing?

Damon saw color draining from her face, and he cleared his throat while trying to salvage the situation.

"I meant, if your injuries are bothering you, I can help you wash up."

"No need.", Talia squeaked, and she scrambled off the bed clumsily the moment Damon released her from his hold.

She dashed into the bathroom, closed the door, and locked it with a loud 'click' sound.

Damon stared at the door with a complex expression on his handsome face.

So many women would do community service to be with him, and this girl can't wait to escape.

Chapter 29 - Preparing For The Newcomer

Damon forced himself to stop staring at the bathroom door and called room service.

He realized that he had no idea what Talia likes to eat so he decided to get everything from the menu. In his opinion, the hotel didn't offer enough options.

After placing a massive order for food, Damon made another phone call. This was important.

"Hi Steph...", Damon greeted Stephanie when she picked up the call.

"It's good that you remembered me.", Stephanie said irritably.

"Did something happen?"

"Cassie is coming. Where are you?"

"We are on the way home.", Damon responded. He didn't care about Cassie.

"When will you reach here?"

"Not sure. Something came up. That's why I'm calling."

Stephanie was struck with concern. "Are you kids OK?"

Damon smiled a little. Stephanie is always treating them like kids. "We are fine, but we are bringing someone with us. I want you to prepare a room for her."

"Alright." Stephanie didn't think much about it. "I'm not sure if we have free rooms in the common building because that's Maya's jurisdiction, but I can ensure that one of single Omegas takes her in until we figure out something permanent."

The possibility of Talia being with some random person (and away from Damon) was out of the question.

"No! She will stay in the packhouse, in my old bedroom."

Stephanie paused. The third floor was reserved for the Alpha and his family. Did Damon finally find a woman he was willing to marry?

"Are you bringing Marcy with you?"

Damon nearly choked on his saliva. "What? No!"

Stephanie was confused. Did he have time to pick up another woman? "If not Marcy, then..."

"She is just a girl, Steph!", Damon snapped.

"If you say so...", Stephanie said suspiciously.

Since Damon became Alpha, they took in many members who were rogues or from other packs and no one got to stay in the packhouse. And this was Damon's old room, on the third floor that's off-limits for anyone not related to Alpha.

Damon rubbed his face forcibly. He had a good idea related to what Stephanie was thinking about.

"Don't make a big deal when there is none. The girl is hurt, and she had a hard time. She is timid, and I believe that she doesn't have a wolf. I can't let her mingle with others until we ascertain her condition. Oh, and tell Travis to be ready to accept a patient. I want her to get a full checkup when we arrive."

"I will...", Stephanie agreed. She didn't want to probe into this further.

She sees Damon as her child, but she can't ignore the fact that he IS her Alpha, and she shouldn't question him.

Anyway, there are other things for her to deal with. "Can you give me an estimate on when you will reach here?"

"Probably tomorrow morning."

Stephanie groaned in frustration. That's when Cassie will come, and Stephanie really-really didn't want to deal with her.

"Please, hurry. And drive safely."

Damon hummed in agreement and ended the call.

He looked at the bathroom door and listened to the sound of the shower, wondering if Talia was naked. probably.

Only one door separated them, and he could imagine water drops caressing her body. He swallowed hard.

...

The warm water of the shower allowed Talia to relax and forget about all the troubles outside of that bathroom.

Most of her wounds were scabbed, so shampoo didn't sting, but the bruises still hurt when she moved or washed bruised parts of her body.

She would love to stay under that trickling warm water forever, but alas, all good things come to an end.

Talia wrapped herself in a towel and observed her bruised appearance in the mirror while wondering how long it will take to heal.

Talia was delaying to get ready. Getting ready means stepping outside, and there is a scary Alpha waiting for her.

Can she stay in the bathroom forever?

Talia shook her head helplessly. What's the point of avoiding the inevitable?

If she lingers longer than necessary, Alpha Damon will probably knock to check on her, or maybe open the door. After all, one flimsy lock can't stop an Alpha from getting where he wants.

Talia couldn't help but wonder, why would he help her to leave the Red Moon pack? Is it true that he doesn't have bad intentions?

Talia was not aware of Damon's reputation, but she heard that Alphas are strong and prideful, always chasing power and proving their dominance, and they don't go out of their way for anyone.

Damon was... different. Confusing.

Talia froze when she realized that she doesn't have clean clothes.

She would put the ones she was wearing previously, but they had dried blood stains and were definitely not something she should put back on.

Talia collected her few possessions from the Red Moon pack and bunched them into an overused bedsheet, but they were in the trunk of the car, and if Damon was nice enough to bring them, they are in the room, and not in the bathroom where she needs them!

Now what?

Talia saw a bathrobe hanging on the hook next to the shower and decided to put it on. It was providing better coverage than a towel.

After a few deep breaths, Talia held onto the doorknob and opened the door ajar, just enough to peek into the hotel room.

Part of her hoped that Damon is sleeping, or that he left and that there will be no one in the room, but she saw him sitting on the bed and fiddling with his phone.

After a few exceedingly long seconds, Damon lifted his gaze from the screen and eyed Talia, "How long are you going to stand there?"

Talia cleared her throat nervously. "Did you bring my things from the car?"

He didn't.

When they got into the hotel, Damon was carrying Talia, and Caden brought only Damon's suitcase.

"What do you need?"

"Clothes."

Damon waved at Talia to come into the room. "First, let me check your injuries."

He cocked an eyebrow when he saw that she was not moving, half-hidden behind the bathroom door.

"Come here. I won't eat you." Yet.

Gingerly, Talia moved, and she saw Damon patting the bed, indicating for her to sit.

She sat on the edge, as far as possible from Damon, and clutched the edges of the bathrobe, holding it tightly closed.

Damon shook his head helplessly. All the girls he knows would throw themselves at him, yet Talia was keeping her distance. Why is the only girl he really wants to touch rejecting him? Well, maybe not rejecting him, but she didn't look thrilled to be alone with him either.

Damon moved closer to Talia and extended his hand, palm up. "Your hand."

Talia put her hand into his and he took a moment to adjust to the sparks before inspecting it. It was the hand he licked earlier that morning. The bruise was significantly smaller, and the cut closed with a light pink color, without a scab.

Damon ran his finger over the pink line that used to be a scab.

He enjoyed the sparks and based on her stiff expression, he knew that she doesn't feel them. Pity.

Damon wondered if Talia can sense the bond. A little bit? There should be at least an attraction, right?

Every woman he met was attracted to him, either because of his looks, power, or position. It's natural for she-wolves.

The fact that Talia didn't show any signs she was smitten, bothered him more than he wanted to admit.

Damon shook those thoughts away. It's better like this. The fewer people know that Talia is his mate, the safer she will be.

He is aware that Talia suffered in the Red Moon pack, and her timid personality told him that she won't fight for herself. She is not a fighter, and he doesn't expect her to be.

However, if the word spreads that she is his mate, his enemies will target her and she will become his weakness.

If he slips and fails to protect her, he will never forgive himself.

Damon decided to keep Talia close and make sure she has whatever she needs. He will be her protector and provide for her, and that will be enough. Maybe.

Chapter 30 - Her Name Is Talia

Talia sat stiffly next to Damon and observed him while he held her hand, the same one he licked earlier that morning.

She remembered his grimace after tasting the bitter herbal paste and she pressed her lips into a line while preventing a smile from showing on her face. It was comical. She never thought that a scary Alpha could appear so childish.

"Look how well it's healing. I told you that saliva works." Damon said, obviously pleased with himself.

Talia silently admitted that he was right. It healed much faster compared to other bruises and cuts she had. She wondered if her saliva would work, or maybe only werewolves who have their wolves produce saliva that heals.

"Now, let me check the rest."

Talia jolted at Damon's words. What 'rest' was he talking about?

Damon extended his hand toward Talia, and she shrank, making him halt his movements.

"Is there a problem?", Damon asked with confusion obvious on his face.

"Can I at least get underwear?", Talia spoke timidly.

Damon didn't think if she had anything under the bathrobe, but the confirmation that she has no underwear made his jeans tight in the crotch area.

Damon couldn't believe that he was so easily aroused.

He cleared his throat and adjusted his position a bit. "Why?"

Talia was not sure how to respond to this. What does he mean by, why? Why does she need underwear? She was only in a bathrobe, and he wanted to check her injuries which means removing the bathrobe here and there and potentially exposing her important parts!

"Are you uncomfortable without underwear?", Damon asked with amusement in his voice.

Talia nodded faintly.

"Don't be.", Damon said like it's a totally normal thing. "I'm not wearing any either. Do you want to see?"

He stood up and started unbuttoning his jeans and Talia thought she is going to pass out.

"No!", she squeaked. "I don't need to see anything. I believe you."

Damon chuckled. He never saw a girl being so bashful.

Is it possible that she never saw a guy naked? A smile bloomed on his face at that thought.

If she never saw a guy naked, that means no one saw HER naked, and that means she is untouched.

His hands were itching from the desire to pull her closer and get under the bathrobe to explore her thoroughly while savoring the sweet citrusy scent of freesia that gets amplified by the sparks that make him feel alive.

'What's wrong with you?', his wolf chided him.

'What did I do?', Damon asked.

As much as his thoughts were wandering, he kept his hands to himself. For now.

'Wipe that grin off your face. You are scaring the girl again! And don't you dare bring up the point of how she saw you when Marcy sucked you off! No decent girl will be happy to be reminded that her mate is a man-whore!'

'What!?', Damon asked back in outrage. Did his wolf just call him a man-whore?

'Focus on the girl!'

Damon realized that Talia was a nervous wreck with her eyes darting from windows to door, obviously contemplating exit strategies.

He lifted his hands in the air, indicating that he will not remove his pants. "Sorry, I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable. I'm not wearing underwear for practical reasons."

Talia looked up at him and he could see that she didn't believe him.

"They tear whenever I shift. So, it's easier to go without. It saves a lot of money.", Damon said matter-of-factly.

Talia still didn't believe him. She can't shift into her wolf form, but she saw a lot of laundry, and it contained underwear. If regular werewolves can afford underwear (or remove it before they shift), why can't a big scary Alpha? But she didn't want to argue.

"Will you allow me to check your injuries?", Damon asked as he went back to sit on the bed, next to Talia. "At least on your arms and legs. If there is any other spot, let me know and I will make sure you are not uncomfortable."

"Only to check, right?", Talia asked in a small voice.

It took him a moment to understand that she wouldn't let him treat her and he realized... 'Ah, she thinks I will lick her again!'

Well, Damon had no problems with that. He will gladly lick her everywhere, and probably bite also.

He reached for the bag that was on the floor. "I got first aid supplies."

It was Caden and Maya, but Damon told them to get it, so that counts.

Talia's eyes widened in surprise. "For me?"

Damon was pleased with her reaction. "We need to treat your wounds in order to make sure they don't get infected, and they heal properly. It's either this, or I lick you. I don't mind, how I see it, skin is skin regardless of which part of the body it covers."

Talia was flustered again, and Damon chuckled.

"Tell me, where does it hurt?"

Talia gave him her other hand and he frowned while looking at her swollen wrist.

"Let's see what we have for this..." He fished out of the bag a spray that eases up the pain and a few packs of bandages and started working on it.

Two minutes later, Talia observed her wrist which had several layers of bandage more than necessary.

Damon realized that he used too much. "I'm not an expert at first aid. When we reach the Dark Howlers pack, the pack doctor will tend to your wounds. This is just to make you more comfortable until we get there."

Talia was moved. More than his words, it was his expression that showed concern and a hint of embarrassment. "Thank you."

At the sight of Talia's smile, Damon was overwhelmingly pleased with himself. "Alright! Where is the next injury?"

Before Talia could respond, there was a knock on the door.

Three two-layered carts full of food entered the room.

He wanted to treat the rest of her wounds, but he saw Talia staring at the food.

"Let's eat first.", Damon said. "See what is here and pick what you want."

Talia's eyes were open wide and she swallowed hard. The delicious smell reminded her how hungry she was, and she was embarrassed when her tummy rumbled loudly.

Talia licked her lips, hoping that she was not drooling.

"Anything I want?", she asked while looking at Damon apprehensively.

Damon's heart cracked a little and he tried to suppress sadness and rage that swelled inside him.

He couldn't imagine what she went through to be so happy about simple food items this shabby hotel was offering, and he wanted to return to the Red Moon pack and raze it to the ground. How dare they neglect his mate!?

"Anything you want.", Damon confirmed, and his words applied to more than the food in front of her. He would give her whatever she wanted as long as he can see her smile. "Under one condition."

Talia shrunk and clutched the edges of her bathrobe. She was not sure what the condition was, but it usually included her giving something in return, and other than her body, she didn't have anything else.

Seeing that she was about to panic again, Damon quickly said, "Tell me your name."

Talia blinked, wondering if she heard him right. "My name? Is that it?"

"Is there something else you are willing to offer?", Damon asked teasingly, and he chuckled when Talia shook her head fervently.

"Well? We are together since morning, and I don't know how to call you. Hey, is not appropriate, especially not since we shared the bed."

Talia ignored that bed-sharing comment. Other than sleeping, nothing happened, and she didn't want to overthink it.

She knew that he was referring to how she called him 'hey'. Twice.

"Talia."

"Talia", Damon repeated, pleased how her name rolled off his tongue.

"Talia, Talia...", he said a few more times and he thought that it sounds delicate and elegant, just like the girl in front of him.

Now that he knew her name, Damon felt that they reached an important milestone and he hoped that this will not be a sign of how everything else will go with Talia.

If it takes so much effort just to get her name, who knows how much he will need to work for a kiss?

Damon facepalmed internally. Why the heck was he thinking about kissing her?