

Alphas Bride 231

Chapter 231 - Damon's Way Of Finding Answers

"Can I join you?"

Damon jolted at the sound of Talia's voice even though he knew she was approaching him. Damon was staring at the imaginary spot on the horizon, and the deafening sound of the waterfall below him overpowered any other noise, but he was aware of Talia's presence.

"Absolutely.", he responded while scooting to the side to make space for Talia on the same rock.

Talia sat next to Damon, and her mouth was slightly open as she took in the panorama. The cliff was higher than she initially thought.

There was forest as far as the eyes can reach, and hills and mountains in the distance, and she could see the irregular formation of rooftops etched into the forest. Based on the arrangement of buildings, she knew that the town below them was Darkbourne. The river continued calmly after the waterfall and disappeared among the trees, but Talia knew that was the same body of water that formed the lake Talia recognized as the one where Keith took her during the Summer Solstice festival.

How far were they from the packhouse? She craned her neck to see if she can spot the packhouse from there.

Damon saw Talia leaning forward and his arm circled around her shoulders to support her, and she stiffened upon contact.

His heart ached at the thought that Talia's defenses were back up full force.

"What's the state of your wolf?", Damon asked.

"I'm not sure.", Talia responded. "She said that she came forward because I was in distress and that it was too soon, and she needs more rest. Before I lost contact with her, she said that you shouldn't mark me until you deal with Marcy."

Damon pressed his lips into a line and nodded in understanding. His first impression with Talia's wolf was horrible. He remembered his first encounter with Talia; there was Marcy, between his legs, and if Talia could forgive him for that, then her wolf should be able to forgive that video. Hopefully.

"Now that your wolf appeared, it won't take long for her to recuperate fully. They retract at the back of our minds to focus on healing. My wolf is doing the same."

Talia's brows came together as she looked at Damon. "He is?"

"From the wolfsbane.", he reminded her.

Talia's face fell. That was her fault. If she didn't go into the forest, she wouldn't bump into rogues, and Damon wouldn't end up hurt.

Damon could feel Talia's emotions and he rubbed her shoulder gently. "He will be fine in a day or two."

Talia's guilt was replaced with panic. "What if someone attacks you before he recuperates?"

Damon shrugged like it's not a big deal. "I usually fight on my own. Don't worry, kitten. I won't allow anyone to harm you."

Talia felt the urge to hug him tightly and kiss him senselessly, but she held that back.

The video.

Talia was still not over it and she fought mightily against remembering the visual or Marcy's voice moaning Damon's name.

Talia turned to look at the breathtaking view below them. The river fell sharply down, creating a cloud of white mist above a swelling of water surface before it narrowed and continued calmly snaking between the dense trees, like this majestic waterfall never existed.

"Do you come here often?", Talia asked Damon, feeling the lack of conversation pressing on her and making her anxious.

The silence between them used to be pleasant, but now she felt the urge to distract herself with chatter.

"There was a time when I would come here almost every day.", Damon responded. "I made many decisions here."

"It's peaceful. Good place for thinking and deciding.", Talia said.

"That's true, but decision-making had nothing to do with the ambiance."

Talia looked at him questionably, and he explained, "There were cases when I knew what I should do, but I didn't want to. Mostly related to the pack business."

"Like fighting another Alpha?", Talia guessed.

Damon thought for a moment before responding. "Whenever I received an official challenge, I knew that I will be facing three possible outcomes. The first one is that I lose, and he takes over my pack. I would be either killed or crippled, and neither of those two was appealing. The second option is that I defeat him and leave him alive. Alpha wouldn't be able to live with that shame, and the only way out of it is to get revenge. It took me a few duels to realize that leaving the enemy alive is stupid because they keep coming back until one of us can't fight anymore. And the third choice..."

"Is to kill him.", Talia said instead of Damon.

Damon feared that Talia will see him as a monster, but her emotions told him that she felt sorry for him. Yeah. That's his Talia. Always finding good in people, even when they are set to kill.

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Talia felt her heart tightening. She had no idea what Damon's state of mind would be when he faced a situation knowing he will need to kill a person or be killed by end of the day. There was a time when she thought that Damon is scary and ruthless, but now she knew that he has a kind and gentle side, and she was aware that Damon wouldn't extinguish life without a reason.

"Did you come here to calm down before duel?", Talia guessed.

"In a way.", Damon said. "This place helps me put things into perspective and understand what's important and with my parents here, I would imagine they would approve of my choice."

Talia was surprised to hear that Damon would look for his parent's approval. She saw Damon as a confident Alpha who is always looking forward and doesn't need anyone's support, but then... he started leading a pack before he was ready, and he needed someone to assure him he was doing a good job, even if that someone was long gone.

"Can you tell me more about it?"

Damon glanced down at the water far below their feet. "What do you see?"

"Water. Mist. Rocks." She focused on the details. Damon's expression told her that she missed something. "What do you see?"

"Answers.", Damon said.

Talia didn't get it. "What?"

"My options were to fight or not, and that would make a difference if I will kill my challenger or be killed. So, how do I steel my resolve and go into the fight prepared to kill?"

"How?", Talia asked after a few endless seconds that were filled with the clamor of water.

"I would leave it to chance."

"Chance?"

Damon turned a bit to face Talia. "Like now. Should I fight for us or give up?"

Talia's brows came together. Was he thinking of giving up on them?

But something was wrong with his expression.

Why was her heart aching?

Damon put his hand on Talia's cheek, his touch came with addictive sparks and Talia ended up leaning into his palm.

Damon smiled a little. "If I am alive in a few minutes from now, I will fight for us and no one will stop me from loving you. Not even your wolf."

Talia was still processing his words when he inched closer and pecked her lips once, twice, and then she opened her eyes and the whole world slowed down when she saw Damon kicking off the rock and falling down the cliff until he disappeared in the white mist the waterfall created.

"DAMON!", Talia shrieked as her blood froze.

A pair of shoes Damon left behind on the rock confirmed he did that on purpose. It was NOT accidental!

Why the hell did he jump like that? No matter how good of a swimmer he is, there are rocks down there!

Talia's anxiety swelled. Why was he not coming out?

He can't die, right? He is strong and fast and a werewolf, for crying out loud!

With every passing second, knots in Talia's stomach were increasing.

"IF YOU DIE, I WILL NEVER FORGIVE YOU!", Talia shouted.

She desperately fought to see his head full of raven-black hair emerging from the water, but her sight was blurry from tears.

What if he was hurt, or dead? What will she do without him?

For years, while hiding in the attic, Talia would pass time by daydreaming about finding her mate, a man who will love her unconditionally, and now that she found him, she gave in to her insecurities and ruined everything.

Suddenly, Talia realized what he meant by putting things into perspective.

Damon was facing two bad choices, giving up on his life or taking another's and he used this to leave it to fate if he should live or not. After all, if he died, it didn't matter if it happened during a fight or like this.

And he said that if he survives this, he will fight for them.

In a way, Damon was proving his sincerity because he declared that there are only two paths ahead of him; he will either be with Talia or forfeit his life.

Talia pressed her lips into a line. Isn't she the same? Can she live without Damon by her side? What's the point of dwelling on the past when her soul is crying for his proximity? Isn't she torturing herself and him by avoiding his touch?

Chapter 232 - Underwater Thoughts

Damon swam underwater with the goal to put some distance from himself and the strong currents of the waterfall.

It's been a while since he did a stunt like this one, and he found it cathartic.

Was there a chance for him to die by jumping into this waterfall? Probably not.

At most, he would get badly hurt.

Why did he take that risk? Because the freefall mixed with the uncertainty of what's hiding below the mist, and it was exhilarating.

For a control freak like Damon, jumping into the unknown was stressful and addicting at the same time, and it rewarded him with an immense sense of accomplishment when he emerged out of it unscathed, making him feel like he gambled with death and came out victorious.

Just like every time before, the rush of adrenaline purged all insignificant things from his mind. In this case, as he was falling down, there was only one thing on his mind. Talia.

Damon was painfully aware that his past was coming back to bite him with interest.

In his defense, at that time, he didn't think about a mate. Actually, with every next woman who came onto him with ulterior motives, Damon's desire to find his mate was reducing, and considering that he started from zero, it was going into negative.

Now Damon knew how stupid that was, but at that time, he was just a guy with an insatiable appetite and an endless stream of women who were throwing themselves at him. There was absolutely no reason for him to reject them.

Would he act differently if he knew that one day he will meet his mate who will mean the world to him? Probably not.

But would he act differently if he knew that his philandering would end up hurting his mate? Maaaybe?

Who was he kidding? Damon was always a stubborn Alpha, accustomed to instant gratification, and if someone told him five years ago how a wonderful woman will come into his life and he will be smitten, and that's why he should keep it in his pants, Damon would kick that person to another planet.

How can an Alpha keep it in his pants? He has NEEDS!

Unless there is a serious reason for suppressing the urges, every Alpha will give in when a plethora of women are offering themselves wantonly.

A promise that SOMEDAY he will find something better wouldn't be enough for Damon to reject women who came at him.

It's like when a parched man has glasses of crystal clear water right in front of him. Will he continue to suffer, or will he quench his thirst?

Damon told himself to burry these thoughts deep inside his mind and not to allow them to resurface, ever again, because if Talia's wolf can really read minds, he will be in a heap of trouble.

Yes, Talia loves him, but she grew up differently and she won't understand, and Damon can't blame her because if she had even one lover before him, Damon would rip that guy into pieces.

Dwelling on the past was useless and unfortunately, there is no medicine for regret. The only thing Damon can do is try to help Talia build defenses for situations when Damon's past resurfaces. Unfortunately, Damon didn't know how to tackle this problem.

When he realized they were mates, Damon needed a few days to accept that he can't resist the pull of the bond, and a few days later he acknowledged how Talia is adorable and wonderful in every way possible.

If he was not a lustful jerk, he would probably fall in love with Talia even without the mate bond. Assuming he pays attention to her for long enough to realize how amazing she is. Was this something he can use to get himself out of the current pickle?

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Damon shook his head as he emerged above the surface of the turbulent water and took a deep breath to fill his lungs with much-needed air.

Did Talia see that? Did she admire his athletic abilities?

Damon looked up and narrowed his eyes at the scene of Talia standing at the top of the big rock they were sitting on previously. What was she doing? Was she unable to see him?

Damon raised his arm and gave her a wave that froze halfway when Talia pushed herself off the rock.

It took him a moment to accept what was happening in front of his eyes.

What the hell!?

"TALIA!", Damon's roar was drowned by the thundering of the waterfall, and he watched helplessly as she disappeared into the mist.

Damon frantically swam in that direction and dove underwater in search of Talia.

He needed to find her and assure her safety.

His body is agile and strong, but what about Talia? She is so delicate, and he feared that just the water pressure will cause her serious injuries.

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Talia's whole body tensed when icy water enveloped her, and she wondered if she will reach the bottom. She opened her eyes to see, but the numerous air bubbles mixed with the mud from the riverbed that stirred under the impact of the water from above and it blurred everything, and the strong currents pushed and pulled her randomly, making it impossible to tell which way is up.

Talia panicked. Is this how she will die?

She didn't get a chance to tell Damon that she loves him, and she still didn't meet his wolf officially, but she will regret the most that when they were sitting next to each other on that rock, she didn't lean onto him. She wanted to hug and kiss him, why did she suppress that urge?

If those were their last moments together, why did she sulk instead of making the most of it?

And she will also regret that when her wolf was talking smack to Damon, she didn't fight harder to regain control. Guilt swelled within Talia that she actually agreed with her wolf on many points. Didn't she turn her back on Damon?

Maybe dying here will be her punishment because she acted against her mate, her other half. It didn't matter if the person berating Damon was her wolf or not, Damon is her mate and he should come first, yet she betrayed him. Maybe it's better this way. With her gone, Damon will get a chance to find himself a Luna who deserves that position, and not a nobody he found in the attic.

From the beginning, it was Damon protecting her and doing things for her, and she was silently contemplating exit strategies. Did she ever put her trust in him completely? At that point, it didn't matter.

Moments with Damon flashed in Talia's mind that filled her chest with warm and fuzzy feelings.

A handsome stranger came to the attic of the Red Moon pack, holding her and licking her wound... her falling asleep in the car while leaning on the Alpha who smelled of the forest and the dark chocolate, and waking up in a hotel room... Damon snatching a piece of cotton candy from her... his cocky smile that she wished to erase, yet she couldn't wait to see it again... his crazed obsession with feeding her... holding hands under the table... scent, warmth, kisses, touches... the way his icy-blue eyes stirred with emotions when he looked at her, and how his gaze would turn almost feral during their lovemaking, but she was not afraid. She was never afraid of him because she knew that side of Damon was only hers to see, and her heart tightened at the thought that she will not see him ever again.

More than in the turbulent waters around her, Talia was drowning in regret for not telling Damon how much she appreciates everything he did for her, and for not telling him how much he means to her.

Every time Talia lost her way, Damon would come to her rescue, just how he found her under the tree in the amusement park, and next to the clocktower on the town square at the Summer Solstice festival, and many other times she couldn't clearly remember because her mind was getting hazy due to lack of oxygen, but she clearly remembered how only a day before she saw Damon being stabbed and shot while protecting her from rogues, and then she cried next to his hospital bed while wishing for him to get better so that they can be happy, together. And now it's over. They had so little time left, yet she ruined it.

Chapter 233 - A Jealous Woman

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Talia's endless regret mixed with panic. How can it end like this? She won't allow it. Not without a fight.

She closed her eyes and relaxed while trying to feel which way is up, when a sudden force pulled her to the right, and it took her a moment to realize that someone was holding onto her wrist.

Talia's eyes snapped open, and she saw a familiar figure in the water.

Damon!

Talia moved toward Damon frantically and clung onto him like a koala, making sure not to obstruct his arms and legs so that he can take them out of that watery hell.

She was counting her heartbeats and paying attention to the scarce amount of oxygen she had in her lungs. Surely, she won't drown easily. Even without her wolf, she is still a werewolf, for crying aloud!

Both Talia and Damon gasped for air when their heads emerged above water.

Talia observed that they were between a thick stream of water and a massive rock formation, and it took her a moment to realize they were behind the waterfall that created a noisy privacy curtain, shielding them from prying eyes and ears.

Damon reached to hold onto a nearby rock that was sticking out of the water. It was difficult to stay afloat in those turbulent waters.

"What got into you!? How can you be so reckless!?", Damon shouted at Talia through the noise. "Why did you jump!?"

Talia looked at Damon and smiled goofily. She is alive! And he is alive as well! Isn't life beautiful?

Damon was about to yell at Talia more, when he heard her say, "I love you, Damon Blake."

Talia spoke softly, but her voice reached him clearly over the clamor the waterfall created, maybe because she spoke to his soul.

Damon's handsome brows came together in a confused frown. How is he supposed to scold her now? Talia said that she loves him, and her emotions confirmed that. It was more than just love. It was trust and acceptance, and he knew that she forgave him. At least in her heart.

A big burden fell off his chest, and he leaned his forehead on hers.

They were floating in the water while relishing the happiness both of them felt and there was a moment when their eyes met and the whole world stopped.

Damon moved to kiss her lips and Talia tilted her head to avoid him.

Damon was exasperated. Now what?

Talia punched his shoulder weakly. "You big dum-dum. Aren't you the Alpha of the largest pack in North America? So many people are depending on you. How can you play with your life?"

Damon wanted to say how he wouldn't die from that fall, even if there was no water below, but he kept those words for himself because if Talia finds out about that, she might be upset at him again.

He understood that Talia was this clingy because she thought his life was in danger. He can roll with that.

"How can I think about the pack when you are rejecting me?", Damon spoke with all the sincerity in the world. "Nothing makes sense without you, kitten." This was the truth.

Talia looked at him incredulously. "First of all, I am not rejecting you. I was upset and needed time to sort out my thoughts. And second... did you need to jump like that? Don't you know how dangerous that was!?"

"If you knew it's dangerous, why did you jump?"

Talia's chin trembled. "Didn't you say that we should do everything together? How can we be together if I don't follow you?"

Damon smiled at her words. Instead of running away, his kitten decided to follow him. That was definitely a move in the right direction.

He inched closer to Talia, and he smiled when she didn't avoid his lips. He got a kiss! Talia was obviously holding back something, but she didn't push him away either.

After a few kisses full of longing, Damon asked, "What's on your mind?"

"A long time ago I learned not to expect anything good from people because I only get disappointed. I have no idea how or why, but I started relying on you. If you...", Talia couldn't finish.

Damon pulled Talia closer and held her tightly against his body. He could feel her emotions clashing. Her reasoning was backed up by years of abuse and neglect, and her emotions hung on a thin thread of hope that he won't hurt her.

They were both emotionally damaged, but their rough edges fit together perfectly.

"The mate bond is new for both of us, and I will lie if I tell you I know what's coming.", Damon said. "But I know that I won't disappoint you. You are my everything. I will always have your back."

Talia looked up at Damon and gave him an ugly smile while fighting against sobs that bubbled inside her chest. She was glad that the waterfall mist was everywhere, and it concealed tears that streamed down her face.

Happiness. Fear. Hope.

He was her everything also, and with every second under that waterfall, Talia's defensive walls crumbled to reveal her fragile heart that he could easily crush and destroy her completely.

She needed assurance that he won't do it.

She needed assurance that he will cherish what they have.

No more nasty videos and fondling other women.

"If I catch you with another woman, I will burn your packhouse to the ground with you in it."

Jealousy.

Damon grinned. Talia was claiming him as hers.

"OUR packhouse, kitten.", he corrected her. "And we have a deal. If I ever touch any other woman, I will provide gasoline."

Damon moved to kiss her lips and he was delighted that there was no more reservation from her side.

It felt like forever since they kissed properly and Damon was pleasantly surprised at the intensity with which Talia started tugging on his shirt, to untuck it from his pants.

Feeling her arousal, Damon swiftly scanned the surroundings before moving them closer to the cliff, and he was quick to find the right spot between rocks where he can gain his footing and avoid the possibility of being swept away with currents.

Talia had no idea when Damon tore her panties, but she saw a streak of light green disappearing into the rowdy waters, never to be found again. Her skirt was already up and fluttering around her in the water and she felt his fingers gliding between her folds as he positioned his erection at her entrance.

Damon's heart soared as things fell into place. He was inside Talia as she embraced him with her arms and legs, and everything was back to how it should be... Damon and Talia were one.

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Damon and Talia were lazing on the soft grass that grew at the riverbank next to the waterfall, allowing the hot summer sun to dry their disheveled damp clothes that they didn't bother removing.

Damon was on his back and Talia's head was on his chest with her arm around his waist.

The lush deep green grass rose around them, creating a natural privacy shield and an illusion that they were the only ones in the world.

"Let's not do this again.", Talia said.

Damon cocked an eyebrow questionably. "Which part?"

"Arguing. Jumping into the waterfall.", Talia said guiltily. It was her fault because she couldn't control her wolf who sparked their fallout, and it's not that Talia didn't agree with her wolf, but if she focuses on the negative things, it will ruin everything good. And there was so much good to enjoy.

Damon agreed with Talia. He didn't want to argue either.

He kissed her forehead and thought about what caused this mess.

"I will delete all files that might upset you.", Damon said with finality.

Damon didn't need those files anymore, and he forgot about them, but then... he forgot about many things since he recognized Talia as his mate.

It was just like jumping into the waterfall, when he faced something daunting, all the noise disappeared, leaving only important things in focus. Like Talia.

"You don't need to delete them.", Talia said. She wanted all that gone, but she also knew he held that 'Evidence' in case one of those women comes after him again.

"I want to.", Damon said with all the seriousness in the world. "You are the only woman in my life, the only one in my heart, and you will be the only one on my hard drive. There will be no more games. I am about to get married and I don't want to risk upsetting my wife. I am grateful that she accepted me despite my dirty deeds, but that doesn't mean she will tolerate if random things remind her that her husband has a past full of mistakes." His lips lifted into a smile. "You see... my Mrs. Blake is a jealous woman."

Chapter 234 - Indulging A Grumpy Wolf

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Talia would be glad if Damon can erase all evidence of his previous hookups, including her memory. If she could believe that she was his first, just how he was hers, that would be perfect. But just deleting files won't be enough. "What about Marcy?"

"Your wolf wanted me to deal with Marcy without announcing we are mates. I will do that."

"Aren't Elders working on getting Marcy to back off?", Talia asked. After Elder Samson and Elder Charlie left the packhouse, Talia didn't hear anything about them.

Damon sneered. "They are a useless bunch of cowards who only care about saving their behind. If they were any good, I wouldn't disband them as my advisors."

"You are saying that they didn't make any progress with declining Marcy's visit.", Talia summarized to what Damon confirmed with a nod.

"As I was saying, I will deal with Marcy. If your wolf is anything like mine..." Damon paused. "Is she listening?"

"I don't think so."

Damon cleared his throat awkwardly and Talia understood that Damon wanted to badmouth her wolf, and he was afraid of consequences if her wolf finds out.

Damon spoke in a low voice, "If your wolf is anything like mine, she will be a grumpy existence who looks down on others' intelligence."

Talia was surprised by this. She thought that her wolf was defending her, and that was not wrong, but under that protection was a condescending attitude as she looked at Damon like he belongs to a lower species.

"I want your wolf to approve of me.", Damon said. "I don't want you to fight with your wolf because of me and the best way to accomplish that is to indulge her. I will do what she asked and fulfill her conditions. Once she accepts me, things will be smooth."

Damon sounded magnanimous, but the truth was that he didn't have a choice. If Talia's wolf takes over again, the stubborn beast might reject Damon as her mate and then... he didn't want to think about it.

The other option was to ensure that Talia's wolf can't take over, but that would include Talia overpowering her wolf, and Damon didn't want to put that pressure on Talia. Her wolf just returned, and they need to learn how to communicate with each other, how to shift from one form to another, and how to tap voluntarily into those mysterious powers her wolf carries, but the most important part for Talia will be to build a good relationship with her wolf because her life might depend on it. Literally.

Besides, Damon is the one who messed up and he will own it.

Talia's heart swelled with warm and fuzzy emotions. Damon was willing to follow the ridiculous rules her wolf set, and he was doing all that for Talia. Of course, it was for her.

"Thank you.", Talia said.

"There is no need to thank me. I'm doing it for us.", Damon said matter-of-factly.

Damon decided to work on this as soon as possible. The sooner he starts, the sooner he will finish, and if he needs to wait for Talia's wolf to soften up her attitude before he can mark Talia, there was not a minute left to delay.

Ah, if he knew it will end up like this, he would put his mark on Talia a long time ago, and then her grumpy wolf wouldn't have a way to force him into this ridiculous game!

Damon had no idea how to deal with rejecting Marcy without introducing Talia as his mate, as he had a feeling that saying how he doesn't like Marcy won't work. He needed something more solid.

This will be a disaster! Damon was never the planning guy.

Damon told himself to take this one step at a time. He had a starting point of Marcy coming to the Dark Howlers pack, and an endpoint where she will leave with the knowledge that she won't be Damon's Luna, as for anything in-between, Damon will figure it out, eventually. Hopefully.

Talia put her hand on his cheek and her honeyed eyes smiled at him.

"Don't overthink it.", she said. "The important part is that we are together. My wolf didn't say that I can't help you."

Talia was dazzled by the smile that bloomed on his face.

"If I knew that your determination to stick to me will soar after I jumped into the waterfall, I would do that a long time ago."

Talia's brows came together. "Don't joke about it."

"I am not joking, kitten. I would do anything for you to be with me."

Talia pressed her lips into a line. "Promise you won't do it again."

"That will depend on circumstances."

Talia understood that as a, no, for the promise. "You are blackmailing me."

He didn't deny it. "I told you. I would do anything. Blackmail included."

"I'm sure you have other ways to keep me by your side."

Damon's lips lifted into a sly smile. "That... I do."

Talia's whole body shivered when she felt his hot palm gliding over her thigh higher, under her skirt. And the fact that she didn't wear any panties only made her arousal swell faster.

She wanted to say how that's not fair. He was using the sparks of their bond to muddle her head, but then he kissed the base of her neck, where his mark should be, once, twice, and then his lips latched right there and he started sucking harshly, and Talia clutched his shoulders to steady herself because the whole world was spinning with her and Damon at its center.

Damon growled when the scent of her arousal hit him, and he was quick to unbutton his pants and get on top of her.

"Mine...", Damon squeezed through his teeth while his scorching gaze bore into hers, making it impossible to break eye contact.

He was halfway in when he paused.

"Say that you are mine, kitten", he demanded.

Talia squirmed under Damon. Why did he stop moving? Ah, he wanted something... "Yours. I am yours.", she said breathily.

"Ahh...", a lustful sound escaped her lips when he was sheathed all the way in, just how she wanted him, hard and hot and deep inside her.

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In the packhouse...

Maya and Caden were in the kitchen, and Caden passed Maya a cup of tea.

"Are you sure this should calm me down?", Maya asked while looking at the steaming cup. It was her third one and based on her uneasiness, it was not working.

Caden shrugged. "Would whiskey work better?"

Maya thought that's a good idea. "Probably. Give me a glass. Fill it all the way. Or better... give me a bottle."

Caden rolled his eyes. "Let's not drink during the day. We have so much to do, and guests will be here soon. With Damon and Talia out of the packhouse, we need to be sober."

Maya puffed her cheeks in displeasure. "After the stress I went through, I need something to ease the edge."

"Don't exaggerate.", Caden said.

"Exaggerate? You were not there, Caden. I couldn't breathe."

Caden didn't know exactly what happened, but he felt Maya's emotions through the mate bond. "We already knew that Talia's aura is comparable to Damon's. It's a good thing if our Luna is a strong she-wolf."

Maya agreed with Caden but... "That was not Talia."

Caden frowned. "And who was it?"

Maya didn't have an answer to this question. "It was something... ancient. Powerful. Scary." She was not sure how to explain what she felt when Talia's wolf came out.

"You make her sound like she turned into a monster.", Caden said sarcastically. He was confident that Maya was blowing it out of proportion. He thought of something. "How was Damon faring against Talia's aura?"

"He was fine.", Maya responded right away. Damon didn't seem to be affected.

Caden rubbed Maya's shoulder to comfort her. "There you go. If she didn't affect him, then she can't be more powerful than he is."

With werewolves, strength is determined by sheer strength or by genetics, where the ones with powerful aura can become high-ranking members of a pack. Between the two, genetics takes precedence because a powerful aura will force others to submit, regardless of how much time they spent training.

Maya didn't know how to explain what she felt. It was not about who is stronger, but about the type of power.

When Damon releases his aura, Maya has an urge to submit and obey, but Talia's aura was suffocating, painful, like an invisible force was pressing from every side, threatening to crush her.

Before she could say anything, both Maya and Caden heard Damon's voice through the mind-link, 'Arrange for Marcy from the Red Moon pack to come here as soon as possible. Accommodate her demands as long as they are reasonable.'

'What?', Caden asked back, but his question hit a wall, indicating that Damon shut down the mind-link. He didn't want to be disturbed.

Maya and Caden exchanged confused glances. Did they hear the same thing?

The morning started great, and they completed many of their duties ahead of time so they can relax before guests arrive, but then things turned for worse unexpectedly and Damon carried Talia out of the packhouse to who-knows-where. And now, after nearly two hours of complete silence, Damon told them to prepare things for Marcy?

This day was getting weirder by the minute, and it was barely afternoon.

Chapter 235 - The Shocking Truth (1)

~ the Red Moon Pack ~

Earlier that day...

Marcy was in the dining room of the Red Moon Pack, having breakfast with her father (aka Alpha Edward), her mother (aka Luna Layla), her brother (aka James), Beta Raymond (aka Nora's father), and Nora.

Other than the crisp clinking of the utensils, the dining room was silent. Luna Layla insisted that people shouldn't talk during a meal, because no one should talk with their mouth full of food.

Unless they had guests, their mealtimes were quiet occasions.

However, the absence of people's voices didn't mean that they didn't communicate through their mind-link.

Marcy could see that they would pause their movements occasionally or make faces, which was an obvious sign of an ongoing conversation.

It was normal for Alpha Edward and Beta Raymond to mind-link each other. Marcy guessed that they were discussing issues related to the pack, but this time even Nora exchanged a few meaningful glances with Alpha Edward. Since when was Nora important enough to talk like that with Marcy's father?

Marcy was happy that they kept her out of the pack's business, which meant that no one would talk to her.

Since rejecting George, Marcy's wolf was getting weaker by the day, and that caused her mind-link to falter sometimes. It was like making a phone call when one's phone has bad reception. Marcy believed that once Alpha Damon marks her, her wolf will stop sulking and things will get back on track. Actually, with an Alpha's venom in her system, she should get a power boost. That's just one of many perks she will get as Damon's Luna.

"Marcy? Marcy!?", Luna Layla called.

Marcy's head snapped in her mother's direction. "What?"

"Why are you not responding to the mind-link?"

Marcy didn't want to admit she has problems because that would mean she needed to reveal that she found her mate (and rejected him). "I was just thinking something. What is it?"

Luna Layla frowned impatiently. "I was asking if you want to join us. I'm going with Gabriella and Natalie for some shopping, a spa, and lunch. We should be back mid-afternoon."

Marcy was not eager to spend the day with her mother and her girlfriends. Pampering and shopping sounded nice, but those three will end up talking about the latest gossip, and everyone was still buzzing about the Luna announcement ceremony at the Lightclaw pack, which meant they will discuss topics that are unpleasant for Marcy.

Who cares about the future Luna of the Lightclaw pack? Kalina ignored Marcy more than once, and after numerous attempts to approach Kalina, Marcy got less than a minute of exchanging empty pleasantries. How frustrating!

And even worse was the topic of Alpha Damon and the woman he brought with him as a date.

"I would love to join you, mother.", Marcy lied with the best smile she could muster. "Unfortunately, at nine-thirty AM I have scheduled video conference with the chef who teaches baking, and today we will discuss multi-layered pastries." Marcy knew that her mother won't investigate because she never paid attention to what Marcy was doing outside parties. "If I miss this session, the next one will be in two weeks. His schedule is packed and I waited for my slot for more than a month."

With that, Luna Layla gave up on convincing Marcy to go with them.

After finishing her meal, Marcy went to her room, to find solace in reading online novels. Marcy was picking novels with storylines that start with the heroine being trapped and looking for a way out. Something like modern-day Repunzel.

Since Marcy arrived home from Europe, she realized that her father is set to use her in order to expand his influence, her mother is his silent accomplice, and after Alpha Damon's visit, Marcy knew that Nora is NOT her friend. With her brother being only fifteen years-old, and not interested in anything beyond training, Marcy was on her own. That meant that she needed to watch her own back.

She carefully picked a handful of Omegas and gave them benefits in exchange for information and small favors.

Anna (aka Talia's main ex-bully) became one of Marcy's informants, and thanks to Anna, Marcy knew when who was doing what in the packhouse.

Anna was happy to work for Marcy because Marcy convinced Luna Layla that Anna should be in charge of the second floor. That was definitely a promotion and Anna was ecstatic because other than an upgrade in status, she also got five Omegas to work for her, so Anna's duties consisted of telling others what to do and inspecting it when it was over.

It was shortly before 10 AM when a knock on the door got Marcy's attention and based on the knocking pattern, Marcy knew that Anna was on the other side.

"Come in!"

"Do you have something for me?", Marcy asked as soon as Anna closed the door behind her.

Marcy didn't like that Anna would always come to deliver information in person, even for the small insignificant things. Marcy had a guess that Anna wanted others to see her coming in and out of Marcy's room. It was proof that Anna is important.

More than once, Marcy wanted to set boundaries to what information Anna should deliver in person, but she feared that Anna will misinterpret it (or retaliate), and that might cause Marcy to miss on something important. No matter how annoying Anna's behavior was, she was Marcy's biggest resource and Marcy didn't want to risk offending her.

Anna stood in attention in front of Marcy and nodded resolutely before responding with, "You told me to keep an eye on Nora and to notify you if she is alone with Alpha Edward. They are alone. In the lounge on the second floor."

"Good job. Thank you, Anna.", Marcy said while scooting off her bed. Seeing that Anna was not moving, Marcy gestured toward the door. "You can leave. If you find anything else out of place, let me know."

Anna bowed a little and left the room.

Marcy frowned. Why was Anna dragging her feet? She was an Omega, a servant. Marcy hoped that Anna didn't think about them being friends or something.

Marcy snorted. What friends? Anna was doing this for benefits, and Marcy knew that if anyone gives Anna more benefits, the latter will switch sides without blinking. Actually, maybe Anna is working as a double agent and informing someone about Marcy's movements.

But there was nothing incriminating. Marcy was careful. Even if Anna discloses what she was doing for Marcy, there shouldn't be anything wrong with just wanting to know what's going on in the packhouse, right? Marcy can spin that into a story of how she is preparing to be an effective Luna of the Dark Howlers pack.

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Marcy confirmed that Anna was out of sight before making her way toward the lounge on the second floor through the empty hallways.

The Omegas who are assigned duties in the packhouse completed their work for the morning, so it was easy to move around without attracting curious eyes.

It's not that Marcy cared if anyone sees her going into the lounge, but she hoped to keep this low-key because only like that she will get a chance to figure out what is Nora up to.

Marcy knew that Nora was not her friend and that Nora was working for Marcy's parents with the main task to keep an eye on Marcy. That was not new.

Another thorn in Marcy's side was Nora's reputation as a she-wolf who was attracted to high-ranking werewolves. Just that wouldn't be a big deal because Marcy didn't care how Nora lives her life, but Marcy was painfully aware that Alpha Damon belonged to the queue of Nora's hookups. And it happened when Alpha Damon visited them to discuss his marriage with Marcy. Despicable!

On top of that, since Nora returned early from the party at the Lightclaw pack, leaving Marcy with Luna Layla behind, Marcy suspected that her father and Nora were plotting something even more sinister.

Marcy picked up subtle hints where Nora and Alpha Edward would exchange meaningful glances like they know something Marcy doesn't, but there was no way that Marcy would say anything about it without proof. Actually, even with proof, Marcy would probably stay silent but knowing what's coming would help her to prepare countermeasures.

Chapter 236 - The Shocking Truth (2)

Marcy knew that snooping around could backfire big time. But how can Alpha Edward punish her when she was only days away from leaving for the Dark Howlers pack?

Marcy put her hopes on the scenario where Alpha Edward won't be too harsh on her and risk that she switches sides and collaborates with Alpha Damon.

True to her role of a pawn, Marcy was kept in the dark and she didn't know any secrets of the Red Moon pack, so she wouldn't be very useful if Alpha Damon decides to attack the Red Moon pack, but just refusing to do Alpha Edward's bidding would be a major punishment for her father.

Marcy thought how that would be ironic. Her father spent a lot of time and effort to set her up to be Alpha Damon's bride, and if Marcy cuts her ties with him, it would be all for naught. Poetic justice.

Of course, Marcy felt no gratitude toward her father or mother. They sent her away when she was a child and didn't bother raising her, and now that she came of age, they were determined to use her. What a joke!

Marcy couldn't wait for the moment when she becomes the Luna of the largest pack in North America. The first thing she will do is to give her father the middle finger.

The only person who could boss around will be Alpha Damon. Marcy didn't have big hopes in a loving marriage with Alpha Damon, but she was confident that they will find a compromise where both of them get the most out of their union.

But until Marcy's time to shine comes, she needed to be careful, obedient, and most of all, she needed information. That's why she decided to keep an eye on Nora and watch her movements.

It was too risky to follow Alpha Edward or Beta Raymond as they were either stuck in their offices, or outside with warriors, and her mother was totally focused on parties, spending money, and pampering. However, Nora was different.

Even if Marcy was discovered, she could come up with a believable excuse as to why she was watching Nora.

Like now.

Marcy's goal was to overhear what Nora and her father are plotting, but if they see her, she will just say that she was looking for Nora, her friend. Her best friend.

After glancing left and right to double-check that the hallway was empty, Marcy stood next to the open door of the lounge on the second floor and she listened attentively. Nothing.

A full minute passed before Marcy lost her patience and made her way inside.

Marcy's brows furrowed at the sight of an empty lounge. Didn't Anna say that Nora came here with Alpha Edward? Did they leave already?

Marcy cursed her luck. She hoped to find something useful, but she ended up coming late.

Well, it didn't matter. In a few days, Marcy will go to the Dark Howlers pack, and with any luck, she won't return here ever again.

Marcy was about to return to her room when a faint noise got her attention. It came from the storage room that can be accessed from the lounge.

Marcy's stared at the inconspicuous light brown door that matched the wainscot that stretched along the walls of the lounge.

The lounge is used by her father to entertain high-profile guests, and that storage room has glasses, extra drinks, a refrigerator, and a food-prep area. But, without people in the lounge, there was no need for anyone to use that storage, especially because Omegas were gone for the morning. Suspicious.

Was someone there, or did Marcy imagine that sound? Since no one else was in sight, Marcy decided to investigate.

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Marcy was a few steps away from the door when the shuffling sounds were heard again. She didn't imagine it. Was some Omega late with cleaning duties?

Marcy's hand hovered above the doorknob, and she decided to listen a bit more sneakily because the sounds were ambiguous.

Little by little, Marcy's ear got stuck on the door. Now she could clearly hear shuffling and heavy breathing. Definitely suspicious. It took her a moment to distinguish the sounds of two people. One male and one female.

Marcy's eyebrows shoot up when she heard moaning and groaning. Was someone...?

"Oh, yes..." , a sultry female voice followed by another moan confirmed Marcy's suspicion. Why did that sound like Nora? Marcy's stomach dropped when she heard the next lines, "Alpha Edward, just like that... You are the best..."

Marcy couldn't believe it!

Her father and Nora!

Marcy was nauseated.

What about her mother? Luna Layla should feel the discomfort of her mate being intimate with another woman. Or was Luna Layla alright with her mate sleeping with another woman? And not just any woman, this one was young enough to be his daughter! And Nora is the daughter of Beta Raymond!

Marcy sneered. Her mother threw away her dignity in order to enjoy the luxuries of being the Luna of the Red Moon pack.

Did Beta Raymond know that his Alpha was sleeping with his daughter? All this was too twisted.

"Fuck! Your pussy is fine!", Alpha Edward's labored voice was heard, followed by Nora's throaty moan, and Marcy stumbled backward.

This was too shocking!

She needed to get out of there.

Marcy had no idea how she found herself back in her room, staring blankly at the ceiling and trying to make sense of what's going on.

She knew that her father was obsessed with power and that her mother didn't care about things as long as she can maintain her lavish lifestyle, but now Nora's role in all this changed.

Nora was not just some girl who was keeping an eye on Marcy. She was her father's mistress!

Was this something ongoing, or a one-time thing? Considering their relationship, it would be difficult to believe that it was only once, or twice.

Since when? Did it start when Alpha Edward and Nora left the party at the Lightclaw pack early? Alpha Edward said that he will punish Nora for approaching Alpha Damon on her own and disturbing him, but now Marcy understood that there was not much punishment involved.

Now that Marcy thought about it, her mother was unusually stiff and grumpy after Alpha Edward and Nora left. Was it because her mother knew what is going to happen between those two?

Would her father still be interested in Nora if he knew that she slept with Alpha Damon? Probably not.

Alpha Edward is consumed with greed for power, and he would gladly push his daughter into marrying Alpha Damon; compared to that, accepting that his mistress slept with Alpha Damon doesn't seem to be much.

Marcy thought that the walls were closing in on her.

People around Marcy wanted to use her for their own agenda, or they didn't care about her, and this was supposed to be her family, damnit!

Marcy told herself not to bother with things she can't change.

Marcy saw her trip to the Dark Howlers pack as a way out of this hell. She will be whoever Damon wants her to be, and he will mark her and make her his Luna, and then Marcy will be able to cut off her ties with this twisted family and the Red Moon pack.

Marcy laughed bitterly. Isn't Alpha Damon just as twisted as her father, if not more? If he had any decency, he wouldn't sleep with Nora when he came to discuss marriage with Marcy.

But no matter how bad Alpha Damon is, surely, it can't be worse than here.

However, just in case, Marcy needed a backup plan.

She got an idea.

Marcy will take her jewelry when she leaves for the Dark Howlers pack. If things don't work out, she will sell it and use that money to disappear. Maybe she could return to France. Her apartment in Paris was still leased under her name, and she could stay there until she figures out what to do next. And she also has a few friends speckled through Europe.

Will her father look for her? Probably. She will need to be sneaky because if her father catches her after disobedience, Marcy will be in a heap of trouble.

She let out a frustrated breath. Will she dare to defy him?

Chapter 237 - The Highest-ranking Commander

It was late in the afternoon when a knock on the door got Marcy's attention.

"I told you I'm not hungry", Marcy grumbled when the door creaked open. Why can't they leave her alone?

"I'm not here to offer food.", Nora said while sashaying into Marcy's room.

Marcy frowned while trying to suppress the bile that was rising in her throat. Nora and her father! Revolting!

"Why are you here?", Marcy snapped, unable to conceal her irritation.

"Alpha Edward wants to see you in his study. Now.", Nora said calmly, like she didn't notice Marcy's hostility. "And before you ask, he tried mind-linking you, but you didn't respond so here I am."

Marcy sneered. "What are you now? His secretary?"

"I'm just trying to be useful."

'Yeah, right. Useful by spreading your legs for my dad.', Marcy couldn't stop the incoming wave of negativity. If she could, she would rip Nora's hair out.

Her father is sleeping with his Beta's daughter, her mother is pretending that everything is fine, her brother is obsessed with training and studying to the point of not seeing how twisted this whole packhouse is. But then... maybe it's like this in every packhouse, but Marcy doesn't know about it because she grew up in a different environment.

Marcy adjusted her mood while chanting internally that this will be only for a few days, and then she will find her exit, either as the Luna of the Dark Howlers pack or as an unknown she-wolf in Europe.

A few breaths later, Marcy scooted off her bed. It was time to see what her father wants.

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"You called for me?", Marcy asked when she entered Alpha Edward's study with Nora one step behind her.

Marcy noticed that her brother was also there. That was unusual. Normally, her brother would spend his days at the training ground.

"I have good news.", Alpha Edward said with glee.

Marcy was alerted. Somehow, she had a bad feeling about this, and she held her breath when her father spoke.

"Alpha Damon called. Pack your things. You will head to the Dark Howlers pack tomorrow."

"Do you need help packing?", Nora offered cheerfully.

"No.", Marcy rejected Nora without missing a beat, and she took a moment to process her father's words. "Alpha Damon called asking me to go there tomorrow?"

Alpha Edward nodded. "The exact words were, as soon as possible. But I guess you will need some time to prepare so plan to head out tomorrow morning."

Marcy pressed her lips into a line. Based on their agreement, she still had a few days before she needed to leave. It's not that Marcy didn't want to go, but Damon was postponing their meeting, and then he ignored her completely at the Lightclaw pack, and now he wants to see her ahead of the agreed time? Suspicious.

Alpha Edward narrowed his eyes at Marcy. "You don't look excited about this."

"No, no", Marcy was quick to deny it. "It's just unexpected."

Alpha Edward didn't think much of it. He was excited that things were finally moving in the right direction. Everyone knew that Alpha Damon had a woman by his side, and from Alpha Edward's perspective, this invitation was proof that Alpha Damon finished playing and was ready to get down to business. Real business. With Marcy.

"I don't need to tell you what to do and how to behave. Show Alpha Damon that you are the best choice to be his Luna. As long as you can win his favor, everything will be alright. Once you secure your position, we will talk further."

"Yes, father.", Marcy responded obediently. "When is my flight?"

"You will go via car."

Marcy was flabbergasted. She checked maps. With a plane, it will be only a few hours, while driving will take up a full day! Sure, plane rides are uncomfortable for werewolves, but what's a bit of discomfort in exchange for saving hours?

"I am fine with flying.", Marcy said.

"But Nora isn't.", Alpha Edward deadpanned.

Marcy was not sure if she heard him right. She had a hunch that Nora will tag along, but somehow, she hoped to avoid it.

"Nora is coming with me?"

"I will watch your back and make sure you are not mistreated.", Nora chimed in from the side.

Marcy gritted her teeth. Yeah, right. She would rather have a pack of feral dogs to watch her back.

Other than telling Alpha Edward about every move Marcy makes, will Nora try to sabotage Marcy on the way to the Dark Howlers pack, or after they reach there? Or maybe Nora is tagging along so that she can get into Alpha Damon's bed again? Maybe it's all of those.

Alpha Edward nodded in approval of Nora's words before adding. "James will also accompany you."

Marcy looked at her fifteen years-old brother without returning his smile. "Why is he coming?"

"Nora got information that Alpha Damon is hosting a group of people at this time. Alpha Maddox from the Blue River pack and future Alpha Anthony from the Lightclaw pack. Their visit is not purely social, as they will be training, and this is a great opportunity for James to expand his horizons.", Alpha Edward gave an unusually lengthy explanation. "As a bonus, Mindy from the Blue River pack will be there, and also Kalina, the future Luna of the Lightclaw pack. Use this opportunity to befriend them."

Marcy's stomach was tied into knots at the memory of Mindy, Kalina, and Talia gelling well at the party while ignoring everyone else, Marcy included.

Those three were laughing and having a good time, while the rest of the guests gossiped about Marcy like she was the abandoned mistress! Marcy will never forget that embarrassment.

But never mind, she will swallow her grievances, for now. Once Marcy becomes the Luna of the Dark Howlers pack, she will show everyone where they belong.

Marcy wanted to know only one thing. "What about security?"

"I handpicked a number of warriors to accompany you, but it seems that everyone else will be there without security, so..."

Marcy couldn't believe this. "You are letting us go unprotected?" It's not that she feared thieves or being kidnapped. Marcy's biggest concern was Nora. Sure, her brother was going, but he is useless.

Alpha Edward raised his hand, indicating to Marcy to be patient. "I didn't say that. But I can't send many warriors with you without arousing suspicion. This is a delicate time where we need to show goodwill and not provoke Alpha Damon. Once you become his Luna, we can act freely, but until then..." He made a face like his hands are tied before continuing, "I came up with something in-between. With a pretense of training, my most capable commander will accompany you."

Marcy was NOT happy about this. "One warrior?"

"Don't be dramatic. It's not like I'm sending you to war. Alpha Damon's pack is safe, and with your identity as my daughter, no one will dare to harm you. Besides, my commanders are not just warriors. They are well trained in strategizing, leadership, and decision-making.", Alpha Edward said matter-of-factly. "Actually, the man who will accompany you is the second reason I called you here. He is on his way, and I want you to meet him. Even though he is young, his skills are top-notch, and his aura is domineering enough for him to qualify as a high-ranking member. Too bad he is lacking experience, but that will change by the time James takes over this pack..."

Marcy was not listening anymore.

It was rare for her father to praise a person, but she didn't care how awesome this commander is. Unless he has eyes at the back of his head, doesn't need to sleep, and won't keep Nora out of his sight, he was simply not enough.

Marcy was hoping that with a larger party, there will be more people keeping Nora in check, but what can one person do? And it didn't seem that her father will assign more people. He made up his mind and Marcy will need to work with what she has.

Marcy plastered a smile on her face while looking blankly at her father and waiting for him to finish so that she can leave. All this was exhausting, but in a way, she could see the end of her road. Once she reaches the Dark Howlers pack, it will be Marcy and Alpha Damon, and once she secures her spot as Damon's Luna, she can do what she wants. Yes. That thought was making her smile more genuine.

The door opened behind Marcy after a brief knock, and everyone other than Marcy turned to see the newcomer.

Marcy guessed this was the commander that earned high praises from her father. She schooled her features in preparation to face him because she wanted this to start on a good note, but then an addictive scent of sweet clover hit her senses and she froze.

She knew this scent well. It was the scent she couldn't get out of her mind since she sensed it the first time at her welcoming party.

Alpha Edward stood up, an obvious respect for the newcomer. "Marcy, I want you to meet the highest-ranking commander in the Red Moon pack. George."

That name struck Marcy like a thunderbolt and her head whipped in the direction of the door to meet the Greek God who haunted her dreams.

George.

Chapter 238 - Failed Rejection

Author's note:

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Marcy couldn't snap out of her daze that was muddled by the excitement of her wolf. Marcy didn't feel her wolf in some time, yet now she was coming back. Did that mean she was not having a nightmare and the guy in front of her was real?

"George, this is my daughter, Marcy. I was just praising your abilities."

George's eyes didn't leave Alpha Edward. "You flatter me, Alpha."

Alpha Edward bobbed his head in approval. He noticed that whoever saw Marcy, their gazes couldn't stop roaming her body, after all, werewolves are licentious creatures and Marcy is a good-looking she-wolf, yet commander George knew that Marcy is forbidden fruit. This confirmed Alpha Edward's previous assessment that George is the right person to escort Marcy.

"This is what I like about you. Always humble", and you know your place, "no matter how high you reach.", Alpha Edward said to George and then spoke to Marcy who was still gaping at the newcomer like someone stuck two invisible fingers in her mouth.

"George is undefeated among commanders, and he can get any benefits he wants, yet he always volunteers for missions, stays late at the training grounds to work with warriors, and he even helps with cleanup. Despite his young age, he is one of the pillars of the Red Moon pack, and also a great role model for James."

"It's my honor to personally train the future Alpha.", George responded.

"James is lucky to have you. We all are." Alpha Edward turned to Marcy. "George will keep you safe. I trust his abilities, and you should as well."

Marcy nodded absentmindedly while trying to wrap her mind around this bombshell. What the hell?

Is this Greek God with a head full of brown hair and gorgeous chocolate eyes the same George who she identified as her mate at her welcoming party a few weeks ago? The same one she rejected?

But... wasn't he an Omega? How did he turn into the highly-praised commander? And why did he smell so delicious? She couldn't stop staring at him. The man was simply too handsome.

Marcy wanted to ask if he is the same guy, but her father was there, and George barely spared her a glance. He was standing ramrod straight with his arms behind his back, and Marcy was struggling to maintain her composure.

"Marcy... Marcy!"

Alpha Edward's stern voice pulled Marcy out of her thoughts.

"Aren't you going to greet George? Where are your manners?"

Marcy blinked at her father in confusion and then she plastered a smile on her face while extending her hand for a handshake.

"I am Marcy. It's a pleasure to meet you, commander."

George looked at Marcy's hand for a moment before returning the gesture.

"Call me, George.", he said, and his eyes flashed with something unfathomable when their hands connected. His lips lifted into a half-smile that didn't reach his eyes. "Trust me, the pleasure is mine."

The handshake lasted only for a second, but Marcy clearly felt the sparks. How was that possible? Didn't she reject him? She had so many questions, but she couldn't ask any of them in front of her father. Oh, and James and Nora were there also, watching them carefully.

Marcy saw Nora standing on the side while ogling at George and Marcy felt fury stirring inside her as she wanted to gouge Nora's eyes out. How dares she look at George in such a way!?

George is mine!

Marcy quickly stopped those words from spilling out of her mouth before she causes a catastrophe. What's wrong with her?

She needed some time to process all this and to come up with a plan because things were spiraling out of control.

After finding out that Nora is sleeping with Alpha Edward, Marcy was convinced that she was ready for whatever that duo had in store for her, but this... was unexpected.

"That's better.", Alpha Edward said to Marcy and turned to George. "Plan to spend at least a week at the Dark Howlers pack, maybe longer. I don't expect that anyone will cause you trouble, but until Marcy settles in her role as the Luna of the Dark Howlers pack, I will entrust her safety into your hands."

Marcy swallowed a mouthful of air. Did she hear that right? George will be guarding her? If she had any doubts if George is the same man she rejected as her mate, the sparks during the handshake dispelled any doubts. He is the same guy.

"Dad, can we have a word?", Marcy asked.

"Sure.", Alpha Edward gestured for Marcy to speak.

"In private, please."

Alpha Edward frowned a bit. "If this is something about your upcoming visit to the Dark Howlers pack, Nora, James, and George should hear about it. After all, you are all going together. And if it's not about it, it can wait."

Alpha Edward's impatience was obvious, and Marcy backtracked. "It can wait."

"Good. Then, I suggest that you and George get to know each other. Why don't you take a walk in the garden? ..."

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Marcy and George walked in silence through the garden.

Marcy inhaled a sharp breath and turned to George, "George, about what happened..."

"Your father is still watching us."

George's stern tone sent shivers down Marcy's spine. Was it wrong to say that through all that guilt and confusion she was also excited? No, no... the excitement was coming from her wolf.

Marcy gave a small nod of understanding. She already confirmed that George is not a simple man. Of course, he was aware that her father was watching them. "Is there a place where we can talk?"

Without a word, George gestured toward the path on the right and Marcy followed after him.

A minute later, Marcy stood in front of the door that led into a storage house. George was inside already.

It was a good place because it provided privacy, but at the same time, Marcy was reluctant. What if George does something despicable? Marcy dispelled that thought. George was obviously loyal to her father, and he wouldn't dare to harm her.

On the other hand, George's loyalty to Alpha Edward meant that George is another person who will make sure that Marcy behaves according to Alpha Edward's wishes.

"Are you coming or not?", George asked with impatience in his voice from the storeroom that looked unusually dark, even with the unobstructed windows.

Marcy was dejected. Why did she come here? Was there a point in saying anything? George will probably parrot everything to her father, but there was something she wanted to know.

Marcy got inside and closed the door behind her.

She observed George who stood ramrod straight with his arms behind his back and his legs slightly parted, and she took in a deep breath that filled her lungs with the stale air of the storehouse and delicious scent of the sweet clover that definitely came from George.

"Why did you say that you are an Omega?", Marcy asked.

"I didn't.", George said curtly.

"But...", Marcy paused while recollecting their brief conversation that happened right after she kissed him and before she rejected him.

Marcy's brows came together. George was right. He said that he is a nobody who cleaned training grounds and she assumed the rest.

"Why didn't you clarify it?"

George sneered. "Clarify, what exactly?"

He took a step closer to Marcy and she swallowed hard while wishing that he maintained his stony unreadable expression because his vicious gaze scared the shit out of her. Even her wolf whimpered while covering in fear.

"What did you expect to hear from a man who is supposed to be your other half while you reject him?"

He was so close that she could feel his hot breath fanning her face. It smelled of sweet clover. Delicious.

"I rejected you. How come I feel the sparks?", Marcy asked.

When he didn't respond, Marcy tried to touch him, but he stepped away to avoid her and Marcy realized... "You can feel them also. Why?"

George narrowed his eyes at her. "Because I didn't accept your rejection."

Marcy was not sure what to think about it. Her wolf was happy, but what about Marcy?

The memory of George's strong arms around her and his flavors seeping into her system were still vivid, and Marcy really wanted to get closer, touch him, kiss him, and much more, but if she does that, everything related to her becoming the Luna of the Dark Howlers pack will be voided and her father will skin her alive.

Chapter 239 - Unexpected Complications

While thinking about her options, Marcy steeled her resolve.

"Accept the rejection."

George's expression frosted. "Do you think it will be that easy to get rid of me?"

"This... us... is not possible.", Marcy tried to reason with him. "My father won't allow it. Both of us will be punished."

"How noble of you to care about my wellbeing.", George drawled. "Trust me, I don't need your concern. Besides, aren't you just thinking about not ruining your chances of becoming the Luna of the Dark Howlers pack? Instead of daydreaming about Alpha Damon, you should worry about the Moon Goddess punishing you for rejecting the mate bond. How can you think about another man when your mate is right in front of you, alive and kicking? Your wolf is probably getting weaker. Can you even shift?"

Marcy pressed her lips into a line. He was right. Her wolf was getting weaker, and Marcy was unable to shift.

"What about you? Your wolf should be weak also."

George cocked an eyebrow at Marcy. "My skills extend beyond what my wolf can offer. You see, I risked my life many times when facing enemies and it's not an exaggeration to say I'm lucky to be alive. What is my wolf in exchange for letting you experience the embarrassment when your future husband realizes

that you are weak and useless? Alpha Damon will discard you, and your father will punish you, and I will be right there. Watching."

Panic swelled within Marcy. "You are doing this on purpose. You volunteered to accompany me to the Dark Howlers pack."

George didn't deny it. "Alpha mentioned that he needs someone for the job, and I suggested that it's better to send one capable person than a dozen of warriors because we don't want to arouse suspicion."

"You manipulated him.", Marcy said in disbelief. At first, Marcy guessed that it was Nora's doing to reduce the number of warriors who will watch over Marcy, but now she realized it was George.

George smirked. "You should worry about yourself, princess."

Marcy swallowed hard. What was that supposed to mean? "Are you threatening me?"

"How can a lowly servant dare to threaten his master?", George said sarcastically. "Your downfall will be looking down on people. I thought you are different, but you are just a pampered princess who doesn't know the value of hard work because you were born with a golden spoon in your mouth, and you never cared to look at the world around you. Even without a war on our hands, every warrior suffers through daily training, and even the worst performer from recruits under my care is worth more than you ever will be."

George's hostility was tangible and Marcy realized that her rejection hurt his ego. Is that why he didn't accept it? So that he can torture her? But isn't he torturing himself also? Before she could come up with something reasonable to say, George spoke again.

"I hear that Alpha Damon values his warriors and his Omegas equally. I wonder how long it will take him to see how ugly you are under that pretty face."

Marcy paled. "What will you do?"

"Me? Nothing. I will watch you as you self-destruct. I wonder how his mark will affect you, considering that you have a mate bond already."

Marcy was shocked. He had a point! "As long as our bond exists, harming me will harm you as well. Accept my rejection. It will be easier for both of us."

"You wanted to say, it will be easier for YOU.", George squeezed through his teeth. "I am used to the pain and denying myself what my heart desires. How about you, princess?"

George took a step closer to Marcy and Marcy thought that he looked like a mountain as he gazed at her from above and his smirk was unsettling.

"What's with your hostility toward Nora? I thought you were supposed to be best friends."

Marcy blinked in confusion. How did he know? It took her a moment to realize that he can feel her emotions. "Nothing."

"Was it because she was eyefucking me?", George asked mockingly. "How can you be jealous when a she-wolf is desiring a mate you rejected? Or is there more to it?"

Marcy pressed her lips into a line. There was no way she will tell him that Nora slept not only with Alpha Damon but with Alpha Edward also. And Marcy was jealous when Nora ogled at George. Everything was a mess and it was getting messier by the minute.

She needed an exit so that she can think! But first... "If my engagement fails, I will be punished, but what will happen to you if I disclose we are mates? Will you go against my father? Against your Alpha?"

George was not moved. "Your father can't defeat me. If he makes things difficult for me, I can always leave. With my skillset, any pack will be happy to take me in. I wonder if the same applies to you."

Marcy opened her mouth to retort, but then George's aura pressed on her, to prove his point, and Marcy ended up lowering her head in submission.

Wait! What the hell is this!?! Marcy couldn't believe it.

Why was she submitting to him? She has Alpha blood running through her veins!

Beads of sweat formed on Marcy's forehead as she fought mightily to raise her head, just enough so that she can see him.

"I rejected you. Aren't you a prideful commander? How can you stand being close to me?"

"The more I hate you, the closer I want to be.", George squeezed through his teeth.

Marcy's heart tightened. He hates her? She rejected him, why would she care about his feelings? Ah, it must be her wolf.

What kind of a twisted situation was this? Her mate refused to accept her rejection, tying her to him, yet he obviously didn't have an intention to claim her as his. He hated her. Or did he?

Marcy remembered that she should be able to feel his emotions.

She focused on the pull that was getting stronger by the second, and there she felt anger, dejection, desire... yes! Desire!

Just how she was affected by his scent and the sparks of the touch, he was the same.

Marcy moved closer to George and he took a step back.

She smirked. "Are you afraid?"

The dangerous glint in George's eyes told Marcy that he accepted her challenge.

She took a step closer to him, and another, and then she placed her hand on his chest. The delightful sparks tingled her palm through the thin fabric of his t-shirt that did little to conceal his impressive physique.

"You don't hate me, George. You... AHH!"

Marcy shrieked when George grabbed her shoulders and pinned her back against the wall.

Before Marcy could recuperate, George's lips landed on hers and his tongue plundered her mouth mercilessly, dazing her within seconds as arousal overtook her senses.

The pull of the mate bond was undeniable and the only thing on Marcy's mind was to get closer to George. He smelled appetizing, and this flavor was even better. Mate.

Marcy wanted to hug him, but his hold on her shoulders was solid, preventing her from moving her arms and she moaned in protest.

His kiss was violent, not gentle at all, and Marcy felt her insides shuddering as all the sparks of their bond converged at her core.

The kiss stopped abruptly, just as it started, and Marcy was in a daze when she saw George looking at her mockingly.

"Worry about what I will do, princess. My emotions are not important because I am used to ignoring them. I wonder, what will Alpha Damon do if he finds out that you get so easily aroused by someone else?"

And with that, George left the storage house without looking back.

It took Marcy a minute to collect herself enough to leave the storehouse and drag herself back into her room.

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Marcy plopped on her bed and cursed her terrible luck.

This was going from bad to worse and she had no idea how to stop this crazy ride.

Until half an hour ago, she thought that her biggest obstacle will be to win over Alpha Damon. Sure, she suspected that Nora might tag along, but only after Alpha Edward confirmed it did Marcy see Nora as a real annoyance.

Why was Nora coming? Was she trying to get into Alpha Damon's bed again?

Shouldn't Nora be satisfied with benefits from Alpha Edward? Surely, shagging an older guy must come with benefits, even if he is an Alpha.

Marcy was nauseated at this thought. Her father and Nora. Disgusting.

But now George was in the picture also. Her mate.

What the hell is his problem?

If George put his stupid pride aside and thought for a moment, he would realize that Marcy was right. There was no future for them other than a grim ending, and if George thought differently, he should take it on the Moon Goddess or on Alpha Edward, and not on Marcy!

Marcy was only thinking about surviving this until her chance to escape appears. Why was George treating her like she is the bad guy?

She believed that her trip to the Dark Howlers pack will be a way out because it would end in one of two ways. Either Marcy will cement her position as Damon's Luna, or she would escape the clutches of her father and this crazed society of werewolves.

Unfortunately, with George added to the mix, Marcy realized that her chances of failing at both increased exponentially.

This is a disaster!

Chapter 240 - Plans For Guests (1)

Author's note:

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~ The Dark Howlers Pack ~

Later that afternoon...

After formidable lovemaking in the soft grass next to the waterfall, Damon and Talia took a dip in the river to freshen up, and then Damon carried Talia back to the packhouse.

Neither of them wanted to leave that noisy place where they reconciled and found peace, but with the guests coming, they had to.

Damon and Talia left visible marks of their presence in the form of a patch of flattened grass close to the base of the waterfall, and two pairs of shoes up on the cliff.

The couple arrived in the restricted area full of questions and uncertainties, and left with the conviction that they will give it their all to stay true to their bond.

Damon and Talia were not sure if the Moon Goddess had a plan on her mind when she paired them up, and they didn't know what awaits for them on the road ahead. However, they were confident it will be alright, as long as they are traversing that road together.

"We should visit your parents more often, and not only when we are facing a challenge.", Talia said softly while leaning her head on Damon's shoulder. By now, she was used to him carrying her around princess style.

He loved to hold her, and she let him have it.

"I want to bring flowers and to thank them for their help.", Talia continued, knowing that Damon was listening even though he didn't give any visible reaction and his steps continued steadily. "You were right, that place is good for finding answers and putting things into perspective. I realized that no matter what happened in the past, I can't see my future without you in it. We will pacify my wolf and she will see how wonderful you are. Until then, I will study hard to be the Luna you and our pack deserve."

Damon was delighted to hear Talia's words as her sincerity washed over him. And she said OUR pack!

He kissed her forehead. "You are already more than I deserve, kitten. There is no manual on how to be a good Luna, but I know that you are perfect. The Dark Howlers pack is lucky to have you, and so am I."

Talia smiled and didn't want to counter his words.

It sounded nice, but how can she be perfect when most of the time, she has no idea what to do? The perfect example of her ignorance is that she always ends up in trouble and Damon comes to her rescue. She was unable to stick to simple instructions like, don't go into the forest alone.

She knew that it was risky, yet she still ended up going. More than once.

But this time, it will be different because she steeled her resolve to listen to Damon.

After all, he proved numerous times that he wants only the best for her, and to keep her safe, and if he says not to go into the forest, she needs to take it seriously.

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Damon carried Talia into the office on the second floor of the packhouse that was three doors ahead of his (and Talia's) office.

That room was intended for Beta to use when he deals with pack-related business, but Caden (and Maya) were usually out in the field or would discuss things in their bedroom, so their office was rarely used.

It was the first time for Talia to enter this space.

Maya and Caden were there, and after greeting them, Talia observed that Beta's office was comparable to Alpha's in size.

There was one long desk with two computers, obviously for Maya and Caden to use. Built-in bookshelves filled with books, several tall file cabinets along the left wall, and a sitting area with a long sofa, three chairs, and a coffee table. The gray tones got a pop of color from green leafy potted plants that stood tall in each corner.

Damon sat on the sofa with Talia on his lap and asked Maya and Caden, "Did you do what I asked you?"

Maya and Caden nodded, knowing that Damon was referring to their task to arrange for Marcy to come.

"Well?", Damon asked impatiently. Seeing that Maya and Caden hesitated, Damon explained. "Talia knows. There are no secrets in front of her."

Maya's face contorted into a frown. That's what he said the last time, and Talia ended up turning into a monster when she saw the video. Maya didn't want to experience again nearly kissing the floor so she looked at Caden, silently telling him that he should talk.

Caden didn't think it's a big deal. His Alpha wanted updates, and Caden had some to give.

"We got confirmation that Marcy will arrive with three more people either tomorrow evening or in the morning, the next day. That will depend on when they leave and if they will stay somewhere to rest for the night because they have only one driver. As for requests, there was only one. They all wanted separated rooms in the packhouse."

"Who is coming?", Damon asked. He knew about Marcy, but the other three were unknown. If those were regular warriors, it would be unusual for them to stay in the packhouse.

"Marcy is coming with Beta's daughter, future Alpha James, and commander George.", Caden said without too many explanations. They all met Nora, James, and George during their visit to the Red Moon pack.

Damon didn't want to think about Marcy or that Beta's daughter (whoever she was). He was getting a headache because he had no idea how to deal with Marcy, and he had absolutely no capacity left for another female to fit into that mentally painful picture.

He focused on the guys. One is a teenager, too young to be important, while the other one is a commander, a capable warrior.

Damon met all three commanders of the Red Moon pack, including most of the generals. Hundreds of soldiers gathered in a mini-parade where they tried to impress Damon, but at that time, Damon was too distracted with his search for the girl with copper-colored hair (aka Talia) and he didn't pay attention.

However, Damon knew who George was; the youngest commander left quite an impression in those few minutes they interacted. He was oozing power and discipline, and Damon's wolf stirred in desire for a spar. Maybe they could spar now, depending on how long the commander sticks around.

Damon wouldn't mind keeping the commander and sending Marcy and the other two back to where they came from.

"Did they mention how long they will stay?", Damon asked to what both Caden and Maya responded by shaking their heads.

"They are hoping that James and George can join us for training sessions.", Caden said.

Well, that will give Damon the opportunity to spar with George.

However, what rubbed Damon the wrong way was that first Alpha Magnus asked Damon to train Tony, and now Alpha Edward was pushing his son into Damon's hands.

If there was something in it for Damon, he would be more willing, but just hearing words of thanks and getting pats on the back was useless.

At this rate, Damon should start charging for training services, and he might earn a fortune.

He is an Alpha, and not a personal trainer, damnit!

Damon tched while thinking about this.

Tony is one thing as Damon had a good relationship with the Lightclaw pack, and Damon agreed for Tony to learn from his Generals.

Damon made room in his schedule to work with Tony personally as there are things that only an Alpha can teach another Alpha, especially when they are using their aura, and considering that Kalina and Talia hit it off well, Damon was willing to go the extra mile in helping Tony.

However, future Alpha James and commander George were different.

Damon's relationship with the Red Moon pack is shaky at best. Surely, Damon could use this visit as an opportunity to improve the relationship between the two packs, but considering Alpha Edward's personality and that Marcy is coming here believing that she will become Damon's Luna, there is a good chance that the shaky relationship will worsen, and Damon would be stupid to allow the enemy to learn from him.