

Alphas Bride 31

Chapter 31 - Food And Medicine

Damon gestured toward the carts with the food. "What do you want to start with?"

Talia was about to reach out for something but stopped herself. "Won't you pick first?"

It was ages since she ate in a group setting, but Talia remembered that high-ranking members of the pack eat first. As a child, she always waited for others to have their picks before she could get food. And even if everyone had food in front of them, no one dared to eat before Alpha... and she was with one big scary Alpha in the room right now.

Damon shook his head in disapproval. Talia was obviously hungry, and he ordered all this food for her, yet she wanted him to eat first.

Sure, normally, in the pack, others wait for him, but this was not normal, and he didn't want Talia to feel that she was below him.

He grabbed a fork and poked a finger-sized sausage and held it in front of Talia's mouth.

"Eat", he ordered in a voice that didn't allow for further arguments.

Talia was about to get the fork and hold it herself, but Damon prevented her from doing so.

"You are hurt." Damon gestured toward her wrist. "Let me feed you." He really wanted to feed her.

Talia was about to say that her other hand is fine, but something about Damon's expression told her to open her mouth and accept his offerings. And she did.

"Mmm...", a small moan formed in her throat involuntarily a second after she bit on it. The sausage was warm and juicy, and it was a long time since she ate something so tasty.

Damon watched her chew with her eyes closed and he swallowed hard. Why the heck was he getting aroused now?

That sweet moan was the most seductive thing he ever heard in his life and mental images of Talia naked under him flashed in front of his eyes. What sounds will she release when he is sheathed deep inside her?

Damon cursed internally. Damn it! This mate bond turned him into a horny teenager!

He cleared his throat. "Do you like it?"

Talia's eyes snapped open, and she nodded shyly.

Damon smiled. "I will order more of those."

"No need. There is so much food. Won't you eat also?"

Damon was surprised. She was obviously starving, yet she was concerned about him. Silly girl.

He put the fork in his mouth, and finished the half of the sausage that was there.

Damon scooped some scrambled eggs and fed Talia, and then he got scrambled eggs for himself.

"I can eat on my own.", Talia said, and Damon shook his head in disapproval.

"Let's not make your injuries worse. Take it easy until my pack doctor says you are fine."

Talia exhaled helplessly, but she was touched by his concern.

She wanted to bring up the point that there is no need for them to share a fork, but she didn't want to appear whiny and complain.

Bite by bite, Damon fed them in turns, and they ate in silence.

He had a million questions he didn't know how to ask. Who is she? How did she find herself in the Red Moon pack? How did she end up in that attic?

But Damon kept those questions for himself, content that Talia was with him and that he could take care of her. The only thing that could make this better (in Damon's opinion) is if she could sit in his lap.

Talia had a million questions she didn't dare to ask. Why did he help her escape? Why was he treating her kindly? Is he really taking her to his pack? He promised her a room and food and a doctor... is it really that easy?

But Talia kept those questions for herself, content with all the food that entered her system. The only thing that could make this better (in Talia's opinion) is if she could put some clothes on.

Eventually, she reached her belly's capacity.

"I'm full."

Damon frowned. "Really? You barely ate."

He held a piece of bacon in front of her mouth. "Come on. You can have this much."

Talia put her hand over her mouth because Damon looked ready to force-feed her.

Damon continued persuading her.

"You are eating like a mouse." An adorable mouse. "You will remain skinny forever." Not that I mind. "There is no need to hold back in front of me." Please don't hold back anything in front of me. "Or is it that you don't like it?" I will order something else.

She was not sure why he would care about her weight, as for the rest, "I'm not holding back. This is the most I ate in years. Any more and I might have a tummy ache. It was delicious and warm, and I thank you for everything."

Damon exhaled helplessly and placed the bacon piece back on the plate. "It's OK. You will put some meat on those bones, little by little."

Talia was alarmed. Why did it sound like he was planning to make her gain weight so that he can eat her? Is he a cannibal? Well, that would explain a thing or two why they took her out of the Red Moon pack in such a secretive way. If they eat her, no one will notice her missing. Talia felt like crying.

Unaware of Talia's internal turmoil, Damon pushed the carts with food further away, and he kneeled in front of her.

"Let me check your legs."

Talia was flabbergasted. A big scary Alpha was on his knees in front of her! Isn't this like when the prince brought the glass slipper for the princess? And then they had their happily... Talia cut off that thought.

She is not a princess, and he is not holding a glass slipper, but a pack of bandages.

By now, Talia understood that Damon will do what he wants, and he wanted to see her legs.

She clutched the bathrobe at her thigh level and extended her leg toward him.

Damon was pleased that she didn't resist or try to negotiate.

Damon's hands landed just above her ankle, and he held his breath while savoring the sparks that made him tingly from the inside. Every time he touched her, it got more intense.

After covering up a few spots with cream, he looked up at her, and Talia's eyes widened in horror.

"I'm fine. There are no other injuries."

Damon rolled his eyes. "I will believe you for the front. However, I want you to turn around and show me your back."

Reluctantly, Talia turned and loosened the bathrobe, allowing it to fall from her shoulders.

The sweet citrusy scent of freesia assaulted Damon's senses and he swallowed so hard, that he was confident she heard him.

By looking at Talia with her clothes on, Damon thought that she was skinny, but now that he looked at her exposed back which elegantly narrowed from her shoulders toward her waist, he realized that she was perfect. Beyond perfect.

He really wanted to lick her.

There were a few bruises on her back, and he focused mightily on them in order to stay present.

Damon squeezed medicinal ointment on the tip of his fingers and started softly massaging it into the area of Talia's back where the bruises are.

The sparks flew through his fingers into his arm, like a gentle current that shook his pleasure centers.

It didn't take more than a few seconds when Talia inched away from him. "I think that's enough."

He didn't want to stop. "Let me rub it in, otherwise it will ruin the clothes. The surface is too big for a band-aid and the other option is to wrap you in a bandage. You don't want to look like a mummy, don't you?"

Talia let out a long breath. She was not used to anyone touching her and the fact that the bathrobe was loose, it made her feel exposed.

It was just the two of them in the room, and suddenly the atmosphere became intimate.

Talia closed her eyes and tried to think about something else. Anything would be fine, other than the feeling of his fingers moving in circular movements over her skin. But the sensation was impossible to ignore, and she felt her cheeks heating up as her heart thundered against her chest. Can he feel it? Or hear it? That would be embarrassing. She didn't want him to get the wrong idea.

Damon was as possessed. He started with tips of his fingers, and then with pads, and then with the whole palm, and even though he didn't roam away from her back, the sparks he felt were divine and urged him to keep on touching her.

Damon noticed Talia's increased heart rate and his lips lifted into a smirk when he picked up the scent of her arousal.

He was glad that he was not the only one affected.

Chapter 32 - Getting Ready

Damon leaned closer to Talia, his face hovering an inch away from her left shoulder blade.

"Some of these bruises are quite bad and might need a second layer of cream."

Talia flinched when his hot breath splashed against her skin, and she swiftly pulled the bathrobe back up while cursing internally. Why did she allow herself to get carried away like this?

Her face was on fire and she was confident that she was blushing profusely.

"This is more than enough. Thank you.", she said in a whisper.

Damon was disappointed at the loss of that addicting touch, but he saw that Talia was uncomfortable, so he didn't want to push for it.

He shook his head. What was he doing exactly?

They stopped for some food and first-aid, and they need to head back on the road.

Besides, didn't he decide to bring her with him and keep her safe, and there will be nothing more to it?

He reached into his suitcase and got one t-shirt and shorts with a string at the waist.

"Wear these for now."

Damon tossed clothes on the bed and left the room.

He needed some air and distance between him and Talia, before he loses his control, and possibly his mind as well.

There were times when he was attracted to a woman, but never to the point of not being able to control himself.

'Maya...', Damon called through the mind-link. 'Can you check on the girl? We are leaving in half an hour.'

Damon didn't wait for Maya to respond, knowing that she is probably busy with Caden. He went to take a walk and clear his head.

Every cell in his body screamed for Talia's proximity, but Damon was resisting it because this uncontrollable attraction was foreign, and he didn't like it, yet when Talia was nearby, her addictive scent increased his madness.

Back in the hotel room...

Talia was confused, unsure what to think about this.

First, she woke up with the scary Alpha in bed, who was holding her tightly. Then, he fed her and tended to her wounds, and then... he left without sparing her a glance. Did she do something wrong?

Talia didn't expect Damon to be loving or caring, but when he left, he appeared angry.

This only confirmed that Alpha Damon is an unstable person and that staying close to him won't be good.

Talia told herself to stay calm and obedient. Soon, they will reach the Dark Howlers pack and she will see what waits for her.

Hopefully, she can find a small corner for herself; a bed that comes with food and a set of duties, and no beatings or any other type of bullying. She wishes that people leave her alone, and maybe she could make a friend or two.

If it doesn't work out, she can flee and try to make it on her own.

Talia was reminded by Alpha Damon that joining a pack is a big deal because, with that, Alpha can track her down. She took a mental note not to join the Dark Howlers pack unless absolutely necessary, or at least until she confirms that she actually wants to stay there.



It was vague, but it was the best plan she could come up with, and she decided to refine that plan as she gets more information.

A knock on the door got Talia's attention.

"Who is it?", she asked.

"It's Maya. Can I come in?"

Talia opened the door and saw that it's only Maya.

Maya entered the room and eyed Talia who was in the bathrobe. When Damon told her to 'check on the girl', Maya was not sure what to expect, but Talia seemed fine.

Maya also took note of carts with food, which were obviously too much for two people.

It only further confirmed Maya's theory that Talia is Damon's mate. When Maya and Caden found each other, for the first few months, Caden was obsessing about feeding Maya, and even now he often worries she might be hungry. It's something about male werewolves and their instinct to provide for their mate, food included.

"We didn't get a chance to introduce ourselves properly. I'm Maya."

Talia shook Maya's hand. "Talia."

After introductions, Maya explained her presence. "Alpha Damon told me to check on you. You should get ready so that we can go back to the road. We are a long way from our pack."

Talia was not comfortable with the idea of putting Damon's clothes on. The shorts he gave her were loose and there was no way she could wear them without panties. Just thinking about his clothes touching her private parts made her cheeks flush.

"Can you, please, get my stuff from the car?", Talia asked Maya. "It was in the trunk, wrapped in a bedsheet."

"Oh...", a sound escaped Maya's lips when she remembered the bundle that was half-open, just enough for Maya to see worn-out clothes. "Give me a minute and I will get you something."

A few minutes later, Maya was back with jeans, a t-shirt, panties, a sports bra, and a pair of shiny flip-flops.

"I'm not sure if these will fit you, but it will be fine until we reach our destination. I know that I'm a size or two bigger than you, but I've got a belt for the jeans, to hold them in place.", Maya spoke quickly while stuffing clothes in Talia's hands and pushing her into the bathroom. "Change quickly, we leave in a few minutes, and Alpha Damon doesn't like waiting."

"Thanks...", Talia mumbled and closed the door behind her.

Maya glanced through the room and saw on the bed the t-shirt and shorts that Damon gave to Talia.

Maya shook her head in disapproval. Other than shorts being the meshed ones for the gym, the t-shirt would probably look like a sack on Talia who has a small frame.

What was Damon thinking? To bring Talia into the pack looking like a hobo? Doesn't he know that first impression is important?

Forget about the image of a respectable Luna. Whoever sees Talia in those clothes, will never see her as a decent girl. Werewolves maybe have scandalous lifestyles, but their dressing is on point; especially the she-wolves who are hovering around Damon.

Once Talia establishes herself, she can wear whatever she wants.

Thinking about appearances, Maya dashed back into her room and returned with several accessories.

"Thank you for the clothes.", Talia said shyly when she peered out of the bathroom.

The sports bra was not super tight, but it provided support. The T-shirt and jeans were good, nearly new.

Talia was really grateful but also embarrassed as well because she knew that those are Maya's clothes.

"These are a bit big for you. Once we get you clothes that actually fit, you will be a stunner.", Maya said with a wink and gestured toward the chair. "Sit there, let me do your hair."

Talia sat on the chair obediently and let Maya comb her hair.

"Are you excited to come to the Dark Howlers pack?", Maya started small-talk.

"I'm not sure what to expect.", Talia responded honestly.

"It's busy, lively, and there are all kinds of people. But Alpha Damon makes sure things run smoothly. Rewards and punishments are given fairly, and no one undermines his position."

"You speak highly of him."

Maya hummed in confirmation. "I joined the pack when I met Caden, but I know the story of young Damon who lost his parents before he came of age. Alpha Damon was forced to take over the pack, or to give it up for other Alphas to tear it apart. Only he knows what hardships he endured, and he fought many official battles before turning twenty years old. There is a reason why other Alphas don't dare to provoke Alpha Damon, even though he is half their age. Alpha Damon will do anything to keep us safe and thanks to his strength and dedication, the Dark Howlers pack prospers."

Talia listened carefully and she felt sorry for Damon. The scary Alpha became a bit pitiful in her eyes because she knew very well what it means to lose parents at a young age.

Talia grew up on her own, and she thought that maybe she had it better compared to Damon because she was able to hide in the attic, while Damon was forced into the limelight.

"He sounds like a good Alpha.", Talia said.

Maya smiled. "He is the best. Alpha Damon protects his own. As long as you are loyal to him and to the pack, he will make sure you are fine. No one will harm you, Talia."

Talia pressed her lips into a line while telling herself not to get carried away. Everything so far appeared to be good, but she feared that it might be too good and she was not ready to drop her guard yet.

Maya didn't say more, knowing that Damon's interest in Talia went beyond the one of a pack leader, and his reputation in that area was horrible.

Chapter 33 - Sharing Snacks

Maya hummed in satisfaction at the sight of Talia's hair that was parted in two neat braids.

"All done.", Maya announced.

Talia touched the braid that fell over her left shoulder. "Thank you, this is wonderful."

"You are welcome.", Maya responded and inched closer. "You have beautiful eyes. Will you let me put some makeup on you?"

Talia blinked. Unsure how to respond to the compliment or to the makeup offerings.

Seeing that Talia was flustered, Maya patted her shoulder. "We will do makeup next time. We need to head out now."

Maya told Damon through the mind-link that they are ready to go, and it took him a minute to reach the hotel room.

Damon stood frozen at the door and stared at Talia who was collecting fruits, cheeses, and granola bars from the food carts, wrapping them in napkins and arranging them in a paper bag Maya gave her.

Eventually, Talia noticed Damon and paused.

He didn't say anything, and she started squirmed under his unreadable gaze.

Did he not approve that she was packing food? Or was it because she didn't wear the clothes he told her to put on? Or maybe it was something else?

She touched her hair and straightened the t-shirt nervously. "Is something wrong?"

Damon cleared his throat. "No. Everything is fine." More than fine.

Now that her hair was tidy and she wore good clothes, Talia was a stunner, even with those bruises. Her citrusy sweet scent of freesia made Damon slightly dizzy, amplifying his visual enjoyment, almost like he was intoxicated. She was intoxicating.

Damon barely registered Maya giggling and patting his shoulder.

"You are welcome...", Maya said to Damon, before walking out with, "We are going to check out and meet you by the car!"

"Maya kept things in your suitcase.", Talia said. "I hope that was OK."

Damon nodded absentmindedly.

"Is it OK if I pack leftovers? There are plenty and you already paid for them. It would be a pity to let them go to waste. We can have them on the road."

Damon nodded again and gestured for Talia to go ahead. "Take your time, we are not in a rush."

He leaned lazily on the doorframe and watched her without a word.

Talia was confused. Maya said that they are in a rush and that Alpha doesn't like to wait, yet Alpha told her to take her time. But it was not her place to question Alpha or Beta, and she was grateful that he approved her request, so she got busy.

Damon noticed how Talia handled the food carefully. So far, none of the women around him would pack leftovers.

Of course, Damon is loaded, so paying for a meal that won't be consumed is not a big deal, but only now he realized how those women took him (and his money) for granted.

Those women would always order the most expensive dish and be super-picky about what they eat, while Talia ate whatever he gave her, without any complaints. Actually, Talia treated every bite like it's a scrumptious treat and Damon loved it.

When Talia finished packing, Damon grabbed the suitcase and headed out, with Talia two steps behind him.

They were halfway through the hallway when he stopped abruptly and snatched the bag with leftovers from her hand without an explanation, and she wondered if she should say 'thank you' or not.

Talia decided to keep quiet because Damon was acting strange again.

They sat in the car and this time Talia didn't fall asleep.

She was looking through the window and listening to the music from the radio, occasionally finding something in the bag to munch on.

They were driving through the night with stops on every few hours.

Damon was frustrated. Talia was mostly keeping to herself and a few times when she spoke, it was with Maya.

He felt neglected.

Damon wanted to hold Talia's hand or maybe to make her lean on him, but without her dozing off, he didn't have any excuses to get closer without appearing like a creep.

After the second stop, Caden and Damon switched places so that Caden can get a shuteye.

Damon took the driver's seat, and he was visibly disappointed when Maya moved to the back, leaving Caden on the front passenger's seat.

Maya snickered and spoke to Caden through mind-link. 'Can you believe that he is so prideful that he doesn't want to ask Talia to join him in front?'

'Hmm?' Caden yawned. 'I wanted to go in the back with you, but the girl seemed uncomfortable so...'

'She wouldn't be uncomfortable if Alpha Damon asked her nicely to come to the front.', Maya responded.

'You think so?', Damon interjected into their conversation and Maya's eyes widened in horror while cursing herself for not triple-checking that the mind-link was only between her and Caden. She scrambled her brain while thinking if she said anything inappropriate.

After a few exceedingly long seconds of stiff silence, Maya responded, 'She is obviously interested in looking outside, and the front seat gives a better view.'

Damon nodded at this.

"Why did we stop?", Caden grumbled while checking the time.

They had a stop less than half an hour ago. Everyone used the restroom and stretched their legs. Unless something went wrong, he should be able to nap at least two-to-three more hours.

"I need to get something...", Damon said and dashed into a small store by the road.

He came back with a bag of chips and a container with mixed nuts.

Maya noticed that the top two buttons of Damon's shirt were undone, and she wondered what he was doing inside. It was not that warm.

Instead of going to his seat, Damon knocked on Talia's window.

"Do you want to sit in front? The view is better and Caden can sleep in the back."

Talia hesitated. Sitting next to Damon was not the most appealing offer, but she understood that it will be better for Caden to rest in the back with Maya, so she agreed to switch places.

Maya watched as Damon gave newly purchased snacks to Talia while saying, "I feel like eating these, but my hands are busy driving. Can you feed me?"

"What happened with, my hand is hurt?", Talia asked Damon and showed her bandaged wrist.

"That was for using utensils. You can put food in my mouth. Right?"



Maya couldn't believe that Damon was this cheeky. But it confirmed that Damon wanted to be close to Talia.

Caden didn't miss this exchange. He pushed himself forward, sticking his head between Damon and Talia.

"I want to have some also. Aaa..." Caden opened his mouth wide, waiting for Talia to put some chips inside while ignoring Damon's glare.

"Don't you need to sleep?", Damon grumbled. "If you are energetic, how about you drive some more?"

"It's just one bite. Why are you making it a big deal?", Caden asked innocently, and his eyes flashed in approval when Talia put a handful of chips in his mouth.

"Tfank ou...", Caden mumbled his thanks to Talia before leaning back into the seat with a big grin on his face.

"Stop feeding him.", Damon said impatiently to Talia and then glared at Caden. "That's for me."

His expression softened as he turned to Talia. "You can have some also, if you want."

Maya and Caden exchanged knowing looks.

It's not uncommon for Damon not to share, but he was willing to share with Talia. And it looked like Damon was more upset that Talia was feeding Caden compared to Damon losing his snacks.

Damon would open his mouth occasionally, and Talia put chips without a word spoken.

"I dropped it. Can you get it?", Damon said to Talia.

"Where did it go?"

"In my shirt."

Talia stared at Damon. "What?"

Maya's eyebrows shoot up. Is it possible that Damon planned for this and that's why he unbuttoned his shirt when he bought snacks?

"Come on. The longer it takes, the deeper it gets. It's itchy and I can't drive properly. You can undo a button or two to get it, if needed."

Talia was visibly flustered while thinking about how to fish out the chip from Damon's shirt.

Damon was disappointed when Talia pinched the shirt in the area of his navel, pulled it to untuck the shirt from his jeans, and gave it a shake. The chip fell on the floor.

"There. You shouldn't be itchy now.", Talia said victoriously.

Maya hid her laugh behind a cough. She never saw Damon sulking before.

By now, Maya's theory that Talia is Damon's mate was solid, and they also understood that Caden's hunch was right. Damon wanted to keep it a secret.

Chapter 34 - The Dark Howlers Pack

~ The Dark Howlers Pack ~

The sun was rising from the East when our group of four reached their destination, and Caden announced, "Home sweet home. Welcome to the Dark Howlers pack, Talia!".

Talia observed the dense forest through which the road snaked, and Caden slowed down the car as they passed through a town.

"This is Darkbourne.", Maya said. "Every person living and working in this town belongs to the Dark Howlers pack."

Talia nodded in understanding while observing the residential buildings with nice backyards that gradually turned into densely packed two-story-high buildings.

"We are getting closer to the center of the town.", Maya continued her tour.

The two-story-high buildings had various shops on the ground level. Talia spotted a bakery, a coffee shop, a clothing boutique, a shoe store, a restaurant, a butcher's shop, a tattoo parlor, a bookstore. There was something for everyone and quite a number of pedestrians filled the sidewalks.

On the left, the road opened into a wide street and Talia spotted a cobblestone town square with a clocktower in the middle. There were trees and several benches, and other than a coffee shop with outdoor seating, Talia also saw two street vendors. One selling popcorn, and the other one ice cream. Based on the number of people there, it was obvious that the town square is a popular hangout spot.

"We will have a fair in ten days.", Maya explained when she saw Talia's eyes lingering toward the town square that was now out of sight. "There will be music, performances, sweet treats, and everyone will come. You will love it."

Talia smiled a little. She never attended a fair and she couldn't imagine how it will look like, but it sounded fun, and based on Maya's words, it appeared that Talia can go as well.

She never attended events at the Red Moon pack, no matter how lively it was downstairs, and this almost sounded like an invitation.

After leaving the town, they drove for another few minutes before stopping in front of a large three-stories-high building that was surrounded by forest.

"This is the pack hospital.", Maya said. "When you are done with the checkup, you will join us at the packhouse. I will ask Stephanie to prepare something tasty for everyone."

Talia didn't know who Stephanie was, but she understood that this was her cue to leave the car.

Talia was surprised that Alpha Damon alighted the car as well.

'Make sure her room is ready.', Damon told Maya through the mind link.

'Where will she stay?'

'In my old room on the third floor.', Damon responded.

Maya didn't think much about it. 'OK.'

Maya turned to Caden, and asked, "Which one is Alpha's old room?"

They have a mind-link, but Maya prefers using her mouth to speak when no one can overhear them because there are always chances that someone might eavesdrop on the mind-link (like Alpha).

It's not that Damon wants to eavesdrop, but as the Alpha of the Dark Howlers pack, the strength of his link with the pack members is extraordinary, and unless they take extra steps to block him, he can hear them.

"It's across the hall from his current room. Why?", Caden responded.

When Damon became the Alpha, he moved into the master bedroom that his parents occupied previously.

"He just told me to make sure THAT room is ready for Talia."

Caden smirked. "So, he will put her in a room that is right across the hallway from him."

Maya shook her head. "What is he thinking? If he wants to hide that she is his mate, he shouldn't keep her on the floor that is reserved for the Alpha. No outsiders ever stayed there before."

Caden chuckled. "He probably knows that he should get Talia to stay like any other single Omega, or at least on the first floor with Stephanie. However, the bond is messing with his mind, and he is not thinking because the only thing on his mind is that he wants to be close to her. I can bet that in a week from now, they will share a room. His room."

"No way.", Maya was confident. "Damon is clueless about romancing a woman, and that girl is petrified. The only way to win her over is to move slowly. If he goes his usual Damon on her, she will run away."

"Do you think he will let her leave?"

Maya didn't have an answer to this question. But Damon wouldn't keep a girl against her will. Right?

In the pack hospital...

"Talia, this is Dr. Travis Arzt...", Damon introduced the doctor who was expecting them. "He is the best doctor around."

Talia watched the tall blonde man whose friendly smile reminded her of Olivia, and she wondered if all medical people have that comforting expression that makes one believe everything will be alright.

Dr. Arzt bowed his head submissively. "You flatter me, Alpha." He turned to Talia. "And you are...?"

"Talia, Dr. Arzt."

"Please, call me Travis. Dr. Arzt is my father and when someone calls me like that, it makes me feel old."

"OK. Travis.", Talia agreed and Damon was irked that she agreed so easily. He remembered how much she hesitated to address him as just Damon.

"If I understood correctly, we are to give you a full checkup. Please step inside and Jill and Cathy will help you change into a hospital gown. I will join you when you are ready." He gestured toward the door on the side that was open, and Talia saw two women waving at her.

Talia glanced at Damon who gave her an encouraging nod. He liked that she silently asked his permission. It made him feel important.

"This will take at least one hour, Alpha", Travis said to Damon. "Who should I notify when we are done?"

Damon frowned. He was not happy that the doctor was sending him away.

Is Talia going to undress and Travis will get to watch and... touch? Damon didn't like it. Not even a little bit.

There should be a woman doctor. Or even better, Damon should be the doctor.

But he knew that there is no woman doctor in their pack, and Travis is the best they have while he (Damon) can't even bandage a wrist properly. But can he really leave?

"I will attend the exam."

Travis was visibly confused. "Is there a reason for it?"

Damon scrambled how to answer this and not to say something like, 'I want to make sure you keep your hands to yourself!' But how can he explain his need to stick to Talia without revealing that she is his mate?

"Talía was treated poorly, and you are a stranger. I want to make sure she is comfortable."

Travis nodded knowingly. "I understand your concern, Alpha, but she seemed fine so far. Jill and Cathy know what they are doing and having more guys present when she needs to undress will..."

"WHAT!?", Damon roared, and Travis shrunk, unsure why Damon flipped from polite to raging within a split second. What's with that murderous glare? The Alpha's pressure was suffocating.

Damon grit his teeth. "She will not undress. Is that understood?"

"How am I going to examine her?"

"Do what you can without Talía undressing.", Damon said sternly. The idea of Travis ogling at Talía was NOT acceptable!

Travis was flabbergasted. "With all due respect, Alpha... I am the doctor, and she needs an exam. I will appreciate it if you step outside and let me do my work. I will keep your words on my mind and minimize her exposure. Is that fine?"

Damon nodded stiffly.

"Is there anything else?", Travis asked, seeing that Damon was not leaving.

"I think that she doesn't have her wolf."

Travis thought how that makes sense. "That would explain the bruises. Don't worry, Alpha. This is not my first time examining a person without a wolf. I did my residency in a human hospital."

Eventually, Damon left Travis's office with, "I will wait in the hallway."

Travis gave Damon a strange look. Shouldn't Alpha be busy? Damon has a reputation as a workaholic, yet now he will dawdle in the hallway for (at least) one hour.

Travis guessed that Talia is someone important. Maybe she is a spy or a relative. There was no other explanation why Alpha would bring her here (and wait for her) personally.

Chapter 35 - Travis Arzt

Author's note: see Travis's photo in the comments.

- - -

When Travis entered the exam room, Talia was wearing the hospital gown.

While Jill was drawing Talia's blood for the lab work, and Cathy collected swabs from Talia's mouth and nose, Travis observed Talia's bruises.

Damon told him that Talia doesn't have a wolf, and that would definitely impact her healing, but it was a long time since Travis saw so many cuts and bruises on a person.

They would be nothing much for a werewolf and would heal within a day or two, but for a human (or a werewolf without a wolf), it can take a week or two until they completely fade.

Travis's sight was drawn to Talia's bandaged wrist. Considering that most of her injuries were exposed, he had to ask, "Who did this?"

"Alpha Damon.", Talia responded.

"That was very...", Travis paused while choosing his words.



Talia smiled a little while remembering Damon's intense expression while bandaging her.

"I know. That was very kind of him."

Travis cocked an eyebrow. "I wanted to say, unskilled, but we can go with your version."

Talia looked at the closed door nervously. "Will Alpha Damon punish you if he hears you badmouthing him?"

Travis waved his hand, indicating that it's not a big deal. "Since when is telling the truth, badmouthing? And besides, Alpha will not harm me. Didn't you hear when he said that I'm the best doctor in the area?" He made a cocky expression and Talia put her hand over her mouth while laughing.

The more Talia looked at Travis, the more he reminded her of Olivia with his easy-going personality and a smile that tells people how everything is going to be OK. She liked him already.

Travis saw that Talia relaxed and that was exactly what he was going for. He needed information and if she is stiff and silent, they wouldn't reach far.

Travis pulled a chair next to the bed where Talia was, and he held onto a notebook. "Let's start with your medical history..."

...

Outside Travis's office, Damon was pacing. There is a waiting area further down the hallway, but Damon couldn't sit.

He was imagining Travis touching Talia's back, just how Damon did in the hotel room on the previous day. What if Talia likes it?

The side door opened, and Jill and Cathy exited.

"Is the exam over?", Damon asked, catching Jill and Cathy by surprise.

The two nurses didn't expect to see their Alpha there.

He was too close and too handsome, and it took them a moment to recover.

"No. Alpha.", Jill responded.

"Then, why are you out?"

"We are taking these samples to the lab.", Cathy said while gesturing toward the cart with several containers and sealed cotton sticks.

"Does that mean that Travis is alone with Talia?", Damon asked with urgency. "Do both of you need to take this? One is enough."

How Damon saw this, at least one of the nurses should stay in that exam room so that Travis and Talia don't have privacy.

Jill and Cathy exchanged confused glances.

"I'm taking these to the lab, and Cathy will prepare room in radiology so that we can take x-rays once Dr. Arzt finishes discussing Miss Talia's medical history.", Jill responded. "Why don't you find a seat in the waiting area, Alpha? This area is reserved for medical workers and patients."

Damon frowned and stepped to the side, to let them pass. He had no intention of moving from that spot. What if Talia cries for help and he can't hear her from there? The lack of the mind-link with Talia was making him anxious.

Damon knew that the mate bond was making him unreasonable, but there was nothing he could do about it. The fact that Talia was not in the visible range was unsettling and the knowledge that another

guy was with her, and it was just the two of them, was making it worse. Damon was unable to snap out of it.

The stories go that the mate pull is getting stronger by the day, and the werewolves can find peace only after they mark each other. The sealed mate bond allows them to exchange feelings no matter the distance, and because of that, mates can function when they are apart.

Damon tried to distract himself by checking emails, but it didn't work.

He halted his steps and pressed his ear on the door of Travis's office. Nothing.

How is it possible that he couldn't pick up any sound with his Alpha hearing? Are they doing something sneakily? What if Talia left?

Somehow, he feared that she might disappear.

Jill returned after a few minutes, and Damon was a bit at ease, knowing that Travis is not the only one inside with Talia.

Damon was alerted when the door opened, and Talia was pushed out in the wheelchair by Jill.

"What happened with your legs?", Damon asked Talia.

"Nothing."

"Why are you in a wheelchair?"

Jill responded, "It's just the protocol, Alpha. I'm taking her to radiology so that we take x-rays. Miss Talia is wearing a hospital gown that is opened at the back and if she walks, there is a danger of her being exposed."

Damon approved. No one should see Talia exposed. Except for him.

...

Talia and Damon sat together with Travis to hear the results of her exam.

Her swollen wrist was not broken, so they gave her one of those thick wraps with Velcro to secure it without using bandages until it heals.

"The injuries are superficial, and I will prescribe you some ointments and painkillers. You can do any activity that your body allows you to. If you feel pain, stop.", Travis said to Talia. "The more concerning is that you are underweight, and your bloodwork shows several deficiencies."

Travis didn't ask much about her eating habits because just from the bloodwork, he could see that she was eating unhealthy and not regularly.

"Is it serious?", Damon asked.

"It doesn't need to be. Miss Talia will need to take vitamins and I want her to meet with a nutritionist to discuss a healthy meal plan. We don't have a nutritionist here, so she will need to go to a human city. I will give you a referral..."

Travis said that until they meet with the nutritionist, Talia should eat a variety of foods; healthy options, in at least three meals and two snacks.

Talia's eyes widened at the thought of three meals and two snacks. She doesn't remember if she ever ate so many times in a day.

She looked at Damon apprehensively. Will he allow her to eat that much? What if he thinks she is too much maintenance and sends her away? Can she wash enough bathrooms to earn five meals a day?

"Will it be OK if she eats more than that?", Damon asked, making Talia's thoughts stop in their tracks. She thought that he will ask if it's OK to feed her less, yet he insinuated that he will give her more food!

Travis shrugged. "She is underweight, and she should eat as much as she can. However, I don't recommend big meals, split it into more frequent smaller ones, and it won't be good if she starts living off junk food like chips and chocolates. Those will help her gain weight, but it's not healthy. Remember these three: meat, fruits, and vegetables, and you can't go wrong. The nutritionist will give you more details."

Travis said that he wants to see Talia back in one week, to ensure her wounds are healing well and that if anything gets worse or she has questions, to give him a call.

Talia was dazed with all this. She doesn't remember the last time she was in so much company of people who smiled and didn't ignore or bully her.

Chapter 36 - Walk In The Woods

"Are you alright?", Damon asked Talia when they exited the pack hospital.

"Yes, thank you, Alpha Damon.", Talia responded.

Damon cocked an eyebrow at her. "Did you forget already?"

She looked at him questionably, and he said, "Just Damon. Say it."

Talia glanced around, to make sure no one overhears them. He is the Alpha, and she should listen to him, but if anyone else hears that she is addressing him casually, she might end up in trouble.

Everyone they met so far addressed Damon respectfully with his title, and Talia learned a long time ago that standing out is not a good thing.

"Damon."

He smirked victoriously. "Do you want to walk, or should I get a car? The packhouse is about fifteen minutes walking from here if we cut it straight through the forest."

She was not sure why he was giving her a choice. "Anything is fine."

"Then, let's take a walk. I got stiff after so much time in the car, so it will be good to stretch legs..."

...

Talia followed after Damon, elated to be surrounded by the trees during daylight.

At the Red Moon pack, she would come out, but only during the night, when everyone was sleeping.

Alpha, Beta, and their families had a routine of sleeping at a regular schedule, so only the pack members on patrol would be awake at that time. The patrols ran only around the borders of the Red Moon territory, so after completing her chores, Talia could venture into the forest next to the packhouse to get a breath of fresh air and find medicinal herbs for her concoctions.

Other than for treating injuries, preventing infections, and easing up the pain, Talia knew that some plants are edible, and she personally came up with a mix of plants that diminishes one's scent; unless someone is really close, they couldn't pick up Talia's scent at all.

Talia's knowledge about various herbs was one of the main reasons why Talia could conceal herself while living in the Red Moon pack packhouse.

Indirectly, that was all thanks to Olivia who taught her the basics.

Olivia invokes pleasant memories for Talia, and seeing how Travis, Jill, and Cathy were nice as well, Talia was confident that people who practice medicine are good people and everyone likes them.

She wondered if one day, she can be like them as well. Can she work in the pack hospital? She could start as a cleaner and in her free time help out nurses and learn.

Talia took a mental note to discuss this with Damon, or maybe with Maya, once the topic of Talia's future comes up.

Talia wanted to talk about it right now, but she just arrived, and she didn't want to appear too needy.

Damon observed Talia and he was vexed that she was absentminded. Occasionally, she would stop and look at some plant, but then she would just continue following him. Damon slowed down his steps so that they can walk side-by-side, but a few steps later, Talia would trail behind him again.

He didn't mind going slow. Reaching their destination meant re-entering reality where a pile of paperwork and unread emails are waiting for him. After a few days away from the pack, that was inevitable.

Damon hoped that Talia would pay more attention to him.

Every woman swoons after Damon, making him feel like he is the king of the galaxy, yet with Talia, Damon felt invisible.

What's so interesting about that scrawny purple leaf?

Doesn't she know that once they reach the packhouse, he will have so much work, that they will barely see each other?

Talia was startled when Damon grabbed her hand.

"What...?" She was not sure how to finish that question.

"The ground is uneven. I don't want to risk you tripping and making your injuries worse.", Damon said with a straight face. "Besides, you are wandering around, and you might get lost."

Talia wanted to say that she is careful, and she will not get lost. She is not a baby! Even if she loses sight of Damon, she can just follow the scent of dark chocolate, but Damon's grip on her hand tightened and she understood that he will not let go no matter what she says.

Talia decided not to argue. Besides, this was better than Damon pinning her against him.

"I noticed you observing some plants.", Damon broke the silence between them. "Do you mind telling me, why?"

Talia paused for a moment before agreeing shyly.

She pointed at the tall plant with clusters of tiny white flowers. "That is boneset. Its leaves and flowers help reduce fever and pain."

Damon was surprised to hear this. He didn't really pay attention to plants but was confident that he saw this type of flower many times. "Sounds useful. Should we harvest it?"

"This one is not ready, so it would be wasting precious resources if we collect it now. When flowers bloom, they appear to be spiky, then they are the most potent.", Talia said, and she was pleased to see that Damon was interested in what she had to say.

Damon was amazed that she spoke about not wasting things that can be freely found in the forest. It reminded him of how she packed leftovers in the hotel, and he concluded that Talia is frugal, and that's not a bad thing.

Next, Talia stopped next to a bushy plant with massive green maple-like leaves. "This is goldenseal. It's good against infections."

Damon's face scrunched with an unpleasant memory. "Is that the bitter thing I tasted when I licked your wound?"



Talia confirmed and she bit the inside of her lip to suppress the incoming laughter. His expression was comical, but she shouldn't laugh at the scary Alpha. He might punish her.

Little by little, Talia relaxed, and three plants later, she was tugging Damon's hand while navigating randomly through the forest as she followed the trail plants of interest formed.

She didn't notice at what point their fingers interlaced, but Damon noticed it very much. He noticed every little thing about Talia.

Damon was amazed that even with all the scents that are wafting through the forest, he could clearly identify the sweet citrusy scent of freesia like the whole ground is covered with colorful blooms and each of them whispered Talia's name.

Yup. Damon was lost in a daze of Talia's scent and the sparks which started from the hand which held Talia's and he would follow her no matter where she wanted to go.

Of course, they strayed from their original destination, but Damon didn't mind. He didn't mind at all.

After talking about a plant with black bead-like spots on its stem, Talia looked at Damon. "Shouldn't we go to the packhouse? Aren't you busy?"

Damon said that the walk will take about fifteen minutes, and Talia didn't have a watch, but she was confident that they are in the forest for at least one hour. Probably longer.

He wanted to say that he is not busy, but he didn't want to lie. Caden already mind-linked him thrice saying that the food Stephanie prepared is cold and that there are issues that Damon needs to address.

"We are going there.", Damon said and led the way. "Where did you learn so much about plants?"

"Olivia taught me.", Talia responded.

"Your friend?", Damon guessed.

Talia smiled a little. "I like to think so. Olivia is the daughter of the pack doctor at the Red Moon pack. She found her mate and left the pack some time ago. Olivia taught me a lot about plants, and sometimes I would sneak into the library and take a book to read. No one reads these books, so they didn't notice them missing..."

Damon listened with interest, happy that Talia finally revealed some bits of her pasts. From Talia's expression and tone, he deduced that she was fond of Olivia, and he wondered if there are other people that have a place in Talia's heart, and he also wished to be one of them.

He picked up hints that Talia did things on her own, secretly.

Talia was talking freely and smiling, and there were no traces of the timid and scared girl from the attic.

Damon concluded that unless Talia feels threatened, she is an outspoken girl with a sharp mind and cheery personality. He liked that. He liked that a lot.

Chapter 37 - Welcome Home

Damon and Talia emerged from the last line of trees and Talia shrank at the sight of the neat lawn and the mansion.

Little by little, her steps became smaller, and her face was filled with reluctance.

Talia understood that this is the packhouse, and things like a packhouse didn't bring happy memories.

The packhouse at the Red Moon pack was a place where she was fine only while hiding. In the forest, she was happy, and she didn't want to go back to the attic.

"This will be your home, Talia.", Damon announced and tugged her hand to start moving.

'Her home?', Talia wondered if she heard him right.

She knew that Damon lives there, and probably Caden and Maya and any other high-ranking members of the pack. But what about her? She is a nobody.

Talia forced herself to stay present and to observe her surroundings. It will come in handy if she needs to flee.

In terms of size, the packhouse was bigger than the one at the Red Moon pack.

They came from the side, but Damon led the way toward the main entrance, so Talia saw the circular driveway and the lawn that had low green plants along its edges and several topiary trees that were cut in spiral shapes.

It was simple and elegant, and she liked it better than the lavish front of the packhouse of the Red Moon pack that had colorful fragrant bushes and small ponds.

They were approaching the main door, which was open, when Stephanie's voice reached them.

"Any longer, and we would send a search party..."

Talia panicked at the realization that she is holding Damon's hand.

She tried tugging her hand free, but Damon tightened his grip.

At the sight of Stephanie emerging from the door, Talia swiftly stepped behind Damon in an attempt to hide their connected hands.

"Let go...", Talia pleaded while trying to pry her hand free.

Damon enjoyed Talia's predicament. His grip was tight enough so that she can't get free, yet not strong to cause pain.

Talia couldn't believe this. He is the Alpha, and she is nobody. How can they hold hands? It's not appropriate! If anyone sees them like this, she will become a target. Is that what he wants?

"You said that this is only if I trip or get lost.", Talia spoke in an urgent whisper. "We are out of the forest, and we reached the packhouse, so..."

At this point, Stephanie was looking at the duo and waiting for them to acknowledge her presence. She didn't see that Damon was holding Talia's hand, but she saw a girl struggling over something behind Damon's back and Stephanie didn't know what to think about the scene in front of her.

Reluctantly, Damon released Talia's hand.

He felt the loss of Talia's touch and balled his hands into fists in an attempt to stop himself from reaching for Talia again.

"Stephanie, this is the girl I mentioned. Talia."

Stephanie looked at Talia who was still half-hidden behind Damon, and she did her best not to frown at the sight of bruises on Talia's face.

"Hello, Talia. I'm Stephanie. Welcome."

"Hi", Talia said apprehensively, and Stephanie waved at them to enter.

"Come on. The food is ready. We can talk inside."

Talia observed the interior which was clean and neat with just the right touch of elegance. Large windows allowed ample light, giving it an open feel and she could pick up Damon's scent of the forest and dark chocolate lingering everywhere.

If she closed her eyes, she could easily mistake this place for a forest. Probably because of the scent and all the fresh air.

Somehow, she didn't imagine that this is the place where a scary Alpha would live.

A few young ladies peeked at them from behind the corner. Talia didn't miss hearts in their eyes as they looked at Damon. Talia concluded that those are Omegas. If they have any standing, they would approach Damon and talk to him.

The dining room had a rectangle-shaped dining table in the middle, big enough to fit twenty people.

The furniture was light gray in color, and chairs were cushioned in deep red, but Talia's attention was on the food that smelled divine. There were fruits and waffles and several different spreads.

"I will get fresh coffee...", Stephanie said and disappeared through the door on the left.

Damon went toward his usual seat, at the head of the table, and he gestured for Talia to sit on his left.

"Do you want orange juice, milk, or coffee?", Damon offered to Talia.

She picked the orange juice and Damon poured her a glass.

Caden and Maya joined them at the table.

Stephanie entered the dining room with a silver kettle that released steam from the top.

She poured the hot beverage into Damon's cup, and the aroma of fresh black coffee reached Talia's nose. It mixed well with Damon's scent of dark chocolate.

"Did you come here for second breakfast?", Stephanie asked Caden and Maya.

"How can I allow my Alpha to eat alone?", Caden said with a straight face and beckoned Stephanie with his empty cup, indicating that he wants coffee also.

"Well, he is not alone...", Maya said and the three of them looked at Damon who was putting a waffle into Talia's plate.

Damon felt their gazes on him and grumbled. "Talia's hand is hurt, and I'm helping. Stop staring like a circus came to town."

Talia lowered her head in embarrassment. She told Damon that she can manage, but he insisted and now everyone was looking at them.

"Ignore them.", Damon said. "Do you want a jam or syrup with that?"

"I'm not sure.", Talia said honestly.

It was a long time since she ate fresh waffles, and things like jams and syrup were luxury items.

Another odd thing was that she was seated at the table, in a dining room, with people.

A lot of new things to process.

Talia noticed the absence of Omegas. At the Red Moon pack, Omegas were always around, ready to serve Alpha, Beta, and their guests. It's not that Talia wanted someone to serve her, but Stephanie going to get coffee and everyone getting food on their own was unusual.

After Stephanie poured coffee to everyone who wanted some, she also joined them at the table and grabbed a handful of grapes to munch on.

Without Talia's input on waffle toppings, Damon placed a few strawberries next to the waffle and a dollop of whipped cream, and then he drizzled syrup over half of the waffle, and he applied plum jam on the other half.

Talia rejected Damon's offer to feed her. "You already prepared everything. Please, don't..."

She stopped talking when Damon started cutting the waffle into bite-sized pieces.

"Talia...", Damon called, and she looked at him who was totally focused on cutting the waffle. "These are Caden and Maya, Betas of the Dark Howlers pack. And that is Stephanie. She takes care of the packhouse. If you need anything, you can ask them. They might be nosy, but the three of them are here to help me run this pack and they are doing a great job. Neither of them will tease or bully you, but if they make you uncomfortable, you should let them know. In time, you will get used to their sense of humor."

Damon pushed the plate with a cut waffle in front of Talia and gave her a fork. "Now, eat."

Damon's tone didn't allow for objections. Not that Talia had any. She was happy that he didn't feed her how he did in the hotel. That would be super embarrassing.

She mumbled a thank you and started eyeing the food on her plate, silently deciding from where to start.

Maya and Caden exchanged knowing looks, but they didn't say anything, not even through the mind-link, because they didn't want to risk Damon overhearing them (again).

Damon's expression was stern, and he sounded bossy, as usual, but it was undeniable that he was giving extra attention to Talia. It was something no other girl received so far.

Chapter 38 - Late Breakfast

A blissful smile appeared on Talia's face as the buttery waffle with a hint of vanilla melted in her mouth together with the sweetness of the plum jam.

'Caden told me that this girl is different, but only now I realized how much...', Stephanie's voice reached Damon through the mind-link.

Damon guessed that Stephanie was alluding to the way he helped Talia with food.

'There is nothing wrong with me helping the girl out.', Damon said and took a sip of coffee nonchalantly.

'I never said that it's wrong.', Stephanie immediately responded.

It was not wrong, but Damon never took a personal interest in any of the new members.

Stephanie knew that Damon waited for Talia at the pack hospital, gave her his old room on the third floor, and now served her food. This was unheard of.

Stephanie was not considering the possibility that Damon had romantic feelings toward Talia.

She thought of Damon as a child, and compared to him, Talia looked like a little girl, innocent, in need of protection, and not romancing.

On top of that, Talia was shy, timid, and less flashy than many who were after Damon, definitely not a seductress. It's like her presence was small and she was forgettable, even though her face had pretty features.

Talia was bruised, and overall, Stephanie thought how Talia was pitiful which reinforced Stephanie's belief that Talia invoked the protective side in Damon.



Damon might be crass and rough around the edges, but he suffered when his parents died, and since then, Damon never refused a person in need and that's exactly who Talia is.

Stephanie's daughter, Lisa, is about that age, and Stephanie's heart ached at the thought that someone would be heartless to mistreat a girl like that.

Talia's big, honeyed eyes were clear and bright, even though she was visibly apprehensive in the new environment.

Stephanie didn't know how long Damon will allow Talia to stay in the packhouse; he didn't tell her anything other than to prepare a room. But she thought of helping Talia relax.

"Talia...", Stephanie called. "Is there something you enjoy doing?"

Talia blinked. Something she enjoys? No one ever asked her such a question.

Seeing that Talia didn't know how to answer, Stephanie asked her next question, "Do you like cooking?"

Talia understood the question as Stephanie's attempt to give her a job. Kitchen duties sounded much better than washing bathrooms and emptying trash. She could learn from experienced cooks and hone her skills and learn from the cookbooks also.

Who knows... maybe one day she becomes a famous chef?

As a great chef, she can cook for herself many delicacies she missed while hiding in the attic. That sounded like an amazing plan!

All girls in the Red Moon pack get to help in the kitchen until the age of sixteen when they are assigned duties based on their position, but Talia didn't get a chance to cook since she moved into the attic which was more than a decade ago, so her cooking skills were limited, but she didn't let that stop her from grabbing the opportunity.

"I can help in the kitchen.", Talia said with sparkles in her eyes that reflected her dreams of the scrumptious feast she will make for herself. Someday.

Stephanie smiled. "I would love that. How about you help me prepare dinner today?"

"Talia's hands are injured.", Damon said sternly.

"I was thinking that she can help a bit and we can chat and get to know each other.", Stephanie explained.

How Stephanie sees it, if Talia can hold a fork, she can pass an onion. It's not like Stephanie expected Talia to be involved in hard labor.

Damon didn't like it. "With that thing around her wrist, Talia can't help with washing, chopping, or mixing. I want her to rest and focus on getting better. Talia will not have any tasks until she completely heals."

"Of course...", Stephanie quickly said and looked at Talia. "After your hands heal."

Talia nodded in agreement.

Talia didn't think much about cooking before Stephanie brought it up, but it's a skill everyone should have, and this looked like a great opportunity to learn.

Damon could see that Talia's wheels were rolling as she was coming up with some ideas, so he had to ensure she heard him. "You are not allowed to work until Travis and I say that you can. Until then, I want you to take it easy and rest."

Talia wondered how far that 'take it easy and rest' will stretch. "Can I go to the forest?"

Damon frowned while thinking about how to answer this. He didn't like the idea of Talia wandering who-knows-where. He needed her in the visible range. Or closer.

"You can go to the garden.", Damon said after some time. "If you want to go beyond that, let me know. I don't want you to get lost."

Talia exhaled helplessly. Why does Damon think that she gets lost easily?

She didn't want to appear needy or ungrateful, but this sounded like limiting her freedom. She took a mental note to bring this up again later when scary Alpha is in a better mood.

With Talia's stomach getting filled, fatigue took over. After a night awake in the car, and a morning in the packhouse hospital, she was ready to sleep.

Talia yawned.

"You must be tired.", Stephanie stated the obvious. "When you are done with food, I will show you to your room."

Talia was full, but there were a few more delicious bites that included strawberries and whipped cream which she saved for the end, so she decided to finish those, even if it means that she will get a tummy ache later.

"Careful with that!", a shrill scream drifted from the hallway. "That's Louis Vuitton! If you damage it, even if you sell a kidney, it won't be enough to fix it. How can you be so useless? Take it to my room!"

Talia glanced around at the faces around the table.

Damon was busy with his food, Caden and Maya frowned, and Stephanie shook her head for a second before she locked eyes with Talia.

"You are done, right?", Stephanie said with urgency while standing up. "Let me show you to your room."

Before Talia could respond, Stephanie helped her up and was practically pushing her toward the side door.

"Let's go through the kitchen, so you see where it is...", Stephanie said while beckoning Talia with her eyes to hurry.

Talia glanced at the back to see the last two strawberries in her plate that she didn't get a chance to eat, and she saw Damon looking her way with a small frown on his handsome face, and then his head whipped to the door which connects to the hallway.

"Damon, baby!", a curvaceous brunette said with a big smile. "You need to teach those Omegas how to treat their Luna..."

'Luna?', Talia was flabbergasted. 'How many Lunas can one Alpha have? Didn't he come to the Red Moon pack to marry Marcy?'

Talia was distracted because Stephanie was leading the way through the kitchen and then into a hallway before they started walking upstairs.

"I thought you will show me my room.", Talia said to Stephanie with confusion obvious in her voice.

"Yes. We are going there."

Talia pressed her lips into a line, and her heart started racing uncontrollably. They just passed the second floor. Why are they still going up? Is she going to end up in an attic again?

"Here we are...", Stephanie said in a singing voice while opening the door of the room on the third floor.

Talia glanced inside, not daring to take a step over the threshold.

A big four-poster bed, a work desk, sitting area with a low coffee table, a sofa, and two sofa chairs... there was a reading nook with big pillows under the window on the left, and a full bookshelf next to it... and two doors on the right wall were open, so Talia could see a bathroom and a closet.

She blinked a few times and then looked at Stephanie. "Are you sure we are in the right place?"

"Yes.", Stephanie confirmed with a smile.

Chapter 39 - New Room

"Based on your reaction, I can guess Alpha Damon didn't tell you that you will be staying in his old room."

"His old room?", Talia repeated robotically. "Don't you have any other room to give me?"

Stephanie shrugged. "Don't look at me, girl. I'm just following orders. Come inside and see how you like it."

"You traveled the whole night, and then went to the hospital. I guess you want to shower and rest, right?"

Talia nodded at Stephanie's words while observing the room and her sight stopped at the intricate woodwork on the mantle that surrounded a massive fireplace.

"Uhm... they didn't bring any suitcase for you. Do you have any clothes?", Stephanie asked.

"I had clothes wrapped in a bedsheet. That was in the trunk.", Talia said.

"Give me a second.", Stephanie lifted her finger, indicating to Talia to wait, and she mind-linked Maya. 'Did you bring Talia's things inside?'

'What things? Other than one book and a few trinkets, Talia has only a few items that are worn out and don't fit her. I will take her shopping as soon as I finish a few tasks here.'

Stephanie pressed her lips into a line, and she felt her eyes stinging from the unshed tears. She couldn't imagine how bad were Talia's living conditions before coming here.

She got an idea. 'Don't worry about shopping for now. I have a few things from Lisa that are in good shape. I'm sure they will fit her.'

'Oh, great.', Maya responded enthusiastically. 'Since it's not urgent, I will still take Talia shopping, but not today. Can you go into my closet? The second drawer on the left. There are few boxes of unpacked underwear that Caden got for me when we started dating. I think they are still in the gift bag as I kept them for memories, but it's not important. They are small for me, so I never wore them, but they should be good for Talia.'

Stephanie was happy with this solution.

"Maya mentioned that she will take you shopping, but not today because everyone is busy after being a few days away. Let me get you something."

Stephanie quickly left the room, leaving Talia behind.

Talia moved to the middle window and saw the circular driveway and the road that disappeared among the trees.

She remembered the plants she saw in the forest while walking here, and she was eager to return to the forest and harvest some. She never had a stockpile, and she knew that she needs to take the mixture for diminishing her scent soon, because the effects of the previous dose will wear off within two days.

It was a trial and error, but Talia confirmed that as long as she takes them once a week, no one can pick up her scent unless she is close. It's not that Talia planned to hide or sneak around, but the fact that no one could track her was a layer of protection she craved for.

Talia took a moment to absorb the fact that this luxurious room was given to her, and even though she didn't know for how long, she was grateful even if it's just for one day.

Talia remembered that when Damon spoke to her in the attic, he told her that if she comes with him, she will have a room better than the ones downstairs at the Red Moon pack, plenty of food, a doctor to tend to her wounds, and no one will bully her.

She just arrived and she already saw a doctor, filled her stomach, and got a fancy room. And so far, no one bullied her, and people seem nice. She will take it.

Talia smiled a little. It seems that scary Alpha Damon is a man of his word.

After a brief knock, the door opened, and Stephanie entered the room with a big suitcase that swelled how full it was.

Stephanie opened it and some things flew out of it.

"These belonged to my daughter, Lisa, before she left the pack. I had no idea why I was still holding onto them, but now I think they will come in handy. If you can find a few things, then there will be no rush to buy new clothes. Take whatever you need."

She gave Talia a small gift bag. "Here is underwear. I hope it will fit."

"Thank you...", Talia accepted the underwear without looking at it and started going through clothes.

There were many colorful items with pictures of kittens, rainbows, and unicorns.

"Did your daughter leave when she found her mate?", Talia guessed.

"No. Lisa was twelve years old when she left." Stephanie felt awkward that she is giving Talia clothes that belonged to a preteen, so she explained, "Lisa was a chubby child, and considering that you are on the skinny side, something should fit you."

"Why did she leave?", Talia continued probing.

"At that time, the Dark Howlers pack was unstable. I sent Lisa to stay with my sister temporarily, while I helped Damon and Caden here. After some time, Lisa made friends and asked me if she can stay longer. That longer turned into years, and already seven years passed."

While listening to Stephanie's story, Talia found several leggings and t-shirts that were acceptable. There were even cute jeans shorts and one oversized tank top that could easily pass for a nightgown.

Talia and Stephanie re-packed the suitcase together.

"Lisa is about your age. She will visit soon, for the fair. I'm sure you will get along well.", Stephanie said.

Talia didn't comment on that. Other than Olivia, she didn't have friends, so Talia didn't feel comfortable committing that things will work out between her and another person.

"Can I ask you something?", Talia spoke reluctantly.

"Sure."

"Can you bring my stuff to me? I know it's not much but it's all I have."

Stephanie nodded in agreement. "Go wash up and rest. Do you want me to wake you up for lunch?"

Talia was confident that she will sleep through the day. "No, please. Is it OK if I go to the kitchen and grab something when I get hungry?"



"You are free to go anywhere.", Stephanie assured her. "If the door is closed, you can assume that it's either a bedroom or someone is inside. You are free to knock and check. If it's anything important, it will be locked. Alpha Damon said that you can go to the garden, and if you plan to leave the packhouse beyond that, notify someone so that we don't worry." Stephanie paused and her expression turned sour. "If you bump into Cassie, just ignore her."

"Cassie?"

"The noisemaker who arrived when we left the dining room."

Talia remembered the brunette. "You mean, your Luna."

Stephanie frowned. "Goddess, I hope that doesn't happen."

"You don't seem to like her."

"No one likes Cassie.", Stephanie said.

Talia was confused. That brunette made a noisy entrance and called herself Damon's Luna. How can she do that if no one likes her?

"Does Alpha Damon tolerate people he doesn't like?"

"Alpha Damon is complicated. Many women are swarming around him and wanting to be his Luna, yet he can't pick one."

"What about Marcy?"

"From the Red Moon pack? You know her?", Stephanie asked, and Talia nodded.

Well, she knows who beat her up, twice.

"Are you from the Red Moon pack?", Stephanie continued asking and Talia confirmed.

Stephanie let out a long breath and shook her head. "I heard that Marcy is not the one either. I really don't know what that child is thinking. Damon has so many candidates to be his bride, and he is not accepting them, or pushing them away..."

Talia understood that Damon's love life is complicated.

Considering how Marcy reacted because of Damon, Talia took a mental note to stay away from Cassie. Or even better. She should stay away from Damon.

After a brief chat, Stephanie remembered, "These arrived for you from the pack hospital." Stephanie gestured toward the medicines on the bedside table. "Capsules are for the swelling and pain management. Take one in the morning and one in the evening for a week. The little white ones are additional painkillers which you should take if the capsules are not enough, but no more than four a day. And cream is for the bruises... You can call me or Maya to help apply it on areas you can't reach..."

Talia listened carefully and she was touched because this was the first time that she had a doctor giving her medications and such instructions.

It was a day of many firsts.

Stephanie left so that Talia can get ready and rests.

Talia took her time in the bathroom.

Before washing herself, Talia quickly rinsed in the sink the bra and panties she was wearing previously and hung them at the top of the shower door to dry.

The shower was hot and relaxing, and the towels were fluffy.

Talia peeked into the bag that had her new underwear and her eyes nearly bulged at the sight of a dark red lacy bra and a matching thong. There were three sets; one hot red, one dark red, and one black.

The panties were thongs, while bras were slightly different. The dark red one was lacy, the hot red bra was mesh-like, and the black one had strings weaved like spiderwebs. At the bottom of the bag, Talia found two small tassels that had attachments, and she guessed that they go on bras.

She was grateful for the new underwear, but she never wore something so racy, and the idea of a thong getting between her butt cheeks didn't seem comfortable, not even a little bit.

She will sleep anyway, and she decided to go commando (aka without underwear). By the time she wakes up, the underwear she wore previously will dry, and she can wear them again.

Talia put on an oversized tank top that reached half of her thighs. It was a bit breezy down there without panties, and loose around arms so if she moves about, her breasts might peek from the side, but she was going to bed, so... it was fine.

When she got out of the bathroom, Talia spotted on the bed things wrapped in a worn-out bedsheet and she smiled a little. She took the Cinderella book and placed it on the bedside table, next to the medicines. Talia didn't care much about the clothes, but that book was precious.

Seeing the big bed waiting for her, Talia couldn't resist the temptation, and she jumped on it.

She enjoyed the bouncy mattress, giggling like a child for a few minutes before going under the cover.

The mattress was just right, and the pillow was like a cloud, and the cover was warm and fuzzy, and Talia fell asleep the moment her eyes closed.

Chapter 40 - A Way Of Protecting Talia

In the dining room, ten minutes ago.

Damon was caught by surprise when Talia left with Stephanie. He wanted to go after Talia, and his wolf agreed, but then Cassie appeared at the door and Damon paused.

If he goes after Talia, Cassie will notice and target her.

'You were supposed to get rid of Cassie a long time ago!', Damon's wolf growled in his head. 'Sent her packing and go after our mate!'

Damon pinched the roof of his nose. 'Cassie is just a fly. But a fly with a hurt ego and big mouth can cause damage. Even if she doesn't know that Talia is my mate, just the fact that I'm treating Talia differently will put a target on her back.'

'So, what is the plan, wise guy?', his wolf asked sarcastically. 'You will pretend that mate is not here until this annoying she-wolf leaves?'

'I can't act differently. Talia's safety comes first.'

His wolf snorted in disapproval. 'How about you go and shag every she-wolf in ten miles radius? In that way, no one will suspect you have a mate.'

Damon gritted his teeth in annoyance. 'If you don't have anything useful to suggest, then go back to sleep!'

By this time, Cassie was next to Damon, grinning at him.

"Why are you here?", Damon asked Cassie grimly and pointed at the door through which she came in. "Who gave you the right to reprimand my pack members? And who allowed you to stay in a room?"

"Damon, baby...", Cassie leaned to hug him, and Damon stood up, dodging her by a hair.

"It's Alpha Damon!", Damon snapped and released his Alpha aura, making her lower her head in submission.

Did she ignore his questions, thinking that getting chummy will fix things? Since when was he easily coerced by pleasures of the flesh?

Damon's rage was directed at Cassie, but Caden and Maya also lowered their heads. No one could deny that Damon can suppress them easily without lifting a finger.

This was not supposed to happen.

Normally, Damon would let Cassie greet him with a hug and a kiss. Yes, he would always reject Cassie as his Luna, and he told her that she can't call herself his girlfriend (or anything related to him), but Cassie was fine for a temporary release. She was pretty and available, and willing. From Damon's point of view, it was perfectly fine.

However, this time, just the thought of Cassie's touch made his stomach tie into knots and he couldn't make himself go through it.

"Miss Cassie...", Damon called stiffly. "Even your father can't come here without an appointment. Don't mistake my politeness for weakness."

"You can't treat me this way...", Cassie said through her teeth. "I gave you my first time and many others. You owe me."

"That's why I didn't snap your neck so far, but there must be a limit to how much one's virginity costs. I believe I paid for yours several folds so far. But if you think you are worth more, give me a number, and we will negotiate. ", Damon responded, and Cassie's face contorted with anger as he spoke.

"We should write up a contract so I know that the final payment will prevent you from bringing up that point again. Maybe your first time was important to you, but for me, you are just one of many."

Cassie was never so insulted!

Did he just treat her like a hooker?

And he was not done talking!

"I will let my Betas explain to you about rules we follow here and if I see you again without an appointment, don't blame me for being impolite."

Damon walked out of the room, and only when he was out of sight, the three people resumed breathing.

Caden and Maya exchanged glances. That was intense.

Yes, Cassie is irritating, always was, and always will be. However, Damon didn't pay attention to her so far. If he was busy, he would ignore her, and if he was willing, he would play with her. But he never snapped like this.

Cassie would play various games to get Damon's attention which sometimes worked more or less, and she would boss around Omegas in the packhouse, imagining that she is the Luna, and leave after a few days, but this was the first time for Damon to reprimand her like this.

Cassie was in shock.

Maya glanced at Cassie who stood in place like her feet grew roots. Her hands were balled into fists, and she was shaking profusely either because of fear or anger. Probably both.

'Why is he letting us deal with his trash?', Maya asked Caden grumpily through their mind-link.

'You saw him. If he deals with her, we will have a task to come up with an explanation of how Cassie died on our territory.'

'He must be grumpy because Talia left.', Maya said and Caden nodded in agreement.

'And that confirms that Damon is set on keeping Talia a secret...', Caden responded in a singing voice.

Cassie lifted her head and glared at Maya and Caden. "Damon can't treat me like this!"

"It's Alpha Damon, Miss Cassie.", Maya spoke in her official tone.

Cassie sneered. "When I become Luna of the Dark Walkers pack, you will need to answer me."

Maya shook her head. "I suggest you get your act together, Miss Cassie because this was just a warning. No one disrespects our Alpha and gets unpunished."

Cassie didn't get it. "Disrespect?"

Caden responded instead of Maya. "Miss Cassie, if you didn't understand so far, Alpha Damon has no intention of making you his Luna. He was tolerating your presence because of your father. For the same reason, he didn't summon our warriors to escort you to the border of our territory, but he gave you a choice to leave on your own. Don't test him."

...

Damon went to his study and powered on the computer.

He shoved his hand in his hair angrily.

Why did he snap like that?

He was supposed to let Cassie do her usual routine, and she would leave in a few days without suspecting anything. But he ruined it.

Actually, he forgot that Cassie was coming.

Damon was so focused on Talia, that he neglected everything else.

Now that he thinks about it, if Cassie figures out that Talia is here, it won't take her long to assume how Talia is important to Damon, and that will be more than enough to start rumors. Rumors spread faster than a wildfire and it will be only a matter of time before someone comes for Talia.

What if he can't protect Talia?

What if he ends up in a situation where he needs to pick between Talia and his pack?

Damn it!

He took a deep breath and looked at the screen which flashed with notifications.

Just as he expected, his inbox was flooding with unread emails.

Damon didn't feel like working. What he really wanted to do was to go to the third floor and snuggle with Talia or at least confirm how she is doing.

Ah, if he thought about this earlier, he would install cameras in that room, so that he can watch her.

Damon mind-linked Stephanie. 'What is Talia doing?'

'She is picking clothes from the stash that Lisa left behind.'

Damon frowned. 'Why are you giving her secondhand items?'



'Because she has nothing else to wear, Alpha. Maya will take her shopping, but until then, these will do. There is nothing wrong with these clothes. Lisa barely wore them, and some still have tags on.'

Damon grumbled internally. He wanted to dress Talia in Chanel, Dior, Versace, and Valentino, and not some no-name labels from the mall that someone else left behind.

Why would she wear shabby clothes, if he is loaded with money? Damon's money is made for Talia to spend!

Damon decided to take Talia shopping, and he will personally pick clothes for her.

He could imagine himself sitting in front of the dressing room, and Talia would come out and strike a pose to show him how the dress he picked fits... and then she will need help with the zipper in the back, so he will join her in the dressing room, and help her out with more than just a zipper. Ah, the possibilities!

Damon remembered the feeling of applying cream on her back, and his palm tingled in response.

He really wanted to touch her.

He will definitely take her shopping.

Damon regretted that he didn't get to show Talia her room personally, so he had to ask, 'Does Talia like the room?'

'Talia is a quiet girl. She didn't say anything, but I think she likes it.', Stephanie responded.

Damon remembered that when it was just the two of them, in the forest, Talia was talking and smiling, and she didn't make a big deal about them holding hands until Stephanie showed up.

It told him that Talia was comfortable with him, only him. It made him smile a little.

Damon concluded there is a good chance that in the right environment, Talia will come out of her shell.

'How long is Cassie staying?'

Stephanie's question which came through their mind-link pulled Damon out of his thoughts.

'I don't know. Probably as usual.', Damon responded honestly.

He wanted to chase Cassie away, but he already snapped at her, which is something he never did before, and if he does anything more drastic than that, Cassie will definitely be suspicious.

'Can you tell Talia not to pay attention to Cassie?', Damon asked Stephanie.

'I will.'

'Did Talia say what she plans to do later?'

'Rest.'

Damon wanted to ask more, but it would risk exposing himself more than he already did, so he decided to stop.

Talia will rest, and he had a lot of emails to go through.

He will check on her later.