

Alphas Bride 41

Chapter 41 - Cassie's Act

Author's note: see Cassie's photo in the comments

Cassie entered her room (aka the guest bedroom on the second floor where she usually stays when she visits the Dark Howlers pack), and she paced while biting her nails.

She understood loud and clear that Damon wanted her out of here, but how can she leave? She just got here!

Damon was never ecstatic to see her, but she always played her role of an airhead perfectly. She would ignore his grumpiness and accept any affection, and he never told her to leave. What changed?

Cassie got her phone and called her father.

"Hi, pumpkin...", her father said in a singing voice that doesn't sound like it should belong to a vicious Alpha Richard of the Steelbite pack.

"Hi, daddy...", Cassie spoke in a whiny voice which told him that something is not right.

"What happened?"

"Damon told me to scram."

He snorted. "What did you do?"

"Nothing. Really. Absolutely nothing. I arrived and I wanted to greet him, but he acted like I have a plague or something. He used his Alpha pressure to make me submit and told me not to appear unless I have an appointment. I'm not sure what to do now. I don't want to leave. He just returned after spending two days with Marcy and I need to find out how far they went. But if I insist, I might irritate him more."

"Relax, dear", Alpha Richard said.

"How can I relax?"

"Nothing happened with Marcy. I spoke with Alpha Edward and he said that things are looking good, but he didn't say that they sealed the deal either. It doesn't matter how far he went with Marcy or with any other woman, as long as he didn't agree to the Luna ceremony."

"But if he didn't fall for Marcy, why did he avoid me?"

Alpha Richard thought for some time before responding. "It sounds to me that he is under stress."

Cassie snorted. "If he is under stress due to some random thing, he doesn't need to vent on me."

"Don't you want to be his Luna?"

"Yes, yes!", Cassie confirmed enthusiastically.

"Then, you should learn to read his mood. Alpha's job is not easy. Other than managing his pack, Damon needs to handle relationships with other packs also. It's a job that never ends. When things are good, it's easy. But when he hits a rough patch, as his Luna, you need to observe and listen, and help him if you can, and if you can't then don't bother him."

Cassie pouted while thinking about her father's words. "But... how can I observe and listen if he doesn't let me come close?"

"He was probably irritable, and you came suddenly. I know you are a ball of energy, but you need to do it gradually so that he doesn't notice you coming. It's all about the right approach."

Cassie smiled. "Thank you, daddy. You always know what to say."

"Of course, pumpkin. Give him some time to cool off and try again but be more subtle. If all fails, be vulnerable. Real men love helping a lady in distress. And don't forget to pretend that you are clueless. If he suspects that you are putting on an act, he will really kick you out."

"Got it, daddy."

Cassie sent a smacking air kiss to the phone before ending the call.

She plopped on the bed and stared at the ceiling.

Right. She needs to give time to Damon to cool off and then she will try approaching him again. Later.

But what should she do until later?

...

In the study room...

Damon was still going through his emails when Caden entered after a brief knock.

"I've got you these to check and sign.", Caden said while putting a stack of papers on Damon's desk.

Damon frowned at Caden's gifts. "Did Cassie leave?"

"Not that I know of, and I have no intention of going to her room to check."

Damon's frown deepened. "That's not her room."

Caden chuckled. "You know that she always stays in that room, and no one else uses it, so... it's Cassie's."

Damon rubbed his forehead and Caden observed him curiously. "What's got into you?"

"She is annoying."

Caden agreed. "Cassie was always annoying. But what I don't know is what changed with you to suddenly tell her that she can't come without an appointment. You used your Alpha on her."

Damon paused. How is he supposed to answer this? "Cassie is acting like she owns the place, bossing Omegas around and upsetting Steph."

Caden nodded in slow motion. "Cassie always did that, but you never cared. When I asked you why we are allowing Cassie to stay, you would always give me a half-smirk and say how she has her uses. Did her pussy go bad or something?"

Damon exhaled irritably. "Maybe I'm tired of her shit."

He really didn't want to explain.

Damon knew that Caden was suspicious, and he knew that Talia being his mate can't be hidden at this rate, but he didn't have a solution.

Before anyone finds out that Talia is his mate, Damon needed to prepare himself and Talia for those who will come after Talia in order to get to him. She will be put on the spot, scrutinized, hunted. Some will come openly, and some will act from the shadows.

Damon didn't want to see that. He wanted to see Talia energetic and happy, just how she was in the forest, earlier that day.

The other option was for Damon to get his act together and to convince everyone that Talia is just a girl who doesn't mean anything. But how can he do that when every woman he met so far is just a vague outline, while he can remember every speck of golden in Talia's honeyed eyes?

Damon would need to be indifferent toward Talia and allow women like Cassie to get close to him.

He didn't care for Cassie. Her or any other, it didn't make much difference for Damon, but now just the thought of contact with any other woman was repulsive.

Damon stood up abruptly.

"Where are you going?", Caden asked.

"I need a break. I'm going to shower...", Damon responded without halting his steps.

...

When he approached his room, Damon paused, and he fought a mighty internal battle while deciding which door to take.

On his right was his bedroom, the master suite on the third floor.

On his left was his old bedroom, and a faint scent of freesia told him that Talia is inside.

Damon cursed under his breath and took the right. He needed a shower. A cold one.

Shower didn't help to calm down Damon's raging emotions, and after dressing up, he went straight across the hall to find a cure for this newfound madness.

Damon placed his ear on the door and listened intently. Nothing.

He knocked gently a few times and waited. Nothing.

Damon told himself to leave. Just keep on moving. But the only thing that moved was his right hand which held onto the doorknob, and he peeked into the room through the gap.

"Talía?", he called. Nothing.

Damon opened the door so that his head can fit, and he smiled when he saw Talía on the bed.

He knew that he should leave. What will he say if she wakes up and finds him in her room?

'Say that you were worried about her, so you came to check if she is OK', his wolf gave him an idea, and that was the last straw Damon needed to get into the room and close the door behind him.

He slowly inched toward the bed, each step bringing him closer to the girl and her addictive sweet citrusy scent of freesia.

Damon had no idea at what point he got close enough to sit on the edge of the bed.

He reached for Talía's hand that was peeking from under the cover and he inhaled a shaky breath at that initial surge of sparks when his finger touched the inside of Talía's palm.

He will never get bored of it.

A second later, Talia's fingers curled around Damon's, and he smiled. Technically, she was holding his hand. He liked that.

Talia rolled on her side, and the cover slipped lower, revealing her shoulder and upper arm.

Damon held his breath when he spotted that the loose tank top shifted sideways, and Talia's breast was almost exposed. Almost.

That was definitely a side-boob view! And it was a beautiful view.

Damon stared at that area and chanted silently for Talia to move just a bit more.

He really wanted to suck her there.

Damon felt the pressure in his groin area increasing and cursed internally.

Does she need to tempt him even in her sleep?

Doesn't she know how hard was for Damon to keep his hands to himself? Probably not. She is innocent and gorgeous, and all the dirt is coming from him.

Damon cursed again. Since when is he thinking about touching a woman as something dirty?

A woman as wonderful as Talia is made for touching. His. Only his.

If any other guy thinks about touching Talia, Damon will bestow him a marvelous death.

Damon released a long breath while controlling his urges.

Slowly, very slowly, Damon grabbed the edge of the cover and pulled it higher to conceal the source of visual temptation which sent pulses of need into his throbbing cock.

He didn't trust himself that he will not start feeling her out the moment his shaky restraints snap.

Damon observed Talia's sleeping face and fought mightily against his urge to lie next to her, aware that the pull of the bond was getting stronger by the minute, but there was nothing he could do about it.

Damon held Talia's hand and closed his eyes while allowing the scent of freesia to fill his system, and everything faded.

There were no sounds, no people, no Caden or Maya or Stephanie, and definitely no Cassie. It was just the two of them, Damon and Talia, and it felt like this room provided a sealed dimension that keeps everything else out, or maybe it was keeping Damon and Talia in. He didn't mind, as long as no one interrupted this peace that came over him.

Chapter 42 - A Thief In The Kitchen

Talia blinked herself awake and the first thing she noticed was the darkness.

It was definitely past dinner time, but Talia didn't mind.

She buried her head deeper into the pillow, indulging in the softness and warmth that came with the scent of the forest and dark chocolate.

Talia paused and took a few sniffs to confirm that her nose is not playing tricks on her.

Talia looked around to ascertain that she was on her own.

She was confused. The room didn't smell like Damon before she fell asleep, but now it did.

She liked his scent; it was a mix of her two favorite things: forest and a sweet treat. Talia wondered if Damon came to check on her while she was sleeping.

Talia shook that thought away. Why would a scary Alpha come to check on her?

It's more probable that Stephanie or Maya brought something that had Damon's scent on it. But she couldn't see anything different.

Talia decided to stop thinking about it. It doesn't matter.

She listened carefully, and there were no sounds she could pick up. Considering that it was dark and late, Talia thought of one pressing matter which included her going to the forest.

Talia was happy that the underwear she washed earlier dried off.

Putting those thongs on or going without would be uncomfortable.

She got black leggings that reached just below her knees, and a dark blue t-shirt with a picture of two kitties sleeping in Talia's chest area.

Unfortunately, other than shiny flip-flops that Maya gave her earlier and running shoes with cracked soles, Talia didn't have any other footwear, so she opted for flip-flops.

The packhouse was quiet, with only dim lights along the hallways.

When Talia reached the main floor, she remembered that Stephanie told her how she can go anywhere, kitchen included, so Talia decided to find a snack before heading out.

...

Damon spent most of his afternoon coming up with various scenarios related to handling his relationship with Talia.

He didn't know if he can pretend that Talia is not important. Her scent was addictive and the sparks amplified it, and considering Damon's uncaring nature, it would be only a matter of time before people notice that he is acting differently around Talia.

But maybe if he keeps his distance from Talia when others are around, it might work.

No matter what happens, he was confident in one thing: he needs to keep her safe.

Maybe later, when Talia's physical condition improves and she gains confidence, he will reconsider, but for now, it's better to keep her importance a secret.

People close to him will probably notice, but those are only a few that Damon trusts anyway, so when they ask him about it, he will explain, but not sooner than necessary.

Dinner was a lonely event without Talia, but Damon wanted to let her rest, remembering her sleeping face and the way she held onto his hand.

Damon barely noticed Cassie's presence. She was quiet and didn't try to get close, so it was easy to ignore her.

After dinner, Damon met with Maya and Caden in his office.

They normally do this status meeting once a week, but since they were away for a few days, they decided to have one before calling it a day.

They discussed ongoing issues and made decisions when needed, they finalized their story about Talia's presence in the pack, and of course, there were a few random topics at the end.

"How is Talia doing?", Maya asked Damon.

"She is resting.", Damon responded. He was not sure if Talia was still sleeping, but she was when he left her room, and he assumed that she would come down after she wakes up.

"What are we going to do about Cassie?", Caden brought up the topic. "You told her to leave, but she is still here. Based on disobedience, we can escort her out of our pack's territory."

Damon puffed his cheeks while thinking about the best solution. "Let's ignore her. In a day or two, she will get bored and leave. I believe that she understood I'm not going to put up with her antics and that's why she was quiet over dinner."

Caden and Maya both frowned at this.

"I think that Cassie was quiet because she is up to something.", Maya said.

Damon didn't disagree with this, but... "I would love to kick Cassie out. Unfortunately, I can't do it without her committing a serious offense because I need to think about the pack. Based on Cassie's behavior so far, she is only after me, and saying that she is annoying is not a good reason to risk straining the relationship with the Steelbite pack. After Cassie leaves, we will send a memo to the Steelbite pack and any other in the area, that outsiders can't come and go as they please. Let's come up with a story that due to increased attacks, we raised our vigilance, and non-members can't come without previous approval. That will allow us to stop Cassie at the border next time." Damon spread his arms toward Caden and Maya. "If you have a better idea, I'm all ears."

There were no better ideas. They all knew that Damon was right.

They were in charge of a pack, and they had to put their personal feelings aside, even if they are backed up by facts. Unless there is firm evidence against Cassie, they can't just kick her out.

But this was progress.

Damon never considered preventing Cassie from coming to the Dark Howlers pack and the fact that she could come and go freely, emboldened her.

Maya would love to be there when Cassie finds out that she can't come again because she doesn't have approval from Damon, Caden, or Maya. And Cassie will never get approval, unless it's official business and Alpha Richard (aka Cassie's father), sends her as pack's delegation.

Of course, they all knew that Cassie is not coming here without someone supporting her, and that is probably her father.

A girl with self-respect wouldn't allow repeatedly to be used by Damon when he feels like it. She definitely has an agenda.

After the meeting, Caden and Maya left for their room and Damon went to get himself a drink; a glass of water or maybe orange juice, the same one Talia drank that morning.

Damon planned that after having a drink, he will go and check if Talia is awake.

"Alpha Damon?", Cassie called when he passed by the living room, and his steps halted.

"Can I help you, Miss Cassie?"

Cassie waited for Damon the whole afternoon, and she even looked in the common areas, but he was nowhere to be found.

Over dinner, Damon acted like Cassie was not in attendance, but he didn't chase her away either, so Cassie was confident that whatever made him upset earlier that morning, passed.

This was her chance to get closer to him.

She bit her lower lip and gave him a coy look.

"Alpha Damon, I apologize for my behavior this morning. I was not sensible of what's going on, and I acted recklessly."

Damon cocked an eyebrow. "And what do you think is going on?"

"You were stressed and instead of being mindful of your needs, I acted on mine. I didn't mean to be disrespectful. I was only excited to see you again."

Damon didn't buy it, but he was curious what she was up to and if he just calls her a liar, there was no way she would admit it.

"Apology accepted.", Damon said and made a step to the side.

"Where are you going?"

"To get a drink.", he responded.

"Can I join you?"

'Why are you considering it?', Damon's wolf grumbled.

'This is a good chance to be with another woman.', Damon said, and when his wolf started growling, he quickly added, 'It's to protect our mate. This will be a test to see how far I can go without exposing myself and mate. It's better to check these things without an audience, and no one is around now.'

His wolf didn't respond, but Damon sensed the resistance fading.

Cassie's expression lit up when Damon told her that she can accompany him, and she was quick to latch herself onto his arm.

Damon gritted his teeth and forced himself not to push Cassie away. He is a mighty warrior, and he can endure this.

He was so focused on examining his emotions and containing his impulse to shake Cassie off, that he didn't notice another presence in the kitchen.

Cassie turned on the lights and Talia froze with an apple in one hand and a broken chunk of bread in another.

Looking at Talia's clothes and bruised unknown appearance, Cassie assumed that she is looking at an Omega. After all, if Talia has any standing, Cassie would remember her.

Cassie frowned at Talia. "Are you stealing food?"

Talia's eyes widened and her heart thundered in her chest at the unpleasant memories that resurfaced due to Cassie's expression and way of speaking.

On instinct, Talia swiftly placed the bread and the apple on the kitchen counter like they burned her hands.

Talia saw Damon glaring at her like she shouldn't be here, and her heart cracked a little.

Talia lowered her head and closed her eyes while trying to suppress the swelling of negative emotions.

Why did she think that this place will be any different?

Chapter 43 - Broken Trust

Seeing that Talia was not responding and that Damon didn't react, Cassie was emboldened.

"Answer me!", Cassie hissed at Talia and spoke to Damon without removing her gaze from Talia. "Is this how your Omegas are acting? You really need a Luna to teach them some manners. Sneaking in the dark and stealing food, and then they even refuse to respond..."

"That's enough, Cassie!", Maya said sternly from the door.

Maya's heart cracked when she saw Talia's submissive stance. It's not that Cassie had any aura, but Talia was a broken soul who needed supportive environment.

Maya walked to Talia and asked softly, "Are you OK?"

Talia nodded faintly, but Maya knew that Talia was lying.

Maya narrowed her eyes at Damon and spoke through the mind-link. 'Is this why you brought her here? I thought you promised her protection and not another type of hell.'

"Come, let's get out of here...", Maya said to Talia while wrapping her arm around Talia's shoulders.

"We are not done here", Cassie said stiffly, hoping that Damon will back her up.

"What do you want, Cassie?", Maya snapped. "Do I need to remind you that you are a guest? You have no right to boss around or bully members of our pack. If they did something you don't approve of, you can report it. Do not act like a judge and executioner. If you have any problems with this, you are welcome to challenge me to a match. In case you win, I will gladly give you my position as the Beta of the Dark Howlers pack. And if you don't have the guts to face me, then stay out of my way."

Damon watched as Maya led Talia out and rage bubbled inside him that was immediately extinguished by the feeling of guilt because he was angry at himself. This was his fault.

Damon was surprised to see Talia in the kitchen, and he told himself to stay out of it because he shouldn't expose that Talia is important. After all, Cassie can flap her mouth, but Damon would never let her really harm Talia.

Talia's defeated expression created an agonizing hole in his chest.

He could see her disappointment and the moment when that little trust she had in him vanished.

The pain was unbearable.

'Talia is upset because of me.', Damon said to his wolf.

'You stood and did nothing while that she-wolf disparaged our mate, and you broke the promise of giving her food because our mate left without eating anything. Again. And let's not forget that the same nasty she-wolf is attached to your left.', his wolf said with disapproval before retracting to the back of Damon's mind.

'Maya, can you make sure that Talia gets something to eat?', Damon asked through the mind link.

'Oh, so now you care about Talia?', Maya snapped at him. 'If you cared a minute ago, Talia would pick her food and not be chased out like a thief!'

'Don't talk to me like that!', Damon growled.

'Oh, I apologize, Alpha Damon. Where are my manners?', Maya responded sarcastically. 'I suggest that you stay away from Talia. Stick to Cassie, that's what you are good at, and leave this poor girl alone. She suffered enough. As your Beta, I will take the responsibility of arranging a different accommodation for Talia.'

'No!', Damon shouted into the mind-link, but his message hit a wall which told him that Maya shut him out.

...

"Don't pay attention to Cassie...", Maya told Talia when they exited into the garden. "Cassie talks big, but she is no one. She wouldn't dare to harm you."

Talia didn't respond.

If Cassie is no one, why didn't Alpha Damon say something?

Why didn't he clarify that Talia lives here?

Why did he act like he doesn't know who she is?

"I was not stealing.", Talia said after some time. "The lights were off, and I assumed that everyone was sleeping. I didn't need lights, so I didn't turn them on."

"Our Omegas don't linger in the packhouse.", Maya explained. "They come once a week to clean and do laundry. They help with food preparations when we are hosting a party, and you might find one or two of them in the evening hours, helping Steph with dishes, and they turn off the lights when they leave because we don't have visitors after dinner hours."

Talia thought how that was different. In the Red Moon pack, they had Omegas around until midnight, and the first ones would start their duties at dawn.

That's why Talia assumed it was very late and no one was awake.

If she knew, she would turn on the lights, and maybe that would allow her to avoid this all-too-familiar uncomfortable situation.

"You were in the kitchen.", Maya said. "Are you hungry?"

"No.", Talia denied it.

It's not that she was not hungry, but she had a good meal that morning, and that's more than what she usually had. She was used to skipping meals and she didn't want to go back to that kitchen and risk meeting Cassie or anyone else.

Talia remembered that Stephanie said how Cassie wants to be the Luna, and the way Cassie clung onto Damon's arm, it looked like she has good chances of accomplishing it.

Talia decided that if Cassie becomes the Luna of the Dark Howlers pack, Talia will leave. There is no way that a woman who immediately accuses a person of sneaking and stealing could be a good Luna. Talia already saw one which is selfish and heartless, and she didn't want to see another one.

On the other hand, maybe she should just leave without waiting to hear how the matter between Cassie and Damon will conclude, because an Alpha who can watch while another is being wrongly accused and say nothing about it, is not a righteous Alpha.

Somehow, Talia thought that Alpha Damon was different.

"Do you want to go inside?", Maya asked Talia.

Talia wanted to go into the forest, but she feared that if she says that to Maya, she will prevent her from going. After all, Alpha Damon told Talia that she can't go beyond the garden without notifying him. But then... he said that no one will bully her either.

"Feel free to go back.", Talia said with a small smile. "I'm sure that Beta Caden is waiting for you. I will stay here a bit. I will be fine."

"OK. Let's go shopping for clothes tomorrow afternoon.", Maya said and continued without giving Talia time to respond, "Talia, think about what you want. The packhouse is usually quiet and we don't have many guests, but if you stay here, you will attract attention. I'm not saying this to sway you one way or another, but I want you to be aware of your surroundings. I can arrange for you to stay with the Omegas, that will help you blend in. Or if you prefer on your own, we have apartments."

Talia was unsure what to say.

She didn't want to stay in the packhouse. Yes, the room was nice, and the bed was warm, and the towels were fluffy, but the scary Alpha only brought trouble with him, and based on tonight's episode, it seems that whatever protection he had for her, it ran out. But she was anxious at the thought of living with Omegas because those were her bullies from the past, and she never lived on her own so that was a completely foreign concept.

Maya saw that Talia was on the verge of panic, so she quickly said, "There is no need to decide now. I advise you to stay here at least until your bruises heal. But think about it. OK? There are options for you. No one will force you to stay here or anywhere else, I will make sure of that."

Talia relaxed a bit. "Thanks."

"My room is on the second floor. When you climb the stairs, take right. It's the last room on the left.", Maya said and pointed at the last three windows on the second floor. The light was on. "If you need anything, anytime. Come and find me."

With that, Maya left Talia in the garden.

Talia was surrounded by silence that was broken by the occasional rustling of leaves under the breeze.

It was a familiar feeling, yet somehow, she felt empty... like she lost something. She lost hope.

Talia exhaled softly and shook her head.

It's her fault.

Since she accepted Alpha Damon's offer, she allowed herself to hope that things will get better, and this was not better.

It was the same but wrapped in a different container.

Just like many times before, Talia was alone in the darkness, hungry, bullied, and wearing clothes that used to belong to someone else.

The kind face in the Red Moon pack was Olivia, and here is Maya, and maybe Stephanie also. But just like Olivia, Maya and Stephanie will leave her at the end because they have their lives and it's not their job to take care of Talia.

Talia sucked in a sharp breath. There was no point in dwelling on what happened, other than to acknowledge that people are the same regardless of the pack, and unless she takes charge of her life, someone will always treat her like a doormat.

Talia peeled her eyes from the three lit-up windows on the second floor and turned toward the forest that was shrouded in the darkness.

Steeling her resolve, Talia started walking.

No matter what the future brings, she knew that she will need her herbs.

Talia relaxed the moment she entered the protection the trees provided.

She didn't fear the darkness or the creatures of the forest, knowing that the biggest monsters are people themselves, werewolves included.

Step by step, Talia made her way deeper into the forest and she carefully placed collected plants in the few sheets of paper towels which she took from the bathroom and concealed under the elastic of her leggings.

Bunchberry, fringecup, moonflower, alumroot... they were all there, offering to Talia their leaves and petals like they knew she was coming.

Chapter 44 - Missing

In the kitchen...

Damon pried his arm free from Cassie's hold and her eyes widened in surprise.

Why did he back away? Why was he frowning? Things were going well, damn it!

She composed herself and called sweetly, "Alpha Damon, do you think I was out of line?"

"Cassie, you accused a teenage girl of being a thief. Do you really think that my pack members have a need to come here and steal food?"

Cassie pressed her lips into a line, feeling wronged. "But she was in the dark which is proof that she was up to no good. How could she see anything with the lights off?"

Damon took a moment to process what Cassie said, and he realized that Cassie was right: Talia was in the dark.

The light in the kitchen was off and so was the one in the hallway. The visibility was close to nil.

Werewolves have enhanced senses, proportional to the strength of their wolf.

Cassie is a weak werewolf and the boost her wolf provides her is negligible when compared to other werewolves.

However, Talia was able to move freely in the completely dark kitchen, which she was unfamiliar with. Doesn't that mean that the power her wolf is giving her is significant?

An even bigger revelation would be that Talia has a wolf because if her wolf is gone, she wouldn't have any boosts.

Talia's healing is low, but if her vision is sharp to the point of seeing in the dark, then she definitely has a wolf.

There is a possibility that her wolf is weak and that's why is enhancing only her vision while other things are blocked.

'What should I do?', Damon asked his wolf.

If this was facing rogues, or determining a budget for the next quarter, he would know what to do, but right at that moment, Damon was lost.

His wolf didn't respond, and Damon cursed under his breath. The old guy was still ignoring him because he allowed things to escalate.

"Damon?", Cassie called while rubbing his forearm.

He was spacing out for a minute, and it made her nervous.

Damon yanked his arm away. "It's Alpha Damon. Don't forget that!"

Absolutely confused, Cassie gaped at Damon as he took a big plate and placed in it the chunk of bread and the apple that Talia left behind. He looked into the fridge and grabbed some grapes and cheese and headed out of the kitchen, without paying any heed to Cassie.

Damon took two steps at the time all the way to the third floor and paused in front of the door of Talia's room.

The lack of her scent told him that she was not there, but he still knocked before entering the room.

Damon placed the plate on the coffee table and tried contacting Maya on the mind-link, but she was unavailable.

'Caden...', Damon went to the next person. 'Are you with Maya?'

'No. She felt like sweets and went to grab something from the kitchen.'

Damon exhaled in frustration. 'I just came from the kitchen. Do you know where she is?'

The response came a few seconds later, 'She is in the garden.'

Damon told himself to calm down. After the incident in the kitchen, Talia probably needs some air, and that's good because it will give him time to figure out what to say to Talia when she returns to her room.

Damon couldn't leave it be and allow Talia to think that he doesn't care.

He can't tell Talia how much she means to him, but he can tell her that Cassie is nobody.

Minutes trickled slowly, and Damon switched between sitting on the sofa, to bed, and in-between, he paced through the room.

He realized that more than an hour passed.

Where is Talia?

His heart ached and it was suffocating, and he was unable to stay still, so he went to the second floor and started pounding the last door on the left with his fist.

"Is your mind-link broken?", Caden asked with a frown when he opened the door wearing only a bedsheet bunched around his waist.

It was obvious that Damon interrupted something, but Damon didn't care.

"Is Maya here?"

"Yes. She is.", Caden responded dryly.

"What do you want, Alpha Damon?", Maya grumbled while exaggeratedly dragging the last two words.

"Where is Talia?", Damon asked while trying to make his way into the room, but Caden didn't move and his deep frown told Damon to give up on that idea.

Caden knew about the incident in the kitchen. Maya told him that Cassie was doing her Luna-act while holding onto Damon and accusing Talia of stealing food.

Seeing that Damon was on the verge of panicking, Caden enjoyed Damon's predicament.

If Damon acted like an ass, he should pay for it.

No matter the circumstances, Caden couldn't imagine the situation where Maya was in distress and he just watched.

As an Alpha, Damon's animalistic instincts (mate bond included) should be much stronger than Caden's, and Caden had no idea how Damon was able to sit this one out and allow Cassie to disparage Talia.

Caden narrowed his eyes at Damon. "You came at this hour, banging on the door. First, you ask about Maya, and then about Talia. Do you think that Talia joined us for a threesome?" Caden paused and glanced at himself, obviously making a point about his naked self. "Or did you start spot-checking every pack member in the middle of the night?"

Maya was frustrated with how Damon allowed Cassie to bully Talia, and she didn't want to make his life any easier, but she had a strong feeling that he will not give up until he gets his answers.

"Talia said that she needs air, so I left her in the garden. Maybe she is still there..."

Damon didn't hear more than that, as he dashed down.

"Why did you tell him?", Caden groaned at Maya while closing the door behind him.

"Because he needs his mate just how I need mine.", Maya responded in a singing voice and bit her lower lip seductively.

Caden had no objections. The bedsheet that was around him fell on the floor at the same time he jumped on the bed and pounced on Maya.

...

Damon frantically sniffed the air in the garden. There was no hint of freesia.

He rubbed his face with force.

This situation reminded him of the evening when he lost Talia the first time. They were in the kitchen of the Red Moon pack, and he was an ass... and she left... and he couldn't track her. The next time he saw her, she had additional injuries on her body.

Damon told himself not to panic.

Maybe Talia went to her room while he was talking to Caden and Maya.

Damon dashed back to the third floor and his stomach sunk when he realized that Talia was not there.

He went back to the kitchen, only to find it empty. He checked the living room and the dining room and the entryway, and he went through all the hallways, and even into the basement, with the hope of picking up Talia's scent. Nothing.

Eventually, he returned to her room.

A whirlwind of negative emotions crashed on Damon. Anger. Dejection. Guilt. Worry. Fear. They switched so quickly and amplified each other that he was unable to breathe.

And he was caught unprepared when a gush of loneliness overtook his senses.

Did she leave? Did he lose her?

If she stayed in the garden, everything would be fine! Didn't he tell her not to go beyond the garden!?

What if someone kidnapped her?

What if she wandered off, and someone mistook her for a rogue?

She was already hurt, what if she got hurt more?

He was angry at Cassie for bullying her.

He was angry at himself for letting it happen.

He was angry at Talia for leaving.

But she couldn't leave. Not yet. His territory is huge, so even if she was running, she was still within borders.

'I want extra patrols around the border!', Damon shouted into the mind-link of warriors. 'Search for a she-wolf in her teens, wearing a blue t-shirt and black bottom. She is in her human form. The girl is not an enemy; however, she might be frightened. When you spot her, don't engage, and notify me immediately!'

Damon could feel the commotion of his warriors stirring into action. They did this many times, whenever they have rogues attacking.

With this, he had extra eyes and paws searching for Talia and he told them that she is not an enemy, so they will not attack.

Damon wanted to go after Talia, but he didn't know which way she went. What if he takes the wrong direction? What if she comes back and he is not here?

Damon sat on the bed and grabbed the pillow on which Talia slept. He buried his face in it and took deep breaths, inhaling the lingering citrusy sweet scent of freesia.

The scent calmed him a little, but it also reminded him of the girl that went missing. And this was not any girl. This was his mate.

Damon couldn't believe that this was happening.

He didn't want a mate.

He didn't want to meet her or acknowledge her.

He hoped that all these foreign feelings will disappear, and he contemplated leaving Talia at the Red Moon pack and forgetting about her.

Damon took the plunge and brought her with him, risking the exposure and endangering his pack because he couldn't leave her behind. Not like that.

He decided to keep her close and safe, to feed her and buy her clothes and give her whatever she wants but he messed up and now she was missing, and he was on the verge of losing his mind.

She was somewhere out there, in the cold, hungry, hurt, scared... and it was his fault.

"Damn it!", Damon cursed loudly.

Chapter 45 - Back In The Room

"AWOOOOO!"

A sky-piercing howl shook all the windows in the packhouse of the Dark Howlers pack, threatening to shatter them. The powerful sound echoed far into the distance, stirring every pack member with the might their Alpha possesses.

"Will Damon be OK?", Maya asked Caden while blinking at the dawn which cracked through the windows.

They heard four rapid thumps when Damon landed in the garden after jumping from his balcony on the third floor.

"He will be fine.", Caden assured Maya and pulled her closer to him. "The border patrol just notified Damon that they found Talia."

Maya wanted to ask for more information, but Caden was snoring softly already, so she gave up.

Normally, warriors and patrols can't contact Damon through the mind-link. That is reserved for Caden, Maya, and Stephanie, and even those three know not to disturb him unless it's important.

Warriors, scouts, and other pack members follow the chain of command which allows only a handful of people to contact Caden or Maya, and Betas will decide if they will handle the matter or inform the Alpha.

Things related to warriors and security will reach Caden, Maya will be contacted on issues related to the pack members, and anything that involves the packhouse will go to Stephanie.

These channels of communication are not very efficient, but without them, Damon would go crazy with everyone speaking into his head.

In this case, since Damon asked them to look for the girl, the patrol who found her contacted their supervisor. The supervisor notified Damon directly and Caden was also included in the exchange.

Back to the present...

Damon ran through the forest, and he felt his muscles tensing to the point of aching, but he still kept on pushing.

Normally, Damon enjoys the feeling of his paws digging into the forest's floor and the wind sweeping through his fur, but this time he was too focused on his destination.

They told him that a girl matching the description he provided was found, and Damon felt the urgency to confirm that is Talia.

Damon's steps paused when he saw four werewolves, in their wolf form, standing nearby.

The four warriors stiffened when they spotted a massive black wolf approaching them and they all lowered their heads in submission.

Damon whipped his head to the left and a low growl escaped him when he saw Talia sitting on the ground, with her back against the tree and her eyes closed.

'Who was the first to find her?', Damon asked through the mind-link grimly.

'It was me, Alpha...'

Before the warrior could finish, Damon pinned him on the ground and snarled at him.

'What did you do to the girl!?'

The warrior whimpered. 'Nothing, Alpha.'

'What do you mean, NOTHING!?', Damon raged with his teeth dangerously close to the warrior's neck. 'Why is she unconscious?!'

'She is sleeping.', one of the other three warriors said, because the one under Damon was nearly paralyzed with fear.

Damon snorted and glanced at Talia again.

Her expression was relaxed and the slow rise and fall of her chest confirmed that she was sleeping.

'You are dismissed.', Damon said curtly. 'Call off the search. The girl is found. I will take it from here.'

The four warriors slowly backed away with their heads lowered. Once they confirmed that they've put enough distance between them and Damon, they swiftly disappeared among the trees.

Damon sniffed the air, to ensure no one is around before he slowly approached Talia.

He couldn't believe that she just fell asleep.

How careless!

Doesn't she know how many guys saw her relaxed sleeping face? Damon felt like gauging their eyes out. No one should see Talia like this with her guard down. No one. That's only for him to see.

He nuzzled her neck with his nose and inhaled the sweet citrusy scent of freesia that came with a huge sense of relief.

Talia was safe and at that moment, nothing else mattered.

...

-- This work is published on WebNovel (webnovel.com). Don't support illegal copies! Read from the original site to support the author --

...

Talia woke up in confusion.

How did she find herself back in this room?

Didn't she go into the forest?

Talia remembered that she followed the invisible trail the plants created. She collected necessary ingredients for her to conceal her scent and once she ingested that mixture, Talia continued exploring goodies that the forest provided.

Talia didn't feel like returning to the packhouse. She lost track of time and she stopped only when her aching legs reminded her that she was walking for too long.

The painkillers wore off, and her injuries were aching all over, and she sat next to a tree to rest a bit, but then she fell asleep.

Talia had a weird dream. It was about a massive black wolf with icy blue eyes. He was sniffing her neck and licked her cheek a bit, and the dream ended with Alpha Damon carrying her in his arms.

Talia shook her head, rejecting to accept how any of that was real.

Why would Alpha Damon bring her back while carrying her princess style?

Ah, Alpha Damon! He told her not to go beyond the garden, yet she disobeyed him. She is definitely in trouble.

Right, that was definitely a dream, because if he found her for real, he would scold and punish her, and not bring her back like a knight in shining armor.

Talia blushed. In her dream, Alpha Damon didn't wear any armor. His torso was completely bare, and her cheek rested on his firm pec. Talia was not sure if Alpha Damon was wearing anything on his lower half, but she clearly remembers his scent that helped her relax and his every step rocked her back into sleep.

Yup, that was a dream.

The only explanation that made sense was that Talia went into the forest and was so tired that she doesn't remember how she returned.

But, if that was a dream, why was her room smelling of the forest and dark chocolate again? It was not very fresh, but it was there, lingering in the air and in the cover, and some of it was in her pillow as well.

Strange.

Talia observed the room and saw a plate with bread and fruits and there was some cheese also.

Her stomach rumbled, and in response, Talia scooted out of the bed and went to attack the food. It was more than twenty-four hours since she ate last time, and everything else could wait.

The bread was hard, but Talia didn't mind. She would squish a grape and use its juices to moisten the bread. It was good.

Talia jolted when someone knocked on the door.

"Yes?", she called apprehensively.

The door cracked open, and Maya's smiling face peeked in.

"This is the third time for me to check on you.", Maya said and when she saw Talia's confused expression, she reminded her, "We are going shopping. Remember?"

"We can leave when you are done with food." Maya frowned when she saw that Talia was eating hard bread. "Do you want me to bring you something else?"

Talia didn't think about more food because what she had was enough.

She pressed her lips into a line while thinking how to dodge shopping. She really didn't want to go outside this room, and shopping meant leaving not only the room but the packhouse as well. The people in the town will see her, and the ones working in stores as well... and there is a possibility that she might bump into Cassie or Damon, and Talia didn't want any of it.

Her eyes fell on her wrist that had a firm wrap with Velcro on it, and she got an idea.

"I'm sorry, Maya, but I don't feel well."

Maya's smile fell. "Should I call a doctor?"

A pang of guilt swelled in Talia's chest, but she kept on talking. "No need. It's just my injuries from before. As long as I rest, I will be fine."

Maya was not sure if Talia was really hurting but she couldn't blame her for wanting some peace and quiet and Maya definitely didn't want to call Talia out.

"Alright.", Maya said with a smile. "Take rest and we can go when you feel better. There is a nice sweet shop in town, so when we are done with shopping, I will introduce you to the best lime pie in the world."

Talia's eyes sparkled and she nodded happily. If she knew that there will be pie involved, she wouldn't be so hasty to come up with an excuse.

"Do you want to come downstairs to eat, or should I bring you something here?", Maya repeated her offer for food.

Talia shook her head, rejecting the offer. "Don't trouble yourself for me. These are fine. I will wash up and rest."

By now, Maya understood that Talia prefers to stay low-key and not attract attention in any way.

Maya didn't know what Talia went through but seeing all the bruises and knowing that she lived in the attic told a heartbreaking story.

Maya wanted to help Talia, but Talia was shrinking and closing in.

A mate would be able to help her out the most because their bond draws the best in each other but considering that the other person for Talia is Damon, he would only make more damage. And he already did.

Chapter 46 - Restless Uncertainty

"Oh, before I forget...", Maya stirred the conversation the other way. "Don't tell anyone that you are from the Red Moon pack. The official story is that you grew up with your grandparents somewhere North and that after they passed, you came here with the goal to find a pack and we bumped into each

other accidentally. Do you remember the gas station where Alpha Damon went out to purchase snacks on his own? It's the stop where you switched places with Caden."

Talia nodded.

"That's where we met. Feel free to fill in any gaps about your background.", Maya said and observed Talia who was listening intently with a hint of confusion on her face. "Do you know why this is important?"

Talia shook her head, indicating that she doesn't.

"If Alpha Edward suspects that we took you secretly, he might accuse us of kidnapping or stealing."

Talia's eyes widened. "I agreed to come with you."

"You did, but Alpha Edward is not on friendly terms with Alpha Damon, and he might use this incident to stir trouble."

Talia didn't understand. If they are not friendly, why would Alpha Damon marry Marcy?

She told herself not to think about Damon and his complex marital life. He had one Luna called Cassie, and he was about to marry Marcy, and she heard that there were numerous other she-wolves around him. Talia was not aware that polygamy was allowed in these times.

But no matter who warms his bed, Alpha Damon brought Talia to the Dark Howlers pack, and she accepted without considering that it might have some consequences for him.

"I didn't mean to make trouble for Alpha Damon or for his pack. What should I do?"

"There is nothing for you to do, Talia." Maya put her hand over Talia's and gave it a few reassuring gentle taps. "Trust in Alpha Damon. He knew what he was doing when he invited you to come. There is a

possibility that nothing bad will happen, but just to be on the safe side, if anyone asks about your background, don't mention the Red Moon pack. OK?"

Maya was not sure if Damon had a plan when he snuck Talia inside the trunk, and it didn't seem that Damon knew what to do with Talia two days later, but Maya couldn't tell her that they are mates. It was not her to tell.

After Maya left, Talia laid on her bed and stared at the ceiling while thinking about Maya's words and things that happened in the last few days.

There was a mixture of feelings Talia couldn't identify as anything other than uncertainty which came with restlessness.

She didn't know that her coming here could cause trouble for Alpha Damon or his pack.

No one cared about her at the Red Moon pack. It will take them some time to notice that bathrooms are not being cleaned, but they will probably realize soon that trashcans are not magically emptied every night. But even if they notice, no one will know it's Talia who is missing; they will think that some of the other Omegas are slacking because Talia was practically invisible.

Maybe Anna will miss a person to bully, but that's it. They called her a slave, a roach, a rat... no one called her by her name since Olivia left, so they probably don't know her name. And now that her hair is neat and she is wearing decent clothes, even she would have difficulty recognizing herself.

Princess Marcy knew that Talia was in the attic, but she returned to the pack recently and she might think that Talia is not there because she hid in the common rooms with Omegas. Someone of Marcy's status won't lower herself to search for one lowly Omega. At least that's what Talia hoped for.

But there was a chance that Omegas won't pick up Talia's duties, and Luna Layla and Alpha Edward might find out that the girl from the attic is missing. If that happens, what will Alpha Edward do? Will he really cause issues for Alpha Damon? In that case, what would Alpha Damon do?

Alpha Damon is eccentric, and Talia was not sure if he was a good person or not, but the fact that he took her with him from the Red Moon pack, regardless of the risks, confused Talia.

No matter what his personality is, she was confident that if he needs to pick between his pack and her, he will discard her in a heartbeat.

Why would he risk anything for her? She is a nobody.

He is an Alpha and he has the right to act and behave any way he wants. His status allows him to treat people based on his mood, and Talia found that nerve-wracking.

One moment he was sharing a bed with her, pressing her against him, applying medicine on her wounds, feeding her... and then he looked at her like she was dirty while Cassie accused her of stealing and he did absolutely nothing. Actually, by staying silent he supported the bully.

That confirmed her theory that Alpha Damon extended his hand to help her, but if he needs to pick between her and someone more important, she will be left behind.

Maybe Alpha Damon has an identical twin. One is kind and uncomfortably clingy, while the other one is distant and heartless. That would explain Talia's interactions with Damon perfectly, but she knew that there was no second Damon. It was only one and he was extremely unstable.

Talia firmed her resolve to leave as soon as she can, and she didn't know where to go, but she was confident that staying in this packhouse was not healthy.

Maybe no one will beat her, but at this rate, she will die of stress.

Talia didn't want to bump into Cassie or Damon, but hiding in this room was not practical.

Even if no one chases her out, eventually, hunger will force her to find food and she didn't want anyone to accuse her of stealing again.

More than beatings and name-calling, Talia was hurt by injustice. She was not stealing. She only did what they told her it's OK and Stephanie said that no areas of the packhouse are off-limits and that Talia can come to the kitchen and eat anytime.

Talia's eyes were burning, but she refused to cry.

Talia is not a crybaby.

Her current situation didn't look good, but Talia knew that she will come up with something as long as she calms down and thinks rationally.

She will take advantage of staying here until she heals, and by then, she will have a plan ready.

Her current tasks: eat and sleep.

She ate before showering, so now it was time to rest, and everything else will come later.

Talia hugged a pillow and drifted off to sleep.

...

Damon spent most of the day with his warriors, training.

After last night's call to find Talia, Damon wanted to ensure that no gossips are spreading, and he knew that his presence would assure them how everything is fine.

While sparring with his best warriors, Damon took his time to reflect on the events from last night.

He didn't know if Talia just got lost, or was really planning to leave, but he knew that she went into the forest on her own, even though he told her not to.

How dares she defy him!?

"Ugh...", a muffled cry reminded Damon that he was sparring with a warrior, and he nearly choked him.

Damon loosened his hold. "Good job. Keep on practicing. Next!"

Damon was going through the report in his head over and over again. He was anxious to the point of madness because the search took so long. His warriors have amazing skills not just in fighting, but in tracking as well, yet no one was able to pick up Talia's scent.

The patrol who found her nearly tripped on her. If they were a few steps away, they would pass next to her.

Damon concluded that if Talia didn't stop on her own, she could easily escape his grasp.

Part of him was curious how is that possible, and part of him admired Talia's skills, but mostly, he was dejected and frustrated because he was so close to losing her. Damn it!

How can one skinny girl escape his packhouse and avoid so many patrols like it's nothing!

"Ahh!", a cry pulled Damon out of his thoughts, and he realized that he dislocated the shoulder of his sparring partner.

Damon glanced to the side. "Medic! Get him out of here. Next!"

Warriors are usually eager to take pointers from their Alpha, but today, they were reluctant to get on the mat with him. Something seemed off.

Unaware of the wary gazes of his warriors, Damon continued sparring with his next victim... cough, cough... with his next partner, while his mind was stuck on the girl with copper-colored hair.

Damon couldn't believe that he was anxious while thinking about Talia's safety, yet he found her sleeping in the forest like everything was fine.

He was confident that Talia was sending him a message, how she can't be controlled or manipulated. He has no intention of controlling her, but he needs her to be close, in the visible range... preferably in touching distance.

Damon was infuriated. From the moment he saw Talia in the forest, he wanted to teach her a lesson in obedience. No one defies him and gets away with it. No one!

But he couldn't make himself wake her up. She was sleeping so peacefully in his arms, and she even rubbed her cheek on his chest. The sparks made him dizzy, and he exhaled helplessly.

And then he placed her on the bed and covered her up and he sat next to Talia while holding her hand until late morning.

Chapter 47 - The Devil Himself

Between sparring sessions, Damon was contacting Maya through the mind-link, reminding her to take Talia shopping, but Maya told him that Talia was sleeping and that she shouldn't be disturbed.

'Talia is sleeping. Considering her wounds, it's important that she rests. We can shop tomorrow.', Maya tried to reason with Damon.

'No. Do it today.', Damon was not relenting.

The truth is that he felt guilty.

He knew that Talia left because of the incident in the kitchen, and he thought that if Maya takes her shopping, Talia will feel better and not try to leave again.

The thought of Talia leaving was creating knots in his stomach.

She nearly escaped, and next time, he might not be so lucky to find her sleeping in the forest.

It was late afternoon when Damon finished training and returned to the packhouse.

His shorts was sticking to his body, and his bare chiseled chest and abs were glistening due to all the sweat and he was itching for a shower.

Damon heard Maya's voice coming from the kitchen, so he took a detour, completely ignoring Cassie who was ogling at him.

"How did the shopping go?", Damon asked Maya, interrupting her talk with Omega who was stealing amorous glances at Damon.

"We didn't go.", Maya responded.

Damon frowned and continued through the mind-link, 'I told you to go today.'

Maya was irked, but she knew better than to show it, so she plastered a smile. 'Talia would not enjoy it if I dragged her against her will.'

'Against her will?' Damon was confused. Every girl loves shopping.

'Talia doesn't want to leave her room and I don't blame her.'

Damon snorted and went to his room.

His steps halted in front of the door, and he went left instead of right.

Before opening the door, he listened carefully. Nothing.

He took a few sniffs and his anxiousness mixed with anger when he couldn't pick up Talia's scent.

Did she leave again?

Damon opened the door abruptly and froze at the sight of Talia who was sleeping on the bed, curled around the pillow.

A slow breath escaped his lips and he backtracked out of her room.

Before closing the door, his sight fell on the empty plate where bread, fruits, and cheese were. He left them there last night.

The fact that Talia ate the food he left, made him feel a bit better.

Damon went to his room and took a quick shower.

He returned to Talia's room, but this time, with another plate of food that had fruits and croissants and it was wrapped in plastic wrap so that pastry doesn't dry off.

Damon sat on the bed and reached to hold Talia's hand.

He really needed to touch her, the sparks confirmed that she is there and that she didn't leave.

He looked at her sleepy face and didn't move for a long time.

...

Cassie was irritated.

Dinner passed, and Damon didn't come down.

She saw him take a plate of food upstairs, the same how he did last night, and she knew that he took it to the third floor, but she assumed that it's for him, because she was not aware that someone else is on Alpha's floor (how Cassie calls it).

Only once Cassie made her way to the third floor, and Omegas told her that it's not allowed, but when she ignored them, Alpha Damon showed up and chased her away saying that only his Luna will get to climb there.

Well, isn't that her? It's only a matter of time, how Cassie sees it.

There are numerous she-wolves coveting Alpha Damon, but Cassie is the only one who can stay in his packhouse. Doesn't that make her special?

Cassie went to her room (on the second floor) and called her father.

"Daddy", she whined. "Alpha Damon is ignoring me again."

"What did you do, pumpkin?"

Cassie pouted while trying to think about what she did to offend him. "I really have no idea. Last night, I apologized and he was fine, but then he was not."

"Hmm...", Alpha Richard hummed. "Did something happen while he was fine?"

"We went together to get drinks in the kitchen, and there was a girl stealing food. I called her out and she left with that pesky Beta."

"What did Alpha Damon do?"

"He asked me if I think that his pack members need to steal food."

"And? Do you think they need to steal?"

"No, I don't. But that girl was sneaking in the dark. If she was not stealing, what else was she doing?"

"Sweetie, you are looking at this wrongly."

"Huh?" Cassie was confused.

"You want to be the Luna of the Dark Howlers pack, right?"

"Why are you always asking me that, daddy?", Cassie groaned.

"I'm reminding you why you are there.", Alpha Richard responded. "If you want to be his Luna, you should act like one."

"I don't get it.", Cassie admitted. "Alpha Damon prohibited me from calling myself his Luna."

"This is not about titles but about behavior, pumpkin. Luna is the mother of the pack. If her children are hungry, she will provide for them, and not call them out on stealing. You need to be compassionate and gentle. Show him that you can be a good Luna for his pack..."

Cassie listened intently.

She knew what her father was saying, but she didn't want to be the Luna in order to pamper others.

She is after the power and prestige which comes with that position. She dreams about standing proudly next to Damon.

Omeegas should have their duties and their mealtimes, and that doesn't include eating from the packhouse because that is for high-ranking members. Any Omega in the packhouse is there to work, and not relax and have snacks.

But she knew that her father was right. No matter what her end goal is, she needs to put on a good facade. After she secures her spot, she can do whatever she wants.

...

Damon stayed in Talia's room until she started stirring.

He knew that she will wake up and he wanted to talk to her, to ask for an explanation.

Why did she go to the forest? Didn't he tell her to stay put?

Was she running away, or warning him that she can leave without him noticing?

A part of him feared the answers.

He didn't want to hurt her, but if Talia says that she wants to leave, Damon was not sure how he would react.

While she was missing, he was spiraling into insanity while anger and fear consumed him, and if she says that it was on purpose, he might snap.

And why did she refuse shopping? Was she punishing him by refusing him the chance to repent?

At that moment, Damon decided to leave.

They will talk tomorrow.

By then, he will cool off and the risk of him snapping will be significantly lowered.

But Talia didn't show up for breakfast, and she didn't show up for lunch either and he was back to being irritated.

What is her game? To starve herself?

Talia was either harming herself or defying him, or both, and neither of those sat well with him. With every passing minute, his impatience morphed into fury until he couldn't take it anymore.

Damon filled a plate with food and stormed toward the third floor.

What Damon didn't know was that Maya noticed how Talia was cooped up in her room, so besides bringing her food, Maya brought Talia a tablet and showed her how to go on the internet and browse. Talia spent quite some time reading news and looking at local maps to familiarize herself with the world and surroundings.

Talia shrank when she heard someone rapidly slamming on her door.

She was sitting on the bed with a tablet in her hand, looking at the local map and figuring out nearby towns. It was nice and calm, and whoever was on the other side of that door made her anxious.

Is the house on fire? Or did Alpha Edward find out where she is and something horrible happened because of her?

The door swung open, and Talia's eyes widened when she saw Damon's dark expression. Did he come to punish her because she went into the forest without permission?

"Why are you not coming down to eat?", Damon asked grumpily. "Do you think this is a hotel, and we should serve you?"

Talia shook her head frantically, unsure why he was asking her that. Just the other night he stood and watched as she was being accused of stealing food. It seems that he changed his mind, and she was allowed to eat again.

"Doctor told you that you are underweight. Did you forget that you need to have regular meals? Or are you starving yourself on purpose? I didn't bring you here to have you hospitalized."

Talia realized that Damon was concerned about her weight. Did the kind doctor Travis call to check on her? Probably. Talia couldn't imagine that Damon would care about Talia's weight. Unless he was fattening her up so that he can eat her later.

Only then Talia noticed that Damon was holding onto a plate filled with food. Was that for her?

When she woke up last night, she found fruits and croissants, and that morning Maya brought her a nice sandwich and orange juice.

Talia was not hungry, and she didn't want to risk seeing Cassie or Damon again, so she decided to stay in the room and avoid trouble, yet the devil himself was at her door.

She was not sure what to think about Damon other than he was mentally unstable.

Chapter 48 - Bossy Damon

Seeing that Damon was looking at her grimly from the door of her room, Talia didn't dare to provoke him.

Talia didn't have the faintest clue what caused his current mood (or what that mood was), but she decided to play it safe, and she lowered her head.

"I apologize, Alpha Damon.", she said in a small voice.

'BAM!'

Talia jolted when the door closed loudly, and she inhaled sharply at the realization that Damon was only half a step away from her.

It took him only a second to cross the distance between them.

Damon grabbed her chin with his index finger and thumb and forced her to lift her head and look at him.

"What did you call me?"

He was leaning above her, and his angry words splashed on her face. Talia blinked rapidly, unsure what he was getting at.

Seeing the horror in her eyes, Damon let go of her chin and put his palm on her cheek.

"I told you to call me by my name. Damon. Just Damon. Say it."

His tone was much gentler, but his gaze was unwavering.

"Damon", Talia said quickly, hoping that this will pacify the unstable scary Alpha.

Damon smiled and his eyes fell on her lips.

He really wanted to kiss her.

But he knew that if he makes his move now, it will look like he is forcing himself on her.

Why can't she have hearts in her eyes like all other women in his proximity? That would make things so much simpler.

Damon took a step back, and then another, and another... and he placed the plate with food on the coffee table.

"Eat, Talia."

Seeing that she didn't move from the bed, Damon cocked an eyebrow at her.

"Should I feed you?"

Within a second, Talia was on the sofa with the plate in her lap.

Damon smiled victoriously and took a seat next to her.

Talia observed the plate. There were roasted potatoes, rice with finely chopped vegetables, chicken drumstick and a thigh, two thin slices of chicken breast with gravy on top, a dinner roll, and a smidge of cranberry sauce. Talia thought that this must be some feast.

Damon propped his chin on his palm and looked at Talia with a smirk.

"If you came down for lunch, you would get to enjoy fresh salad and chocolate pudding for dessert, but you missed those."

"This is more than enough.", Talia responded honestly. "I don't remember if I ever ate something like this in one sitting. Thank you."

Damon's heart cracked. He remembered Talia's appearance when he found her in the attic and he let out a long breath to calm his emotions.

Talia started eating and she was extremely uncomfortable that Damon was watching her every move, but she didn't dare say anything other than, "Aren't you busy?"

Damon nodded. "I am."

"You can go about your business. I will finish the food."

"My business is to wait for you to clean up that plate, and then I will take you shopping."

Talia swallowed hard, unsure if she heard him right. "What?"

"You are refusing to go shopping with Maya, so I will take you."

Talia paled. She rejected Maya so that she doesn't attract attention, but if she goes with Alpha Damon, it will be a hundred times worse.

"I don't have any money.", Talia said weakly and Damon frowned.

"Did I say that you need to pay for anything?"

"There is no need for shopping. These are fine.", Talia said weakly.

Damon hummed ambiguously and his eyes moved over her body, from her head down to her toes. He liked what he saw, she looked good in anything, even though he would prefer her without any clothes.

Talia shrank under his gaze. Somehow, he made her feel naked. What the hell?

"You have an appointment with the nutritionist tomorrow. It's in the human city. Will you go in that?", Damon asked, and Talia glanced at the white t-shirt on her. It had a rainbow unicorn on it that said, 'Unicorns are awesome'.

"Don't answer that.", Damon said curtly. "I was not asking you to go shopping. I was informing you."

He got his phone and started fiddling with it, and Talia understood that this conversation was over.

Damon was back to his bossy mode. Actually, Damon is always bossy.

But he said that she needs to eat and go shopping, and maybe after that, he will leave her alone.

...

A black armored Lexus SUV with tinted glass stopped in front of a clothing boutique in Darkbourne.

Talia fidgeted in the front passenger's seat.

She thought that this will be easy, but now that they were here, she was reluctant to get out. There were people on the street, and some of them were already looking at the car, probably recognizing it as Damon's.

Damon glanced at Talia and got out of the car.

Talia clutched the seatbelt and closed her eyes. Maybe he will do the shopping himself and leave her in the car?

The door on her side opened, crushing her dreams of staying hidden.

"Do you need help unbuckling?", Damon asked, and Talia scrambled to undo the buckle when he started leaning over her.

Seeing that she can't stay in the car, Talia wanted to dash into the boutique, but Damon was in her way, with his hand extended, palm up, to help her out of the car.

Talia released a slow breath and put her hand into his.

She lowered her head while following Damon into the boutique, and the only good thing was that he released her hand the moment her feet touched the ground.

Talia could feel numerous gazes on her, and if Damon forced handholding, it would be too much.

'Ding-Dong!'

An electric chime sounded when the door of a clothing boutique opened.

Damon held the door for Talia who entered gingerly.

"Do you want to pick clothes for yourself, or should I?", Damon asked Talia.

Talia looked around the store. Other than two saleswomen who beamed at them, there were several customers who stopped whatever they were doing.

Damon coming to this place was a big deal and Talia tried to ignore people who scrutinized her.

There were so many things! Walls were lined with shelves that had garments folded, dresses and suits hung on racks, there were several mannequins with the latest fashion trends. And this was her first time in a store!

Damon saw Talia shrinking and he got his answer.

Unfortunately, he had no idea about women's clothing.

Yes, he knew about the famous designer labels because some of his dates couldn't stop talking about it, and even though he was not interested in those, a surprised shout, "You just tore my Gucci dress!", kind of stuck into his head.

Damon is not a patient man, and that applies to undressing his bedmates.

He looked at two eager saleswomen who stood behind the small counter with hearts in their eyes.

Normally, they would greet the customers, but this was Alpha, and they waited for permission to speak.

"Isi, Bryn..." He gestured toward Talia. "This is Talia, she is new. Talia needs to go to human's town for a doctor's appointment. Can you get her something appropriate?"

The two young women smiled widely.

"Leave it to us, Alpha!", they said in unison.

Isi and Bryn circled Talia once with thoughtful expressions and then started picking garments.

Bryn's left hand held several hangers, and with her right hand, she grabbed Talia's arm. "Come to the back. That's where dressing rooms are. You need to try these."

Isi gestured toward the chairs that were on the side. "Take a seat, Alpha, this might take a while."

Damon gave a stiff nod and paused. "Find her something for the fair as well. At least a few outfits. Shoes and underwear included."

"Yes, Alpha!" Isi grabbed several more things and walked to the back of the store with her hands full.

Damon sat on the chair and looked in the direction of the dressing rooms. He was hoping that Talia will pick her clothes and maybe ask him what he thinks, and then he would tell her to try it on and she would pose for him... but now they were in Darkbourne, and the reality was that such behavior would attract attention and people will start talking about him and Talia.

Damon decided to sit this one out and to let two saleswomen handle this. As long as Talia gets several sets that fit her well, he will consider this outing as a success, and he will take Talia for a more personal shopping experience later. Maybe in the human town.

Talia observed a big dressing room that was surrounded with mirrors. She estimated that at least six people can come here and change clothes at the same time, and there would still be extra space. The store looked much smaller from the outside.

Isi and Bryn were enthusiastic. They didn't ask Talia about her circumstances. It's not uncommon for them to accept refugees, and Talia's fading bruises told them that she didn't have an easy time.

Other than their Alpha personally bringing Talia shopping, nothing was too strange.

They all know about Damon's reputation with women, and he never treated his hookups poorly. Sure, they didn't hear that he took them shopping, but fancy meals and exclusive locations were included, so buying clothes was not over the top.

Isi and Bryn were itchy to ask Talia questions, but they feared that it might reach Damon's ears and they might get punished.

The duo concluded that Talia is a refugee or a hookup, and one doesn't exclude the other. They knew that it's not appropriate to talk about those, but that doesn't mean that they will not gossip later after Alpha Damon leaves.

Chapter 49 - Different Than Others

Talia found her first experience of shopping for clothes overwhelming.

Dresses, tops, shorts, pants, skirts, shoes, hats, boots, jackets, cardigans. Everything looked good and she didn't dare make any requests.

Bryn took Talia's measurements and determined the right size for her undergarments, so Talia only needed to pick style and color from the catalog that Isi brought. Talia picked a conservative style in light tan color, and Isi slipped into the pile white, black, and blue undergarments of the same type.

Bryn was expertly removing clothes from Talia and putting new ones on, and Isi would go out to get the right size or color when needed.

When Isi came out of the dressing room the second time, she changed the sign on the door to 'Closed' and locked the door, so that new customers don't come. The two of them were committed to serving Talia, convinced that would please Damon.

"This green dress goes great with your hair!", Isi exclaimed.

"This silvery top is cute and makes your eyes sparkle.", Bryn chimed in.

They were praising everything and after the fifth outfit, Talia tuned them out.

Damon used his Alpha hearing to listen to their every word and he tried to imagine how those clothes fit Talia.

Was she smiling while looking at herself in the mirror?

"You should really try this camisole, it will show off your legs...", Isi said.

"That's not necessary. I know how my legs look like.", Talia responded stiffly and Damon facepalmed.

Silly girl. That would be for him to see her legs.

Was she trying on that camisole? Damon swallowed hard.

He really wanted to see her.

Bryn sighed loudly. "This v-neck shows your perfect skin and just the right amount of cleavage."

"It would look better with this push-up bra.", Isi chimed in.

"No need.", Talia refused to put it on.

From the outside, Damon agreed. There is no need for a push-up bra. Talia is perfect as-is and if she wears such a bra, she will attract lecherous gazes. No one should look at her other than him.

After some time...

Talia lifted her hands, preventing Bryn from putting another top on her. "Uhm... I think this is enough."

Isi and Bryn frowned in disapproval.

"You still need to try these.", Isi gestured to the latest pile that she brought into the dressing room.

"We are here for a while and Alpha Damon is busy. I don't want to risk him being late for something important because of this.", Talia said.

Isi and Bryn exchanged glances and nodded in agreement. They got carried away thinking that if they please Talia, it will put them in good books with their Alpha. Damon doesn't shop often, and this was his first time in their boutique. But they didn't consider that this might interfere with his schedule which might make him angry.

"Alright.", Bryn said and gestured to the neatly stacked clothes. "These all fit you well. Which one do you want?"

Talia took a few seconds to visually inspect the choices. She picked one dress, one top, and one jeans, and then she reached for a pair of white tennis shoes.

Talia was not into skirts or high-heeled shoes, and with what she picked, she thought that she got a bit of everything.

"I will take this."

Bryn's displeasure was obvious. "Only those? What about a jacket and some accessories?"

Talia looked at the pile of clothes and shoes longingly. "Everything you showed me is wonderful, but I don't have money. When I repay Alpha Damon and earn more, I will come back and get something else."

Damon was shocked by Talia's words. She wants to repay him for the clothes? Didn't he tell her that she doesn't need to pay for anything? But then, this was Talia and she always acts in unexpected ways.

The more Damon found out about Talia, the more he realized how she is different than any other woman he met.

Bryn and Isi were flabbergasted. How can Talia talk so openly about not having money? And what was that thing about repaying Alpha Damon? This is his pack, and technically this store belonged to him also. He is providing the whole pack with benefits and usually no one in the Darkbourne charges Alpha Damon for goods and services.

'It seems she is just a refugee. Maybe just passing by.', Isi said through the mind-link to Bryn.

Bryn agreed. 'Yeah. Why did I think that Alpha would look at such a scrawny girl? It's obvious that he is doing this out of pity.'

In the next moment, Isi and Bryn found it difficult to breathe.

'I asked you to help her pick clothes, not to gossip.', Damon's icy voice sounded in Bryn's and Isi's head and the two of them visibly paled.

"Do you think that this is too much?", Talia asked two saleswomen. She saw their expressions change but she was not sure about the cause. "Maybe I should get only the dress then..."

'Pack everything that fits her. You have two minutes!', Damon said to Isi and Bryn through the mind-link. 'If I hear any rumors about this, I know where to find you.'

Talia watched as Bryn and Isi scrambled through the dressing room. They filled their hands with clothes and shoes and dashed out without telling Talia what's going on.

One moment Isi and Bryn were forcing clothes on her with smiles on their faces, then they asked her to pick with stern expressions, and then they just left frantically.

Talia was not sure what to think of this.

Maybe everyone in this pack is moody like Alpha Damon.

...

When they were close to the packhouse, Damon mind-linked Maya and Caden, 'Where is Cassie?'

'She is in the living room. Waiting for you.', Maya responded.

'Keep Cassie busy. We will be there in a minute. Don't let Cassie see Talia.'

Damon didn't want to hide Talia, but if Cassie sees her, it will cause more drama and it might upset Talia more. Cassie is a loose cannon.

Damon got out of the car and helped Talia out, but this time he didn't let go of her hand. He almost ran up the stairs and Talia had difficulty keeping up with him.

He halted his steps when they reached the third floor and looked at Talia who was catching her breath.

"If this gets you winded, you should exercise more.", he said flatly.

Talia looked at him dejectedly. "No amount of exercise will help me keep up with you." With your speed or with your mood.

Damon smirked. "We will see about it. We start after Travis says that you healed."

Talia's lips twitched as she felt a calamity approaching. Did he say 'WE start'? What was that about WE?

Damon glanced toward the stairs, wondering if Cassie will be brazen enough to come after them. She should know that the third floor is off-limits, but Cassie is known to be the one who ignores the rules.

He opened the door of Talia's room and practically pushed her in.

"I have something urgent to handle. Get in and take a rest. Someone will get your clothes up."

And just like that, he closed the door and left.

Talia stared at the closed door with a frown, but a second later she shook her head and went to bed.

This whole experience was mentally exhausting, and she didn't want to do it again.

One good thing was that it seems she was done dealing with Alpha Damon for today.

...

Damon instructed Maya and Stephanie through the mind-link to help take bags from the trunk to Talia's room.

"You are difficult to see.", Cassie said to Damon as she approached him when he descended the stairs to the main level.

"I am busy.", Damon responded curtly and headed out.

Damon nearly blew a fuse in the boutique when he heard how Isi and Bryn spoke about Talia and he needed to steam out, so he went to the training grounds.

Cassie stood in the hallway and pouted. Sure, Alpha Damon is always busy, but normally she could see him over meals and in the evening, yet now he seems to be impossible to catch. And she still didn't get a chance to find out what happened in the Red Moon pack.

Her plan was to get him to bed and make him talk when his guard is down, but he didn't seem interested in carnal activities. What gives?

Cassie's eyebrows shot up with curiosity when she saw Maya and Stephanie, both with hands full of bags that were clearly from a boutique in Darkbroune. Cassie was here many times, so she is familiar with the town and shops.

She glanced through the main door and saw that those came from the trunk of Damon's car.

"Did Alpha Damon return from shopping?", Cassie asked Maya.

Maya smirked. "What do you think?"

Cassie's expression darkened. Didn't he say that he was busy? And he went shopping?

Cassie craned her neck to see what's in the bags, but other than one piece of white fabric with lace on the edge, she didn't see much.

Cassie pursed her lips while wondering... Lace? Since when is Alpha Damon buying garments with lace?

That was obviously for a woman!

Cassie frowned while looking up, just enough to see that Stephanie and Maya went all the way up to the third floor.

Did he buy presents for someone?

But there are no guests other than Cassie, and it doesn't make sense that Damon would buy clothes for Stephanie or for Maya.

Cassie's face exploded into a smile when she concluded that those clothes must be for her.

Yes, it made sense. Alpha Damon was avoiding her and pretending to be busy, while secretly he went to buy clothes for her, and he will give them to her as part of some surprise.

Is he planning for a romantic dinner? Who knows, maybe he asks her to be his Luna?

Cassie told herself not to spoil the surprise. She will pretend that she didn't see anything and when the time comes, she will show him her best-amazed expression.

Cassie hummed a tune and went to her room with a spring in her step.

Chapter 50 - A Heavy Sleeper

Talia was sleeping, and she was not sure what she was dreaming of, but she knew it was pleasant, and she didn't want to wake up.

There was a tickle on her forehead and her eyebrows twitched in a feeble attempt to remove the source of that subtle sensation.

The tickle moved over her temple, and settled on her cheek, expanding into something warm and cozy and Talia leaned her head in that direction.

She took a deep breath and smiled as the scent of the forest and dark chocolate entered her system.

It was novel, yet familiar, and definitely relaxing.

Talia's smile froze when she heard a deep chuckle.

"You are a heavy sleeper."

Talia's eyes snapped open, and she met Damon's unfathomable blue eyes.

She swallowed hard. Oh, God! The warm and cozy thing on her cheek was his palm!

Why the heck was she sleeping on his palm as a pillow!?

No, no... wrong question!

"Why are you in my room?", Talia croaked before ducking under the cover completely.

Damon thought that she was adorable, and he missed the sparks that disappeared from his palm the moment Talia moved away.

He really wanted to get under that cover with her.

"You didn't come for breakfast, and you have an appointment with the nutritionist. I knocked but there was no answer so...", Damon's voice trailed. "You should get ready and eat."

Talia's head peeked out, just enough for her eyes to be visible. "You came to wake me up?"

"Mhm...", he hummed in confirmation. "I also brought you food."

Talia glanced toward the coffee table, and she saw a tray with food on it.

Talia was half-relieved that Damon's mood seems to be good.

Or is it?

She blinked at the sight of his half-smile directed her way.

That might be a dazzling smile for many women, but Talia feared that he will do something outrageous. What if he holds her hand, or forces a hug? It wouldn't be the first time. Or maybe her hair is super-messy, and he is mocking her. Was she snoring? How long was he watching her before she woke up?

She wanted him to leave.

"Thank you for bringing me these. I will be down as soon as I get ready."

Damon nodded in agreement. "We will go down as soon as you get ready."

Talia noticed the 'WE' part. "You don't need to wait for me here."

"Oh, but I do. What will happen if you go back to sleep?"

"I won't."

"You won't", Damon confirmed before expanding on it with, "You won't with me here."

He leaned closer to Talia who pushed herself into the bed how much pillows allowed.

"What do you want to do first? Wash up or have breakfast? If you keep on delaying, one will need to be cut short unless you do them at the same time." His eyes twinkled with mischief. "I can feed you while you shower."

Damon's words were suggestive, and his scent of the forest and dark chocolate made her dizzy, and Talia swallowed a mouthful of air.

"I will wash up right away." She hated that her voice was squeaky, but it was out and she couldn't take it back.

Talia reached under the comforter to ensure that the oversized tank top is as low as possible. She had panties on, but still... she didn't want to risk her important parts to be exposed.

Talia scooted out of the bed sideways because Damon's face was still hovering only a few inches above hers.

Damon watched with amusement as Talia dashed into the bathroom and he wished that she moved slower so that he can get a better look at her legs.

Damon chuckled while thinking how she is adorable. And sexy.

He wanted to go after her and help her wash up. Maybe he can offer to soap her back, and then work his way from there.

Damon let out a long breath and took his phone to distract himself, otherwise, he might really go after her.

But the phone didn't do much. As soon as the water from the shower started running, his mind created all kinds of X-rated images of Talia.

"Ugh!", Damon groaned, desperately trying to find something to keep his mind occupied.

Right! Instead of imagining Talia naked, he should think about a cute outfit she will wear.

Damon frowned when he realized that he didn't get a chance to see anything she bought on the previous day, so he decided to go into the closet and investigate.

Damon shook his head helplessly when he saw that everything was still in bags and boxes, probably how Maya and Stephanie left it.

If it was any other girl, he might think that she doesn't appreciate the clothes, but this was Talia and Damon knew that she didn't think of herself as worthy.

Damon took a mental note to pamper Talia more and help raise her self-esteem because she shouldn't think of herself as below others.

But how can he do that without exposing that she is his mate?

'Are you still stuck on it?', Damon's wolf asked.

'Stuck on what?'

Damon's wolf snorted in disapproval. 'You are worried about others finding out how important mate is so that they don't hurt her, and you end up hurting her. Wake up! Your choices are either to protect her how any Alpha would his woman or let her go.'

Damon groaned. 'You know I can't let her go.'

He knew that the safest thing for Talia would be to pretend that the sparks are not there, but he was too selfish to do so.

Damon had status, power, money, women... anything he wanted was his.

Toward his pack, he feels duty, and everything else is either a necessity or fleeting pleasure.

However, the connection he feels with Talia is different, addictive, and as much as he is frustrated that he can't resist the pull, the sweet citrusy scent of freesia puts his mind at ease, and the sparks when they touch make him feel alive.

When Talia is in Damon's visible range, there is no pack, no enemies, no schemes... it's just the two of them and he wouldn't want it any other way.

Last night, instead of sleeping, Damon stared at the ceiling while imagining how it will feel when they kiss. It was not IF they will kiss, but WHEN, and Damon was giddy like a teenager while thinking about various scenarios of how that magical kiss will happen. Soon.

'You have your answers, boy.', Damon's wolf said. 'Stop going back and forth because you always return to the point that she IS important, and you CAN'T let her go. Act like it or you will end up hurting mate, she will go hungry again, and... she will leave.'

Anxiety swelled inside Damon at the thought that Talia might leave.

Damn it! So many women are sticking to him, and he can't get rid of them, yet the only woman he wants close can escape his grasp easily.

Damon looked at the bags with clothes and wondered if he should buy more stuff. Yes. If he gets her more stuff and food and whatever she wants, she will not leave. But Talia doesn't seem to be a materialistic person, so maybe he should offer her a massage. He could do that. Start with the shoulders and work his way down.

Metal images returned: Damon in the bathroom with Talia... under the shower... and he could massage her thoroughly.

"Shit!", Damon cursed under his breath because he was getting hard again.

Damon needed a distraction, so he decided to arrange things from the bags in the closet.

...

Talia stood under the warm water, flustered as the memories of Damon cradling her cheek in his palm popped into her mind.

His touch was warm and gentle, and it reflected in his deep blue eyes.

It actually looked like he cared.

And then he got above her, really close, and he smelled delicious, and she saw him throw a quick glance at her lips, and...

Talia told herself not to overthink it. Alpha Damon saw so many beauties like Marcy and Cassie. Compared to them, Talia is like a stick figure and Alpha Damon would never have any inappropriate thoughts. He probably sees her like a pet project, something to keep himself busy.

It seems that clingy Damon came to wake her up and Talia was not sure if she prefers this one or the one who ignores her.

Talia didn't want to come out of the shower. Not because she enjoyed it, but because she knew that once she comes out, she will need to face Damon again.

But then... what if she takes too long? He might come after her.

Talia quickly got out of the shower and toweled off.

"Oh, no...", Talia mumbled dejectedly when she realized that in her hurry to escape Alpha Damon, she didn't bring any clothes with her. Now what?

Slowly, Talia peeked out of the bathroom and released the breath she was holding when she couldn't spot Damon. He left!

She clutched the towel that was wrapped around her.

Yes, she was alone, but that didn't mean that Damon won't return any moment. There is a chance that he just went to his room for a minute, so she better hurry.

Talia froze at the door of the closet.

Why is Alpha Damon there? Are those her panties he is holding?