

Alphas Bride 421

Chapter 421 – Morning Negotiations (4)

James sat in a chair next to George and did his best to ignore the fact that Talia was sitting on Damon's lap.

He saw Talia wiggling to stand up, but the Alpha held her firmly, and after some struggle, she gave up with a huff and looked at James apologetically.

James realized that despite Alpha Damon having Talia on his lap, the atmosphere was solemn.

"Why are we here?", James asked, unable to hold it in.

Damon responded. "After last night, I expect that your father will retaliate. I believe that all of us in the room want to minimize the damage."

James pursed his lips when he realized that Damon wanted help. James was looking forward to the next few days of playing, but after only one day of fun, he was back in this study and troubled expressions told him that this will take more effort to settle than just sending an email in George's name.

"How about you tell me what's going on?", James asked. "Considering that George is here, and my sister is not, I will need more details if you expect me to cooperate. And we also need to get our stories straight."

Damon glanced at George. "Will you tell him, or should I?"

George waved at Damon to go ahead.

"Your sister was in critical condition, but she is recovering, and we expect that she will wake up today.", Damon said. "You know her best and I expect that you will help me convince her to play along. As to what the play will be, that's why we are here. Each of us has an interest in containing this incident, and..."

"Wait, wait.", James interrupted Damon. "Why was Marcy in critical condition? Did she have an accident?"

"Her mate bond was broken."

James' head was buzzing. A mate bond? When did that happen? Considering that she was fine when they arrived, it means that the rejection happened after they arrived here. And she came to be Alpha Damon's Luna? Did she meet her mate here?

James had so many questions, so he picked one. "Marcy had a mate?"

"Yes.", Damon said and threw a meaningful glance at George.

James' mouth hung open as he turned in slow motion toward George. "You? How? Since when?" Well, that would explain why both of them were mysteriously absent. Wait! If it was George, it meant that Marcy came to the Dark Howlers pack to be Damon's Luna with her mate accompanying her, and both of them knew! James thought that his mind will explode.

But there was a good side to this. George and Marcy were mates, and they kept it a secret. With James knowing this about George, George will definitely not give him such a hard time during training.

Who knows, maybe James can convince George for some 'training' in the human city. James can spend the day in arcades, and George can call that as training to blend in with humans. James liked this.

George didn't want to talk about Marcy, but James was staring at him with a smile that made George's skin crawl and he knew that the teenager was up to something. Talia and Damon were visibly curious also, so George decided to give them a short version.

"A few days after Marcy came from Europe, there was a welcome party. That's where we met, and she rejected me. I accepted her rejection when we arrived here."

James needed a few moments to process this. He was always calm and collected even when his father brutally interrogated spies, but this caught him by surprise.

Damon paused. If Marcy met George shortly after coming from Europe, doesn't that mean she knew George was her mate when Damon was visiting the Red Moon pack? And Marcy came onto him and even sucked him off! Shouldn't her wolf prevent her from getting close to another guy after finding her fated mate?

"So... Dawn is your second chance mate.", James said after some time and George nodded in response.

James reminded himself to focus. Getting lost was not his style. He would always keep his poker face on and think about useless things when he was on his own.

James turned to Damon. "You said that Marcy will wake up today. Can you provide more information?"

Damon confirmed. "She was comatose. Last night doctor confirmed that Marcy showed signs of recovery and if things move at this pace, she will wake up today. You are a smart guy. Can you predict what she will do when she wakes up? Should I lock her up with Nora?"

"Locking her up won't achieve anything.", James said right away. "My father will want to talk to her..." James's voice trailed, and he puffed his cheeks while his mind worked a million thoughts a second. Did Alpha Edward already call Marcy? James will need to check her cell phone. What about Nora? Considering that Nora was his spy, Alpha Edward would probably try to contact her first. But he already told him that Nora was in the dungeon because Marcy wanted it, however, after Alpha Damon announced that Talia is his mate, Alpha Edward will probably doubt that story...

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Once he collected his thoughts, James spoke, "Marcy will need our help because she can't tell the truth. If we give her a scenario that benefits her and us, she will play along."

Damon thought how this was too good to be true. "Are you sure?"

"Yes. First of all, Marcy is not very smart. If she is, she wouldn't come from Europe only to be used by my father. Second, to my father, Marcy is a chess piece, and she knows that. She is valuable as long as she can be your Luna. If my father finds out that Marcy concealed the fact that George was her mate, and she came here and ruined her chances of being your Luna, she will lose her value. Trust me, you don't want to know what my father does with people who fail and are no longer useful." James glanced at George. "If I'm right, no one knew that the two of you were mates. Not even Nora who had a task of keeping an eye on Marcy."

Damon's interest in James was rising as the youngster spoke.

"How can you be confident that Nora doesn't know?"

James smiled smugly. "If Nora knew, my father would know. And if my father knew, George wouldn't be allowed to come here."

James looked at Damon thoughtfully. "Why are we here, Alpha Damon? We might be able to influence my father to some degree if he doesn't see it coming, but we can't do miracles. My father will want to talk to Marcy and when he confirms that she failed, hell will break loose. George and I can't help you. If we speak or act in your favor, we will only invoke my father's wrath."

"I'm not expecting miracles.", Damon said. "But if you can postpone Alpha Edward's retaliation, or diminish it to some degree, I will appreciate it. If Alpha Edward challenges me to a duel, I will accept it. However, I fear that it won't be so simple."

Chapter 422 – Morning Negotiations (5)

Talia's whole body tensed. Did Damon speak about a duel with another Alpha?

She didn't want him to fight. The idea of him getting hurt invoked gruesome images of Damon lunging at the rogue who stabbed him with a wolfsbane-laced knife and Talia's chest tightened. She leaned into Damon with the hope that his proximity will dispel the dark thoughts.

Talia noticed that Damon was still sitting there straight, firm as a mountain with his left arm around her waist, and she wondered how many times he had these heavy talks and then returned to smile at her

like everything was alright. Talia silently prayed that things work out and that her insecurities were not showing. She needed to be strong if she wanted to stand by Damon's side as his Luna.

James wondered how much Damon knew about Alpha Edward's ways of doing things.

"My father will not challenge you openly.", James said. "He will avoid direct confrontation unless he is confident that he can win. He will send spies and small teams to disturb your pack. Some of them are already here, as sleeper cells. They will spread misinformation and cause unrest. My father will collaborate with other packs to pressure you from the outside. He will hire rogues to attack you at random times until your warriors are weakened due to injuries and exhaustion from extra patrolling shifts. He will chip away your power until he creates the right opening, and then he will strike to deliver the final blow."

Listening to James say all those ominous words like it was a totally normal thing made Talia break into goosebumps. Is this how a sixteen years-old boy should be talking?

"Is there a way to resolve this amicably?", Talia asked.

James looked at Talia keenly with his brows slightly furrowed and she pushed further into Damon on instinct. Why did she have a feeling that James can see through her? Was it possible that he recognized her as the girl who used to stay in the attic of his packhouse?

She relaxed when James started talking.

"There are always negotiations. My father will say that Alpha Damon wronged him and will demand compensation. What will it be? Money? Resources? People? Territory?" James glanced at Damon. "Considering that Marcy was supposed to be the Luna of the Dark Howlers pack and she lost it, maybe my father demands something of equal value."

Damon's jaw tightened when he realized that 'equal value' would be Talia, the Luna of the Dark Howlers pack. Damon would rather go into an all-out war than give up on Talia, but he was not sure how Talia would feel if it came to it. Damon decided not to think about it because that's not happening.

James returned his gaze to Talia and continued, "Will Alpha Damon give any of that knowing that he was being set up from the start? Will that be the final payment or a stopgap until my father asks for the next thing? Do you think that my father will be happy with just one slice when the rest of the pie is on the table and greed is urging him to have it all?"

Talia realized that her question was silly. Alphas settle differences in a bloody fight, and not over tea and biscuits. Did she embarrass herself and Damon? But Damon's hold on her was solid, and that prevented her from shrinking.

Damon smiled a little as he looked beyond James' words. "You don't approve of your father's methods."

"I don't.", James didn't conceal it. "We have a lot, but to him, it's never enough. He enjoys life in a luxurious packhouse where everyone bows to him, but the people who are enabling such a lifestyle are warriors and Omegas who work and train until their hands bleed." James said this last part through his teeth. Only he knew how much he struggled to produce acceptable results. He pushed his body to the point of vomiting, just because his father needed an heir who won't disappoint him.

"Do you plan to fix the current situation when you become the Alpha of the Red Moon pack?", Damon asked James.

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Seeing that James hesitated, Damon cocked an eyebrow and asked, "Or maybe I should ask you if you want to take over the pack at all."

James snorted. "You sound like I have a choice."

"What if you do?", Damon challenged him. "What if I give you an exit ticket? Imagine a life where you can be whatever you want."

James narrowed his eyes. "Are you trying to poach me?"

Damon smirked. "You are a smart kid. Any pack would be happy to have you as their strategist; my pack included. Your bloodline doesn't define you. It's what you will do with it that counts. Think about it."

James shook unnecessary thoughts away. "If I decide to stay here, it will only be one more reason for my father to attack you. He doesn't have another heir, there is no way he will let me go. And also, I'm not suicidal. Why would I stay in a place that will be razed to the ground?"

A low growl formed in the back of Damon's throat. "Are you underestimating me?"

James didn't flinch. Years of his father lashing at him made him numb to these shows of power. Unless Damon used his aura to suppress him, James wouldn't show weakness. Actually, if he was not the young Alpha of the Red Moon pack, James would bow his head in submission and apologize, because Damon was stronger than James in every possible way, but James knew that submission was not an option. He survived so far by bluffing, and he had no intention to admit his thoughts.

"No. I am only saying what will happen if we don't handle this carefully. While on the topic of exit tickets, maybe you should offer one to my sister. She can't go back home. Offer her asylum."

"How will that appease Alpha Edward?" It was George who asked.

"It won't.", James deadpanned. "Actually, it will probably anger him more. However, if my sister makes a public statement that she was a willing participant in whatever happened, other packs won't support my father, and that will make him think twice before reaching for something that belongs to the Dark Howlers pack."

James spoke to Damon, "Invite media to broadcast Marcy's emotional speech about how she realized that she wants to be a nun or travel the world and that you were a wonderful and understanding host who didn't trample on her dreams. That will also allow me and George to return to the Red Moon pack, and the most we will get from my father is scolding because we didn't stop Marcy from straying from the plan of becoming your Luna..."

Damon sat frozen with Talia on his lap, and he listened to James while thinking how the teenager in front of him is a monster. Did he just come up with that plan within minutes they were discussing this? Scary.

Chapter 423 – Morning Negotiations (6) [Bonus Chapter]

"Do you think Marcy will be OK with it?", George asked. How he saw this, the blame of everything collapsing will fall on Marcy. Will she be stupid enough to take the fall so that everyone else can pass with a slap on the wrist?

James looked at George like he asked something silly. "She doesn't have a choice."

James' eyes settled on Damon. "My father studied you and he prepared for you the perfect Luna. Marcy attended the right courses, she was beautiful, untouched, with an unblemished past. A few of her indiscretions that left traces were completely wiped off by my father."

Damon's brows came together at this. If Alpha Edward was keeping an eye on Marcy, it's no wonder that they didn't find any solid dirt on Marcy despite the rumors.

James continued speaking to Damon, "If you were not greedy for the power you would get by solidifying the relationship with the second largest pack in North America, my father was counting that you will be enchanted by Marcy's abilities as a Luna, or just blinded when your vanity and lecherous side take over. After all, every Alpha dreams of claiming a virgin." He glanced at Talia. "The only thing my father didn't count on was that you will find your mate."

James shook his head and stifled a chuckle. He found it ironic that years of careful planning Alpha Edward did went down the drain because of one woman who was currently sitting on Alpha Damon's lap. James couldn't imagine a fit his father was probably throwing right now. He was glad to be away from home.

"But let's get back to Marcy. My father will skin her alive if she returns to him without the keys to the Dark Howlers pack. Her only chance of survival is that you offer her something... something that will make her feel safe, outside my father's reach. Marcy is not bright, but she has a strong survival instinct. That's why she went along with my father's plan..."

After brushing up the plan a bit more, James excused himself. He was happy that Damon told him he can proceed with his day in the human city with Petra, Erik, and Zack. They had a number of exciting activities lined up, and they were set to leave after breakfast.

Talia was happy that Damon let go of her in order to shake James' hand. She scooted off his lap and went to sit on her chair. It was awkward to snuggle and cuddle when everyone discussed serious topics.

Before James left, Damon told him, "George and I will take it over from here. One way or another, you won't go home for at least another day or two. Use them to your heart's content. But keep your phone handy, if something comes up we will contact you."

James agreed and left the study with a spring in his step.

"Was he always this calculative?", Damon asked George when the door closed behind James.

"James has his ways to survive, but in the end, he is just a kid.", George said, and released a low breath, feeling a bit guilty. He saw James being punished harshly by Alpha Edward many times and George didn't step in to help the boy. It would blow his cover, George told himself, as his goal was to make Alpha Edward believe that George was a loyal dog. Only like that he will get close to the target of his revenge and climb high enough to issue a challenge.

But more than beatings, the worst punishment for James was the mental pressure. George admired James for not snapping. Instead, the boy developed an ability to read the situation and was quick-witted.

"What about you?", Damon asked George as his expression turned solemn. "Don't tell me that you plan a career until you retire as a Commander in the Red Moon pack."

"No.", George admitted. However, he didn't trust Damon enough to reveal how he wants to kill Alpha Edward. "My plan is still not finalized." This was the closest to the truth he could say.

"With the news that Marcy is not my Luna, Alpha Edward will be busy. Whatever your plan is, this might be the right timing.", Damon said and glanced at Talia. "Take care of Dawn. If anything happens to her, Talia will be sad." And she will probably give you a swift death.

"I will keep Dawn safe.", George assured Damon. "I understand that James communicated in my stead with Alpha Edward."

Damon regretted that James left. Acting in George's place without permission was not right, and James was supposed to explain this, but James was gone, and George already knew, so the only thing Damon could do was to confirm. "That's right."

To Damon's surprise, George didn't raise a fuss.

"What do you want me to tell Alpha Edward? He will expect another report soon."

"There is no point in concealing what happened last night.", Damon responded. "As for Marcy, you can say that you will investigate this carefully and get back to him as soon as you have something. Hopefully, Marcy will wake up soon, and then we can figure out the details with her."

"Do you know what kind of protection you will offer to Marcy? If she stays in your pack, it will attract trouble."

Damon knew this. "I have a few ideas."

He didn't want to commit to anything without thinking it through. Marcy became a crucial person in containing Alpha Edward's rage, but at the same time, Damon couldn't forget that she was Talia's bully and that she came to the Dark Howlers pack with an intention to deceive him. Sure, Damon was not a saint as he went to the Red Moon pack with an ulterior motive, but this involved Talia and he needed to tread carefully.

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George left the study and Damon looked at Talia who sat in her chair with a troubled expression.

Damon walked to Talia and squatted in front of her. "What's on your mind, kitten?"

The tips of his fingers brushed against her cheek and Talia blinked a few times to focus on his handsome face that was close to hers. Somehow, everything seemed so much better when Damon was around.

"I always thought that Alphas are about bossing around, attending parties, and maybe fight, but this... it's different." Her expression showed concern. "I listened to you talk with James and George about serious things. There are so many things that could go wrong and lead to many people getting hurt. Can you trust them?"

"No.", Damon deadpanned. "However, without their help, we will have a war on our hands and that's as bad as it gets. You heard James. Alpha Edward is set on what we have, and he won't play by the rules. With James and George onboard, the war might be avoided. Even if they tell me about some of the spies that infiltrated our pack, it will be helpful in reducing the damage that Alpha Edward can cause."

Talia nodded in understanding. She remembered one thing. "How come you had these serious talks without Caden and Maya?"

Damon moved to his desk and took one pen from the pen holder. Talia's eyes widened when she saw that it was a camera.

Damon pressed a button before keeping the pen camera back, obviously turning it off. And then he returned to squat in front of her while explaining, "Caden and Maya watched and listened from their room. I guessed that George and James will be more open to talking if the crowd was smaller."

Talia couldn't stop herself from admiring Damon. On top of being powerful and smart, Damon was tall and muscular, and beautiful... Talia paused. Was it wrong to think about a man as beautiful? But every curve of his body was perfect, and his full lips called for hers while his icy-blue eyes full of emotions observed her every move and she really thought of him as beautiful. Or maybe this moment was beautiful... just the two of them looking at each other lovingly, like nothing bad was happening outside the study.

Talia's arms moved around Damon's neck, and she scooted off the chair onto him. Damon lost his balance and ended up sitting on the floor with Talia straddling him.

Talia's lips found Damon's and her hands moved to untuck his shirt.

Damon smiled into the kiss as he realized that his kitten wanted to ease the tension with lovemaking. He had no objections.

Chapter 424 The necessary truth (1) [Bonus chapter]

Dawn opened her eyes, and a second later she sprang into a seated position while anxiously observing the space.

She was on her own in the bed and her sight moved over a tan-colored three-seater sofa, a coffee table with a narrow blue vase and flowers on it, two tan-colored sofa chairs... bathroom's door was open... a few pieces of clothing scattered on the floor, the ones she and George wore last night...

It all reminded her that she didn't dream or imagine the last two days. She touched the base of her neck on the left side just to make sure and inhaled a shaky breath. The area was still tender as George's mark was forming there.

The diminished scent of the meadow and clover told her that George was not there for some time, but she still hoped to see his figure.

Dawn came to the packhouse many times, and the guest bedrooms on the second floor were mostly the same, but whenever she came to the second floor, it was to clean or bring towels or change bedsheets, and this was different. Without George, she felt out of place. What should she do?

It took Dawn a few endless seconds to notice a small note on the pillow next to her and she grabbed it. A note from George. Dawn's eyes moved over the words multiple times, hoping to get more information than just how he had some business to take care of.

Where was George? Why did he leave without waking her up? Was there some trouble?

Her heart tightened.

What if Marcy was better? What if he decided to go back to Marcy and leave Dawn?

Just as her anxiety was spiking, the door opened, and she saw George entering the room. Relief washed over her, but then her heart tightened again when she saw his stern expression she couldn't read. Something was wrong.

George closed the door behind him and looked at Dawn who was sitting on the bed and bunching a white bedsheet in her chest area. He wished that she didn't cover her wonderful breasts. Unruly strands of her short blonde hair were sticking out from sleeping, but no matter how George looked at Dawn, she was perfect.

George's anxiety was building up as he thought about the big secret he needed to reveal and her big grayish-blue eyes looking at him with anticipation only made it harder.

George told himself that he needed to do this. Talia was right. It was necessary. Postponing it will only make it worse. As a confirmation of urgency, George could feel the air around Dawn changing, and he knew that she was assimilating his Alpha gene. Dawn needed to start practicing to control her aura.

After their discussion about handling Alpha Edward, it was highly probable that George will return to the Red Moon pack with James. George had to return, otherwise his decade of planning and training will be wasted. How can he avenge his parents if he gives up his current position?

While thinking about going back, George remembered that four of them came to the Dark Howlers pack. It was him, James, Marcy, and... Nora. George totally forgot to ask Alpha Damon about Nora. She was in the dungeon. Will Alpha Damon release her?

If Nora was not aware of what happened between Marcy and George, she will probably be irritable that she was imprisoned, shocked to hear that Marcy is not coming back with them... and maybe surprised that Dawn will join them as George's mate.

With Dawn going to the Red Moon pack, another worry clouded George's mind. If Alpha Edward gets a whiff that there is Alpha female in his pack, he won't stand it. It will expose George's identity or worse...

Alpha Edward might set his eyes on Dawn. Everyone knows that Alpha Edward is sleeping around, and an Alpha female will definitely attract his attention. George's jaw tightened as he tried to push aside this last thought.

Will Dawn dislike him for not telling her right away that he was an Alpha? She even comforted him how she would support him if Alpha Edward doesn't take him in, and he let her talk, touched by her concern.

But this was more than just his identity. It was about what he wanted to do with it.

He wanted revenge, he was set to kill, and if Dawn follows him, she will be in danger. He didn't want to leave her behind, but he didn't want her to come to the Red Moon pack without knowing what that means.

George wanted to give Dawn time to consider her options. Telling her on the day they should leave wouldn't be fair and taking her with him and keeping her in the dark will be unfair and unsafe.

Objectively, he should ask her to stay in the Dark Howlers pack and pick her up when the danger was gone, but he was too selfish, too needy for her scent of cinnamon and those addictive sparks that make his soul hum in pleasure whenever they touch.

But no matter what he wanted, he needed to tell her what's at stake and to let her decide. No pressure. Can he do that? George was not sure. What if she decides to stay behind? The Red Moon pack is known to treat Omegas badly, and even though Dawn is not an Omega, she will need to act as one, at least until he deals with Alpha Edward.

The mental image of Dawn saying that she would rather be anywhere other than with him was creating a painful hole in his stomach.

From the moment he saw Dawn at the door of the room where he laid listlessly, the whole world regained color and his soul stirred to connect with hers and... he didn't want to mess this up.

If Dawn decides to follow him, they will come up with a way to delay her joining the Red Moon pack officially. George will say that they just mated, and their bond is still strengthening, and that should give

them a week or two maybe, and after that... George will put things in motion and Dawn won't need to pledge her loyalty to Alpha Edward because she will be able to keep her head high as George's Luna.

Ah, there were so many things to consider. What if Dawn finds it overwhelming and decides that she doesn't want any of it?

George exhaled sharply, allowing his anxiety to be visible. When was the last time he was this nervous?

"Did you sleep well?", George asked while moving slowly toward the bed.

Dawn nodded stiffly and returned the question. "You?"

"It would be better if I didn't need to leave early.", George responded and sat at the edge of the bed. "Dawn, we need to talk."

Dawn felt knots forming in her stomach. Why was he so serious? This can't be good. With every passing heartbeat, the mental image of Marcy and George became clearer and Dawn saw herself fading in the background.

George's brows came together when he saw tears swelling in Dawn's eyes. He thought that the anxiety he was feeling was his only, but now it seemed that it was hers as well.

Chapter 425 The necessary truth (2)

After realizing that Dawn's mood was not good, George asked, "What are you thinking?"

Dawn shook her head. It's not that she didn't want to speak, but there was a lump in her throat, and she couldn't form a word.

"Hey...", George called while cupping her cheeks with his palms. "What's going on?"

"Are you... leaving me?", Dawn forced the words from her mouth.

"What!? No! Where did you get that?"

Dawn looked at him and blinked while trying to read his face. Every blink pushed another tear down her cheeks that George frantically tried to wipe with his palms. Damn it! She was crying again!

"Please, Dawn, talk to me...", his voice was raspy as her emotions were choking him. "Why would you think that I want to leave you?"

"Because..." She inhaled a shaky breath. "I am not your first mate. Your first mate is there." She gestured toward the window, but it was in the direction of the house with Marcy. "She is so much better than I am." Whatever I did, I will fix it. I will do better, I promise, just... don't leave me. Or am I simply not enough?

George looked at Dawn helplessly. Her self-doubt hit him hard.

"Look at me.", he demanded. He waited until she lifted her gaze and their eyes met. "There is no one better than you, Dawn. Marcy is in the past I don't want to remember. You are my mate now, and I won't leave you. Ever."

George cursed himself for leaving her to wake up alone. He knew that Dawn was insecure and other than sex, he didn't do much to show her that she was special.

"Before meeting you, I didn't have a family. And now, you are my family. You are my everything, Dawn. I will never leave you."

He grabbed her hand and placed it over his chest, pressing her palm with his.

"Do you feel this? It's beating for you, Dawn." And it nearly stopped, but you walked into my life and made me want to breathe again. "Did you forget my promise that I will take care of you?"

Dawn sniffled, embarrassed that she jumped to conclusions. "Then, why did you say so seriously that we need to talk? And where did you go so early in the morning?"

George let out a long exhale and steeled his resolve. Here we go. All or nothing. Please, don't hate me, and don't shrink. I will keep you safe, Dawn.

"There is something I need to tell you.", George said to Dawn and touched his chest, where letters E and C are tattooed. "You remember the letters?"

Dawn nodded. He was wearing a t-shirt, but she knew what was under it. "For your parents."

With her tears stopping, George's hands moved to hold Dawn's, and he rubbed her knuckles with his thumbs, hoping that the sparks of their bond will convey his sincerity and his need to have her by his side.

"I told you that their names were Conor and Eliana. What I didn't tell you was that my parents were Alpha Conor and Luna Eliana of the Frostcrest pack."

Dawn blinked while wondering if her ears were playing tricks with her. "What?"

"I wanted to tell you right away, but I couldn't find the timing. I went to meet with Alpha Damon this morning, and there I met Talia who reminded me that the longer I delay, the more complicated it will get so... there it is. I am an Alpha of a pack that was destroyed, and its members were absorbed by the Red Moon pack."

Dawn's brows came together as various emotions swelled within her and she did her best to keep it together and not freak out because George's expression told her that this was important. "You are Alpha? In another pack? And Alpha Edward doesn't feel threatened by your presence? How does that work?"

"They don't know I'm an Alpha.", George said. He was suppressing his nature for so long, that sometimes even he forgot he is an Alpha.

Seeing that Dawn's confusion mixed with concern, George decided to come clean completely. She needed to know, and he would tell her, it was only a matter of when, and when was now.

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"Let me start from the beginning.", George said. "Will you listen to me until I'm done?" Dawn nodded, and he added, "Please, don't assume things until you hear everything."

Dawn took a moment to stabilize her emotions before responding, "OK."

"I was three years old when the previous Alpha of the Red Moon pack challenged my father to a duel. My father lost and my mother died soon after him. An Omega from the Frostcrest pack mixed me in with other children, and no one knew who I really was as I ended up in a group of kids that was taken as future warriors of the Red Moon pack. They treated us as orphans. I was in my early teens when an Omega found me and told me who I was."

George paused and wondered if this should be it or if he should tell her the rest. So far, she took it well, but that was about his past.

Don't overthink it, he told himself. Dawn is my mate, and she will accept it. Dawn is not Marcy, and she won't reject me or come up with excuses to stay away, but I need to tell her everything. She has the right to know.

"I became a Commander with the goal to get close to Alpha Edward. I want to kill him and avenge my parents. I know that he is not the one who killed them, but Alpha Edward continued his father's oppressive ruling and is ruining the lives of many so that few can live comfortably. If you come with me to the Red Moon pack, you might be in danger, especially if I fail so... think if you want to come with me or stay here. If you come with me, I will do everything I can to keep you safe, and if you want to stay, I will come to get you when I settle things there."

There. He said it all.

George observed Dawn and even without prying into her emotions, he could see that her mood was not good because the waterworks started again.

George panicked.

He really didn't know what to do. Why was she crying again? Do women cry this often?

"I'm sorry, George...", Dawn said in a shaky voice as he rubbed her cheeks with his palms. "You've been through so much. Only a person with a golden heart can be this good after carrying such a heavy burden."

George was not sure how to interpret her words. It didn't sound bad, but he needed confirmation. "Does that mean you will come with me?"

Chapter 426 The necessary truth (3)

Dawn didn't have the time to think this through, and she still didn't comprehend the fact that her mate is not only a Commander but an Alpha with a sad past and uncertain future.

However, she knew that staying away from George will break her heart. Every fiber of her being told her that they need to stick together and she had no intention of going against it, no matter what awaits them.

"I will come with you. If you want me."

"Oh, I want. I want!", he exclaimed and pulled her into his embrace, unable to conceal his excitement.

For a moment, George thought that Dawn's sorry was for her not willing to go with him, or maybe she would say how he was too complicated, and she didn't want to be with him at all, but she said that she will come with him, and she even hugged him, and that was a good thing.

He chuckled.

"What's funny?", Dawn asked.

He inched away so that he can see her face. "When I came into the room, you assumed I will leave you. And now that I told you my story, I assumed you will leave me. We need to work on trusting our mate bond."

Dawn laughed weakly and sobbed at the same time, and she gave him an ugly smile that brightened his world, just how she does.

"I hope you will love it there, Dawn. I won't mistreat you.", George said. "Estelle is bugging me to find my mate, and now that I found you... I know you will get along."

Dawn blinked. For a moment, jealousy and fear mixed in her, but then she heard how that woman will be happy that he found a mate, so that can't be a woman George has at home. "Estelle?"

George hummed. "Remember I told you that Omega hid me when I was little?"

Dawn nodded.

"That's Estelle. She also told me about who I really am. She is the only one in the Red Moon pack who knows about my identity and when you get there, that will make the two of you.", George said, and a smile sneaked on his lips. "I have my villa there with a piece of land around it. Estelle manages it, and there are a few more Omegas living there. They were all from the Frostcrest pack..."

Dawn listened to George talk, relieved that this Estelle person seemed to be an older woman, and she was happy that he shared something about him.

He told her about his villa and the staff, and how every Friday evening more people who originated from the Frostcrest pack gather around a bonfire.

"It sounds fantastic.", Dawn said when George finished.

Dawn's heart soared when she realized that George told her his big secret, knowing that if she betrays him, it could cost him his life. That amount of trust spoke more than a thousand I-love-yous.

"George?", she called. Seeing his questioning gaze, she spoke in a low voice, "Is it OK for you to tell me about what you plan to do with Alpha Edward?"

His eyes flashed for a moment before his expression softened. If she knew that he was on the verge of giving up before she walked into his life, she would understand that he was alive thanks to her. Literally. And if she decided to betray him, then... so be it.

"My life is in your hands, Dawn. I trust you with everything I am."

Dawn was overwhelmed, tears pooling into her eyes, but she blinked them away. She thought how it would be embarrassing to cry again. George will think of her as a crybaby.

"Thank you", she said. "I look forward to seeing our home and meeting all the people who took care of you so far. I'm sure we will get along well." Dawn was confident that they were good people. "I am not much of a fighter, and I don't know how things in the Red Moon pack work, but I will do my best to not be a burden. I will cook for you and make sure that a warm meal waits for you when you finish with your duties."

George was happy to hear her talk about their life together.

The truth was that George spent most of his time on the training grounds or in meetings with other Commanders and Generals, and he usually ate in the canteen with other soldiers, and sometimes even slept there.

Estelle would complain when he didn't come home for a few consecutive days. She would worry that something happened to him.

For George, that villa was a sign of status, and it served for Estelle and other Omegas to have a safe place where they don't need to work hard and be bullied, but now that Dawn was coming, he was determined to spend more time at home with her.

After he takes care of Alpha Edward... somehow, George could see Dawn as his Luna, in a packhouse of their own. He was confident that people who originated from the Frostcrest pack will follow him, at least the ones who were attending gatherings on Friday evenings.

They will build a packhouse, and it will be bright and full of laughter, and the two of them will hold each other and watch their pups running around. Pups. His throat went dry, and he felt the pressure in his groin area increasing as animalistic instincts to impregnate his mate kicked in.

"George?", Dawn called when she saw that his expression changed. "Is everything alright?"

He swallowed hard. "Yeah, yeah. It's just that... I'm hungry."

Dawn glanced at the clock. It was early for breakfast, but he was fully dressed and ready for the day, while she wasn't. Well, no matter what the time was, she could always make something quick for him to eat.

"I should get ready so we can eat."

"I want to start my day with dessert. Maybe some cinnamon rolls that only you can provide?"

Dawn remembered that she brought him three cinnamon rolls two days ago, and she was happy that he remembered them. It meant he liked them.

"Uhm... there aren't any left. I could make more but it takes time. They will be ready by lunchtime."

He was amused that she didn't get it. She was the cinnamon roll. She was his cinnamon everything. And he loved cinnamon. He loved Dawn.

George leaned closer and pecked Dawn's lips once, twice... and then he deepened the kiss and his hand tugged the bedsheet to expose her body completely. As his hand moved back to her, he cupped her breast and started kneading with small growls that formed in the back of his throat. Her tender flesh in his palm felt fantastic!

George knew that there were more things they needed to talk about. He should tell her how things are at the Red Moon pack, and there was also something about Dawn controlling her aura, but she smelled delicious and tasted even better and he wanted just one serving of Dawn. OK. Maybe two. Three at most. And then they will talk.

Dawn realized that when George said he wanted cinnamon rolls, he was not talking about pastry. He wanted HER and she giggled out of pure joy. She had her mate, and he was amazing.

Chapter 427 Visiting the Shaman (1)

After breakfast, Talia and Kalina went to Mindy's room to pack a few changes of clothes and several necessities for the newly mated she-wolf (aka Mindy).

Talia guessed that Mindy will probably stay with Gideon for some time, and she will need her things. The initial plan was that only Talia and Damon will go.

Their goals were to deliver clothes, convince Gideon to perform the ceremony before the pack run, and Talia wanted to ask if he has any tips on how she could shift into her wolf form. She actually hoped that Shaman can perform a ritual, create a magic potion, or provide a step-by-step guide that will allow her to shift.

However, when Damon and Talia disclosed their plan to visit the Shaman, they realized that others wanted to tag along also, so their group of two expanded to six.

Kalina wanted to check on Mindy, and she was curious about the Shaman. Tony had no intention of letting Kalina wander without him. He was supposed to train with Nate, Paul, and Greg, but after last night's event where Elders got disturbed by the news that Damon found his Luna, Tony was not at ease without Kalina in his visual range.

When Maddox heard where Damon was going, he wanted to see his sister, and Tatiana was happy to get out for some fresh air. Tatiana thought about this as a nature walk with her mate, romantic maybe. She also prepared a gift for Mindy and Gideon, a jewelry set. It's a human custom, and since Mindy is Tatiana's sister-in-law, Tatiana didn't want to go there empty-handed.

Maya and Caden were also curious to see Mindy with the Shaman, but there were a million things to do now that the threat of an attack from the Red Moon pack was real, so the two of them decided to focus on that. Their patrols were doubled, and the whole pack was on raised alert. All electronic

communication was monitored and filtered, and anyone leaving or coming into their territory had to pass security checks. Damon was glad that they practiced these things often, so everything ran smoothly, for now.

As soon as the four teenagers finished with breakfast, James went with Petra, Erik, and Zack to have fun in the human city.

James was well aware of the situation and when his father called him to hear what's new, James responded that since he arrived in the Dark Howlers pack, he spent most of his time training with George and other high-ranking warriors from Damon's pack, and he would see Marcy over breakfast and dinner. That was James' routine at home also, so it was not suspicious. Alpha Edward grunted in approval and ended the call when James started talking about youth programs, but James knew that was not a courtesy call. His father never makes courtesy calls.

Alpha Edward was probing to see what was going on, but he didn't want to reveal that he heard disturbing news from his spies and how after that communication died.

That was all part of James' plan. That was the first part of his plan which he called: Confusion.

First, the fact that Damon declared another woman as his Luna while Marcy was visiting, was so outrageous that his father will want to triple-check if it actually happened. Yes, Alpha Edward was eager to make his move on the Dark Howlers pack, but he would want to know all the facts so that he can twist them to fit his own narrative.

Second, James told Damon to kill off the ongoing communication from the pack, so that his father can't get anything beyond what initial spies sent him.

Third, James agreed that George should send in his report exactly what happened without mentioning Marcy. Next, George needed to shut down his phone with an excuse that they (James included) are going to train off the grid for the day.

With that, even though Alpha Edward heard what happened last night, he had no way to confirm it.

Alpha Edward was somewhat paranoid and just a speck of doubt was needed for Alpha Edward to hold off with starting his campaign against the Dark Howlers pack.

Based on James' estimate, this situation will buy them some time, at least a day. When Marcy wakes up and agrees to collaborate, they will move on to the next stage, and until then, James was determined to make the most of his time. Playing.

The packhouse was suddenly quiet with only Dawn and George staying in their room.

George promised to tell Dawn about the Red Moon pack, and he was planning to talk about the Alpha aura as well.

Based on Dawn's timid behavior during breakfast, George concluded that his adorable mate still didn't understand what it means to be marked by him as she carried herself as an Omega. Even without a pack, he was still an Alpha, and Dawn didn't think about the detail of having the Alpha gene in her system. She was humble and delectable, looking at people around her with big eyes full of wonder, and George loved her more for that.

Dawn and George had so much to talk about, and George feared it will be challenging because just thinking about the two of them alone in the room made him hard. He was never this... horny.

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After the car ride, our group of six moved to cross the last stretch on foot.

Talia, Kalina, and Tatiana walked in front and chattered in a good mood. Talia took the lead with her phone in hand to sneak a peek at the map so that she stays on the right path and Damon doesn't need to intervene.

Occasionally, Talia would turn to look back where Damon was with Maddox and Tony, and she would always meet Damon's icy-blue eyes that were burning her skin. She knew that gaze; trained on her, hungry, eager... and she felt butterflies in her stomach at the thought of what they will do that night. Marking. She said yes, and she meant it.

Once his mark is on her neck, a lot of problems will disappear. At least that's what she hoped for.

Maddox walked between Damon and Tony and carried the suitcase with Mindy's stuff. He was still wrapping his head around the fact that his sassy sister was mated. And to a Shaman!

How the heck is that going to work out? Mindy is all about travel, technology, trendy stuff, while Shaman is an old dude probably living in a cave of some sort that's decorated with skulls of small animals and smells of dried roots.

Maddox was in such a shock, that he didn't even call home to inform their parents.

And why the hell were they walking so much? "How far is it?", Maddox grumbled.

Damon peeled his eyes off Talia and glanced into the distance beyond her. He did some mental calculations before responding, "About five to ten minutes." It would be faster if they shifted in their wolf form, but Talia can't shift, and he didn't want to make it awkward for her.

Maddox didn't like it. Why was Shaman living in the middle of nowhere? Was Mindy supposed to live like a recluse from now on? He was not sure what to think about it.

Chapter 428 Visiting the Shaman (2)

Damon's attention was on Talia, and he observed her intently as she moved through the forest. Her every move was graceful, leaving him in awe.

Did she know that she moved without disturbing the foliage she walked through? Even his top scouts would have a hard time if they compete against his kitten in trekking without leaving traces. And if she combines that with the mixture of herbs she used to take, she would be nearly invisible.

Talia was amazing, and the fact that she was clueless about it only made Damon love her more.

Damon smiled when the breeze wafted Talia's citrusy sweet scent of freesia toward him. He knew that taking those herbs to suppress her scent was important, yet she stopped taking them because he said that he loved her scent. The girl who was always hiding wanted him to find her. That warmed his heart.

Damon couldn't stop thinking about tonight and the fact that Talia would occasionally turn to give him a smile told him that she was thinking about it as well. Tonight, he and Talia will head to the cottage. Marking.

The list of remaining tasks was getting shorter, and they agreed that other than Caden and Maya, no one else will know where and why they are going. After settling this with the Shaman, the only pressing matter was for Marcy to wake up and they figure out how to persuade her to collaborate in the fastest way possible because he didn't want to waste time on her.

If Damon's calculations were correct, by afternoon they can set off, and reach the cabin by sunset.

A number of Omegas was already there to ventilate, put fresh bedsheets and towels, and stock up the fridge and pantry. He would love to stay there at least a week, but after hearing James' plan, Maya and Caden assured Damon that they have two or three days.

Damon sighed. Two or three days. It was too short, but if he thought about the danger from Alpha Edward and the Red Moon pack... it was the time they didn't have.

Damon pushed the negativity away.

Maya and Caden are capable, and his warriors are the best. In case of an emergency, Caden can contact Damon, so he can focus on claiming his mate.

Damon didn't want to delay the marking, not now when Talia gave him the green light. It will solidify the mate bond, making them inseparable, and if he was right, his DNA will give Talia a boost and maybe awaken her wolf completely. Maybe.

He heard stories of how the bond changes after marking, merging two into one, entangling their fates, and he couldn't wait to be forever entangled with Talia.

Damon was trembling with anticipation.

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Gideon was combing Mindy's hair with his fingers, spreading it over his chest and enjoying the slight tickle it provided.

They were lying in the bed, completely spent, yet craving for more.

Mindy's hand was burrowed in her personal love blanket (aka Gideon's chest hair), and she took deep breaths, relishing the most delicious scent of lavender that was made only for her. She couldn't believe that they were going at it since yesterday afternoon, with only short breaks to eat and clean up a bit.

It was after midnight when Mindy remembered that she came here with Talia to fetch Gideon so that he can join the event, but by that time the event was already over, and the only thing Mindy could do was hope that Talia will forgive her and that nothing catastrophic happened.

They finished washing and went back to bed without bothering to cover up their naked bodies.

Gideon noticed that Mindy's mood dropped. "What's wrong, princess?"

"The party.", Mindy responded.

Gideon knew what party Mindy was talking about. It was the one he didn't want to go to. "What about it?"

"I came here with Talia to convince you to come."

Gideon's lips lifted into a smile. "But I came. Many times. Thanks to you."

Mindy rolled her eyes. "Be serious. You know what I'm talking about. My friend needed your help."

Gideon frowned. "Did you just roll your eyes at me?"

Mindy blinked, unsure how to cope with this sudden mood change. She could feel that he was pissed, and he wanted to teach her a lesson in obedience. Somehow, it turned her on.

She yelped when he tugged her arm and she found herself on the bed, with her face burrowed in the pillows. Before she could react, Gideon's body pressed on her back, pushing her deeper into the mattress.

"I won't tolerate lack of respect...", he rasped close to her ear. "Do you understand?"

Mindy closed her eyes and nodded while acknowledging the arousal that swelled within her.

"Say it.", he demanded.

"Yes."

"Yes, what?"

"Yes. I understand, daddy."

Gideon hummed in approval. He loved when she called him daddy. It was strange at first, but when he understood that was her sign of the need to be dominated, he approved.

His length moved between her but cheeks, spreading them slightly and reminding her of how much he wanted her.

"Now spread for me, and don't worry about the event because it ended without incidents. If that boy can't handle a few Elders, he wouldn't be an Alpha. And if he can't protect his mate, he wouldn't deserve her as his Luna."

Mindy bit her lower lip and spread her legs, allowing him to settle there.

Mindy was happy to hear how the event ended well. She was not sure how Gideon knew that, but as a Shaman, Gideon definitely had his ways. He managed to put her mind at ease, and it proved that he cares about her.

After one nudge from him, Mindy lifted her hips a bit, so he gets better access.

"Mmm...", Gideon mumbled. "Good girl." And then he buried himself deep inside her in one powerful thrust and Mindy gasped while clutching the bedsheets as another wild ride began.

Back to the present...

Gideon lifted his head and frowned.

"What's going on?", Mindy asked.

His frown deepened. "We have visitors."

"Now? Who?"

"Now.", he responded and kissed her forehead before scooting out of bed. "As for who, we will find out in a minute."

She watched him as he grabbed pants from the armoire, the muscles of his back rippling to create a hypnotic scene.

When he descended the stairs and was out of sight, Mindy scampered out of the bed. She was staring at him and completely forgot that she should also go and see who is there. After all, now she was Gideon's mate.

Problem. She didn't have anything to wear. Her clothes were still downstairs, since yesterday.

Mindy went to the armoire and helped herself with one of his shirts. It looked like a baggy minidress, so it will do. Actually, if the person coming is a woman with interest in Gideon, Mindy's attire will send a clear message that he is taken.

She raked her hair with her fingers to make it somewhat presentable and then dashed downstairs after Gideon.

Chapter 429 Visiting the Shaman (3)

As the group approached Gideon's home, they gathered in pairs with Damon and Talia in front, Maddox and Tatiana next, and Tony and Kalina in the back.

"Don't fight. OK?", Talia said to Damon to what he looked at her questionably.

She could feel how tense he was. He definitely didn't want to be here.

Talia gave Damon's hand a squeeze and smiled. "Thank you for coming with me."

His expression softened. "I will never leave your side, kitten."

Damon's words warmed her heart. Talia knew he meant it and she hoped he will be able to make it come true because the only thing she wanted was for the two of them to be together. Always.

They were a few steps away from the cabin when the door opened, and Gideon emerged. He stood at the door, shirtless, pushing his hair back with his hand and observing six young people with a questioning gaze.

"Shaman Gideon", Talia greeted him first. "We hope we are not interrupting."

He frowned. Of course, they were interrupting. Gideon didn't like Damon, as for the others, he didn't have much of an opinion. However, why did the big guy with a suitcase glare at him?

Wait! A suitcase?

"I'm not accepting people for a sleepover.", Gideon said dryly.

Mindy's head popped from behind Gideon, and she smiled brightly when she saw six familiar faces.

"Max is not here for a sleepover. He brought my stuff.", Mindy said and squeezed next to Gideon. She recognized her suitcase. "That's my brother.", she added in a hushed voice and leaned on Gideon when his arm circled around her waist possessively.

Maddox frowned at the sight of a shirtless Gideon and Mindy who wore only a shirt, acting like they are a loving couple. He told himself that they ARE a loving couple, mates, but just yesterday his sister was bouncing all over the place and now she was stuck to an... older guy, and they definitely smelled like they had sex recently. Probably lots of it. He didn't want to think about it. Yes, they are werewolves, and it's normal, but Mindy is his baby sister, damnit!

Maddox had to acknowledge that the cottage was nicely nestled among trees and bushes. It was not a cave, there were no tiny skulls lining the entrance, and it didn't smell funky, but still... he was not completely at ease.

"Everyone!", Mindy exclaimed. "This is Gideon, the Shaman of the Dark Howlers pack. My mate."

Gideon's eyes flashed and a trace of a smile appeared on his lips. He found it amusing that she introduced him like he was the new face. He lived here for decades! But the pride and happiness radiating from Mindy were tangible and it was contagious.

"Congratulations, to both of you.", Talia said with a smile, and Kalina, Tatiana, and Tony echoed it. Damon nodded in a 'what-she-said' manner, and Maddox stood still like an angry statue.

Mindy beamed at Gideon and waved while introducing people. "I guess you know Alpha Damon and Talia. The big guy with a suitcase is my brother, Alpha Maddox from the Blue River pack. The tall beauty by his side is Tatiana, his mate, and my sister-in-law. And those two are future Alpha Anthony from the Lightclaw pack and his mate Kalina."

Tony nodded during his introduction and Kalina lifted her hand to wave.

Tatiana stepped forward, with two matching palm-sized boxes in her hand that was extended toward Gideon and Mindy. "Please accept these. It's a small gift to celebrate your union." She glanced at Gideon. "I am Tatiana Wilkow."

Before Gideon could say something, Mindy exclaimed, "You really shouldn't have!"

"Nonsense. It's a human custom, and I grew up with them, so... Please accept it, sister-in-law."

Mindy's smile nearly reached her ears. This was the first time that Tatiana called her sister-in-law, and Mindy didn't refuse when Tatiana stuffed boxes in her hands.

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"Waah! You are mated!", Kalina exploded, unable to control her excitement. She gave Mindy a big hug, ignoring Gideon who was forced to take a step back in order to give them space.

When Kalina let go of Mindy, she started talking, "We should do some group activity. How about swimming? Tennis? Volleyball? Ping pong? We can team up in pairs. It would be fun to go hiking and spend the night outside camping."

Tatiana waved to get Kalina to stop chattering. "Only a city girl would think about spending a night in the forest as fun. Why do all of your ideas include sweating and getting dirty? How about we go to a spa?"

Kalina made a face. "And why do your activities include pampering? Aren't you a werewolf? It's normal to get sweaty and dirty."

Mindy slipped from between two Wilkow sisters and approached Talia. "I am sorry, Lia. I know that we came here with a mission, and I failed. I saw him and..."

"It's OK, Mindy. I know you couldn't help it. I am happy for you."

Mindy pressed her lips into a line. The guilt was eating her up. "How did the event go?"

Talia paused while thinking about how to respond to this. It was not really good, but it was not a total disaster either. "I believe we got an extension."

"An extension?", Mindy asked, obviously needing more information.

"It's a long story..."

Mindy really wanted to hear that long story, but she realized that they were all standing outside.

"Oh, how rude of me.", Mindy said and glanced at Gideon. "We can invite them inside, right?" He said that this was her home, but she needed time to adjust to the idea.

Gideon wanted to decline. He didn't want Damon or that big hostile guy (aka Maddox) in his house. Damon was prone to breaking stuff, and Maddox didn't look better either.

But when Gideon saw that the twinkle in Mindy's eyes diminished with every heartbeat he didn't respond, Gideon let out a long breath and nodded.

Gideon stood at the door as Mindy entered the cottage first with Talia, Tatiana, and Kalina.

Tony gave an apologetic smile to Gideon while passing the threshold, and then Gideon looked at Maddox who stopped one step away from him, holding Mindy's suitcase and staring Gideon down.

Maddox was a full head taller than Gideon, and his shoulders were wider, but Gideon extruded wisdom and experience that can't be shaken.

They eyed each other, engaged in a silent staring contest, neither of them willing to back off and look away.

"Max!", Mindy called with the warning in her voice while making her way toward them.

Mindy saw her girlfriends settling in the sitting area, and when only Tony came in, Mindy assumed that Damon and Maddox stopped to talk to Gideon about something important, but then she saw Maddox staring at Gideon, and she couldn't allow her silly brother to do something stupid. Mindy loves Maddox to pieces, but he is a hardheaded Alpha, and it wouldn't be the first time for Maddox to cause unnecessary trouble.

Chapter 430 Visiting the Shaman (4)

"Max", Mindy called in a low voice when she approached Gideon and Maddox who were standing at the entrance into the cottage and staring at each other.

She stood next to Gideon and asked Maddox, "What are you doing?"

"Why are you butting in?", Maddox asked grumpily, irritated that he looked away first. "If he crumbles because I'm scrutinizing him, he doesn't deserve to be your mate."

"Let the youngster do his thing, princess.", Gideon responded calmly, his tone turning softer as he realized that Mindy was wearing his shirt. He was so focused on the intruders (aka guests) that he didn't pay attention to her clothes. She smelled of pumpkin and looked edible. "If a juvenile show of strength will make him happy, he can have it."

Mindy was not pacified. No matter how awesome Gideon was, he didn't have the Alpha aura and if Maddox gets provoked he can suppress Gideon and that would put everyone in an awkward situation. "But..."

"The Moon Goddess paired us for a reason.", Gideon interrupted Mindy's protest. "Do you think that your brother can go against that?"

Mindy relaxed slightly and shook her head. "I don't, but he is my brother and I need to say something."

Gideon's left shoulder rose, a gesture for Mindy to do what she wants.

"Why are you doing this, Max? How would you feel if I was scrutinizing Tanya when you realized you are mates? Didn't you scold me for meddling in your relationship? Is this your way of getting back at me or are you going against your own words?"

Maddox touched his nose. Damon told him that Shaman is a stubborn man, and Maddox wanted to make sure that Gideon knows Mindy has a backing. But now that Mindy reminded him of Tanya, he remembered how Mindy hugged them enthusiastically while welcoming Tanya into the family. Does that mean he needs to hug Gideon? Absolutely not.

"I want to assure you are happy.", Maddox said after some time. "I hear him calling you a princess and I expect him to treat you as such. If he bullies you, remember that the Blue River pack is your home. No one will touch your room. Ever. You can come back anytime and there will be no questions asked."

Mindy's smile reflected in her eyes. She was happy to hear that Maddox cared about her. She knew that he was a loving older brother, but it was rare for him to say such words.

"You will see for yourself if you come inside and observe. Talk to us." Her expression pleaded him to agree. "Hostility will only bring more hostility. We don't know much about each other, but we are working on it and right now I'm happy. Don't spoil this for me, Max."

Max grunted and walked inside. Mindy moved after him because she guessed that Damon was still standing there for a reason.

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Gideon looked sourly toward the crowded seating area. He didn't remember when was the last time that he had so many people visiting. And it was noisy.

He turned to see Damon and his sour mood worsened. "I assume this is not a social visit."

"No."

"Are you here because I didn't attend the event last night?"

"Partially.", Damon responded. "Last night I announced to the Elders that Talia is my mate, and she will be my Luna."

"I thought it went well.", Gideon said. "Why are you here?"

"You heard what happened?"

"The fact that I didn't hear anything tells me that it went well."

Damon frowned while wondering what that means. Gideon didn't flinch when Damon said that Talia is his Luna, so he obviously knew something. Damon didn't want to delve into that issue; it will only distract him from the reason he was there and considering that interactions between him and Gideon don't end well, he needed to focus on the important parts and be done with it before things escalate.

Damon glanced inside, and he met Talia's concerned gaze directed at him. She was watching them and silently pleading with Damon to not provoke Gideon. Damon knew that Talia had high expectations from this visit, so he gave her a reassuring nod before turning to Gideon.

"They didn't really accept her."

Gideon cocked an eyebrow. "You care about their opinion?"

"I don't. But I don't want them to cause trouble for Talia."

Gideon was pleased to hear that Damon cared about Talia.

Gideon wondered if it's a good or a dangerous thing that Talia can affect a stubborn and prideful Alpha like Damon to the point of compromising. Probably both.

"What does it mean that they didn't accept her, and how does that relate to me?"

"They want us to lead the pack run on the next full moon, and the younger generation to decide if Talia is a good Luna. I am here to notify you that your services will be needed for the ceremony before the run."

"You are notifying me? Should I be honored that Alpha came here personally?"

Damon didn't miss the sarcasm in Gideon's tone. He pushed down his temper and responded calmly, "I came here with Talia. She wants to talk to you. As for the ceremony, it's for the pack. I won't force you to conduct the ceremony, but I hope you will think about it and consider what it will mean if you don't do it. People will gather and they will expect..."

"I know.", Gideon cut him off. "Is that all?"

"From me, yes.", Damon said.

After a few stifling seconds of silence, Gideon spoke, "Congratulations on acknowledging your Luna."

Damon was surprised by Gideon's choice of words. "You knew Talia was my mate?"

"Why else would you barge into my house and break the door to drag her away like I wanted to eat the girl?"

Damon glanced at the door that was visibly newer compared to the rest of the dwelling.

"Are you going to break this one also?"

"Only if you give me a reason to.", Damon responded stiffly.

Gideon wanted to say that there was never a reason for Damon to break down his house, but he knew that Alphas get overly protective about their mates, and since Talia's status was not known, Damon would be easily agitated, as for the rest...

"If it makes any difference, I still grieve the loss of Alpha Jacob and Luna Violet."

Damon opened his mouth to say something and then closed it. This was not the time to bicker. "So do I."

With that, Gideon moved on the side, opening the path for Damon to walk inside.

Gideon paused while thinking if he should close the door. He decided to leave it open. If he closes the door, it might be a signal for intruders (aka guests) to stick around and he wanted them gone as soon as possible so that he can enjoy solitude with his pumpkin-infused mate.