

Alphas Bride 451

Chapter 451 Lovers from the beginning of time (3) [Bonus chapter]

Talia writhed under Damon, trying to get him to move faster, but he just murmured close to her ear how much he loves her and continued his torturously slow ministrations.

It was wonderful, it really was. She could feel his sincerity and his intention to make her feel good but slow and gentle was not what she needed at that moment.

She wanted to feel his power and passion.

She wanted Damon who was unrestrained and outrageous.

She wanted him to plunder her insides.

And she was determined to get it.

Frantic for more, Talia's hands glided lower on his back, and she dug her nails into his firm ass, pulling him closer and rocking her hips against him.

"Gods! Woman!", he squeezed through his teeth.

"Your woman.", Talia said. "Please, don't make me wait. Don't make it slow. And don't make it gentle. Not now. I need... Ah... Mmm..."

Her words were lost in moans when Damon's hips picked up the pace.

At the feeling of Talia pulling him in desperately, Damon's weak control snapped, and he gave in to his urges. After all, she was eager and he was also, and they can take it slowly later. They had three days.

Damon lifted himself to sit with his legs crossed in the lotus position, and Talia gripped his back to follow him without them disconnecting.

She straddled him and hugged his neck firmly, unwilling to let go, ever.

"Fuck!", he cursed when she moved, her pace not much slower than his, yet the small rotation of her hips threatened to push him over the edge too fast. Damn, she was perfect.

He pushed her damp hair to her right side, to remove the obstacles from the spot where he will mark her. His urge to put his lips there was driving him to the edge of insanity.

"Ah, Damon...", she moaned close to his ear, the words spiraled from his brain straight into his groin area, and he couldn't believe that his arousal swelled. Seductress!

Talia's legs started shaking and slowing down her movements, so he gripped her hips with his right hand to pull her to him, and his other hand landed on the ground behind him as support while he thrusting into her vigorously.

Her body arched backward, and outrageous sounds ripped from her throat, Damon's name mixed in with a string of vowels and curses, and Damon was sure that he never heard anything so beautiful in his life.

The visual of her bouncing on him nearly made him come. Her head was thrown back and her jaw slack, her breasts jiggling, the sheen of sweat sparkling under the moonlight... it was the sexiest image he saw in his life.

Damon could feel the pressure building in both him and Talia, and something told him that his mouth should be closer to her neck. It was the instinct he pushed away many times before, but not tonight.

Talia gasped at the speed Damon pushed her to lay on the grass, yet her back landed softly as he controlled his speed and force expertly, confirming that he won't hurt her even when he was lost in passion.

He was quick to continue thrusting into her, and Talia's face flashed into his view, full of lust and love, and he was not sure if he saw silvery sparks in her eyes, but this was not the time for technicalities.

Talia's fingers dug into his back, her arms coiling firmly just under his armpits, and her face was buried in his neck, frantic breaths splashing on him and making his hair stand on ends.

When merging with Damon, Talia would always lose herself in pleasure, her whole world zeroing on the sensation of his hard length sliding in and out of her, and Damon all around her, pushing her toward the rapture with every thrust, but this time, it was different. This time, Talia was not lost. Actually, it felt like she found a part of herself, something she forgot a long time ago. Possession. Belonging.

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She wanted to give herself to Damon in body and spirit, and she also wanted everyone to know that he was hers. Completely.

His tongue moved flat over her neck, making her skin ripple in goosebumps, and she felt the urge to do the same.

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The sensation of their bodies moving together was thrilling, and the fact that they were in the open, made them feel like they were sharing their love with the rest of the world.

Damon was focusing on Talia's neck, nibbling and kissing, in order to prolong his pleasure and not come first. They needed to do this together.

Every fiber of Damon's being was trembling, telling him that the time was nearly there, and his fangs elongated without him even trying.

Emotions swelled within Damon and an otherworldly growl bubbled in his chest and burst from his throat, and his heart soared when Talia did the same, like she was responding to his call. He never made such a sound, yet he knew that it was a sign of claiming and belonging.

Talia muffled her frantic moans into his neck as she gripped him tightly, her rapid breaths fanned the left side of his neck, and he knew that she was on the brink of an orgasm.

"Don't hold it in, kitten...", he rasped. "Let it out. Let me hear you..."

And then he started the countdown. 3... 2...

Damon groaned when a piercing pain assaulted his neck, making him feel like he was being burned alive.

What the hell!?

Before he could process what happened, his head dipped and his fangs sank in Talia's flesh, releasing his venom and embedding parts of him as her new normal, yet he felt that he was also undergoing some changes as fiery liquid traveled through his veins.

Damon growled when her insides coiled around his throbbing cock, and both he and Talia shivered in their orgasm that was amplified by the scorching sensation that flowed into their bodies from the neck down.

Damon unlatched himself and he laughed weakly when he realized that Talia was releasing low growls while licking his neck, the spot where she marked him. It was painful, tingly, and super-sensitive to the point of making him aroused like he didn't come just a few seconds ago.

He was not sure what to think about Talia marking him because his consciousness was fading, but he knew that the circle was closed as their bond strengthened and was growing into something mysterious and wonderful.

Damon focused on licking those few drops of blood that trickled from Talia's neck. He needed to help her heal before his strength leaves him completely.

The sensation of her tongue on his neck sent shudders through his body, and he was pleased to know that he will wear her mark, and she will wear his.

He couldn't wait to see how they turn out.

Damon didn't realize at what point he slumped over Talia, but he managed to push himself on the side so that he doesn't crush her with the weight of his body. He felt her arms wrapping around him, holding him close, like she will never let go, and he hoped she never does.

The last spec of energy seeped out of his body as he pulled her into him, and then darkness descended on his senses.

Chapter 452 Call for help (1)

The cloudless sky was colored in oranges and purples, looking magnificent as the sunrise was announcing another hot summer day. Everything was completely still, the only sounds coming from two bodies as they breathed while lying on the grass.

Talia's eyes fluttered open, shaking the morning dew that gathered on her lashes.

It took her a moment to realize that she was lying on the grass, with Damon next to her.

She stuck to Damon's firm body, seeking his warmth. Why the hell were they out in the open, completely naked?

Mental images flashed: their wolves, the sad story and reunion, Damon's gentle gaze, fiery touches, and powerful thrusts, and there was a bite. Two bites.

Her head whipped to see Damon's left side of his neck, and she couldn't see anything other than his perfect skin. He was slightly pale but no less handsome.

Talia was confused. Did she imagine biting him? Sure, Damon heals fast, but there should be a mark, right?

Talia reached to touch the left side of her neck. It was tender, but there were no bumps that would indicate a wound.

If she imagined events from last night, why were they naked here?

Talia closed her eyes to feel for any changes. There was nothing in particular, yet her senses were heightened. It was almost like she connected with nature to feel each plant and animal in the area, caressing them with her mind. Unbelievable.

Talia looked at Damon's handsome features and her brows came together when she realized that he was still sleeping. Damon would always be the first one to wake up, and now she even moved, yet he didn't twitch.

She wondered if she should let him rest more or wake him up, but then... werewolves or not, they should go to the cabin.

"Damon?", she called softly.

Nothing.

"Damon?" This time it was louder.

Still nothing.

She gave him a small nudge and when he didn't move, she pushed herself to sit on her knees.

Talia gaped at his form that glowed in silvery light all over. She didn't notice it up close, but now that she stepped back, it was clearly visible.

Reluctantly, she put her palm on his chest and shook him a bit.

Why was he not reacting? This was not like Damon. Was something wrong?

With every passing heartbeat, her worry was increasing and gnawing on her insides.

Why was this happening in the middle of nowhere? How can she call for help? And who can help anyway?

It took her a few endless moments to realize that she was not alone.

'Liseli?', Talia called in her mind, hoping that her wolf will respond.

'Yes?'

Talia released a breath of relief.

'What's wrong with Damon?'

'Nothing. He is adjusting to the powers he received through our mark.'

Talia took another look at his neck. It was clean.

'Why is the mark not showing?'

'Our mark is more than flesh deep. It connects the souls.'

Talia's breath hitched. 'Our souls are connected?'

'Almost.', Talia's wolf responded. 'The connection will be complete if Sapa and I do the mating ceremony.'

Talia noticed the IF part, and she knew Liseli was still struggling to accept that she was fed lies by her mother and sisters.

'Will you bite Sapa?'

Liseli snorted. 'We are not barbaric like humans. Our mating is more spiritual. We open our minds and hearts and accept each other completely. No secrets.'

Talia understood that the mating for wolves is something along the lines of how Sapa and Liseli shared their memories.

'I think that's wonderful, Liseli.' Only by fully opening up to the other, she could enjoy the feeling of being accepted unconditionally. 'I wish that Damon and I can do the same.'

'You can', her wolf said. 'We are the same but if you need distinction, you can think of it as you and Damon will connect by the flesh, while Sapa and I bond our souls.'

Talia wanted to ask for details, but Damon released a slow groan, drawing Talia's attention back to him, and her anxiousness was swelling again. Yes, her wolf said that this was part of the process, but Talia was uneasy.

She touched his forehead and felt his warmth. Talia paused when she realized that Damon was burning.

'Why does he have a fever? Is this normal?'

'I'm not sure', her wolf admitted. 'It's not like I've seen marking like this one. I can tell you that with your bite, he received a part of your power, and his body is adjusting to it. But anything beyond that is just a guess.'



Damon groaned again, and Talia was now panicking.

Was his temperature rising, or was her anxiousness muddling her senses?

One way or another, she didn't want to leave him on this grass.

Talia tried lifting him, but he was too heavy. Damn it, why did he weigh a ton?

And the fact that she was tugging on him, and he didn't react, only scared her more.

She remembered one thing. 'Liseli, can you help him?'

'What do you have on your mind?'

'When Meg was in the car after Kai marked her, I helped her channel that energy out and she was better. Somehow, I knew what to do. It was you guiding me, right? Do it again.'

Liseli hesitated. 'This is a natural process. If we interfere recklessly, it can have negative consequences.'

Talia bit her lower lip nervously. Damon didn't look good. Was she really supposed to just sit and wait? 'Can we help him just a little bit?'

'OK. Touch him.'

In the next moment, Talia's palms were on Damon's pecks.

Talia looked at Damon's handsome face in anticipation of something happening. Unfortunately, there was nothing.

'Liseli?'

'I'm trying!', Liseli responded in a strained voice, and then she snorted. 'It's not working.'

'Why?'

'Because Sapa is strong. That friend of yours had a weak wolf. Well, weak by our standards. Sapa is different. He is the strongest wolf I know.', Liseli's last words were full of pride and love.

'Aren't you stronger than Sapa?'

'Not really. Our strengths are different. If we need to fight it out, without regard of hurting the other, the outcome would be uncertain.'

Talia exhaled dejectedly. 'So, now what? We just wait and hope for the best?'

'Yes, unless you know of a powerful witch that can help channel the powers of the Moon.'

Talia made a face. Yeah, right. How on earth was she supposed to know a witch? The closest to that was the oracle that Axel mentioned.

Talia's expression lit up when she remembered... Axel!

They were leaving the Dark Howlers pack because they wanted to help Meg, but for that, they needed to go to the Midnight Guardians pack.

She dashed into the cabin to get her phone. Damon told her that she can leave her phone in the packhouse, but she still sneaked it into the bag. She kept it off because she had no intention of using it, but now it will come in handy.

Talia truly hoped that Axel will know how to help Damon.

Chapter 453 Call for help (2)

~ The Midnight Guardians pack ~

Axel groaned when his phone woke him up and it took him a moment to realize from where the noise was coming.

He sprang into a seated position when he realized that something important was happening.

If anyone from the Midnight Guardians pack wanted to contact him, they would use mind-link. And if it was an outsider, only a handful of them had his number.

Axel scrambled to get his phone and his eyes flashed when he saw the name flashing, "Talía".

He reached into the drawer of his bedside table to grab a handful of purple crystals and scattered them around him. The time in the territory of the Midnight Guardians pack flowed differently compared to the outside world, and these crystals created a temporary dimension-tunnel for the cell phone signals to travel.

Axel took a deep breath to compose himself before answering, "Hello?"

"Hi... Axel...", Talía's voice came out choppy. "I need your help. I...", she hesitated.

"Tell me.", he urged her.

"It's Damon."

Axel frowned, and his eyebrows shot up when Talía continued, "He has similar symptoms like Meg when you took her from..."

"He what?", Axel interrupted her.

"He is unconscious and glowing. You know what I mean."

"No, I don't. Why would he..."

It was Talia's turn to interrupt Axel. "Because I marked him."

Axel stared at his phone and then rubbed his eyes as if to confirm that he heard what he heard.

Sure, he knew Talia had powers that would link her to the Midnight Guardians pack, but how on Earth did she mark Damon? Damon was the most powerful Alpha of their generation, and if she marked him, doesn't that mean he submitted to her? Delicate Talia made Damon submit? He saw her swimming very fast, but he never imagined that she would be stronger than Damon. This was difficult to process.

But if it was true, it confirmed Talia had Alpha blood, and there was only one Alpha family in the Midnight Guardians pack. Sure, there was always a chance that Alpha from another pack mated with someone from the Midnight Guardians pack, but still... he pushed those thoughts for later.

"Are you sure?", Axel asked, wondering if this was some strange joke.

Talia exhaled in frustration. She didn't think that he will doubt her. "Why would I lie, Axel? Last night, we came to this cabin, and we had dinner and then..." She really didn't want to talk more, but it was obvious that Axel needed more details. "One thing lead to another, and he said that we should give in to our instincts, and I marked him. I woke up this morning to see him unresponsive and glowing. Can you help us? Please? He is burning up and groaning. I think he is in pain and... Tell me what to do."

Axel pursed his lips while thinking. Of course, he could help her. But the question was if he will be allowed to. "Don't try to wake him up forcibly. There are things..." He paused. "Give me a bit to figure out something. I will call you back."

Axel ended the call without waiting for Talia to respond.

His brain scrambled for options on how to deal with this situation.

He asked Cassandra to come and verify if Talia was the child from the prophecy, and Cassandra was considering it, but his parents objected, saying how they can't risk Cassandra leaving and getting in danger. She knew too much and was too precious for the whole pack.

His parents were adamant about Axel staying away from Talia, saying how they need to focus on their pack, and not on outsiders, but... now that Damon is awakening his powers, he is not really an outsider.

Axel didn't tell his parents that Talia and Damon are fated mates, but if he tells them about the situation, they were bound to find out.

He scooted out of the bed and decided to deal with this head-on. After all, his options were to ignore Talia's request for help or to involve his parents. No one gets in or out of their territory without approval from Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia.

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Talia was sitting by Damon's side, holding his hand, and stroking his hair.

She dressed up and struggled to pull a pair of shorts on Damon before covering him with a blanket.

His temperature was going up and down in waves, and he would groan occasionally, but he didn't open his eyes, and that scared her.

Axel called to tell her he was coming, and to keep her phone powered on, saying that they will find her based on the GPS coordinates, but he didn't say who was coming or when. They took hours to reach here from the packhouse, what if Axel can't reach today?

A helpless sob escaped her lips, and she leaned her forehead on Damon's chest.

"I'm sorry, Damon. I screwed up again. If I knew, I wouldn't give in to my urge... I wouldn't... Please, come back to me...", she spoke in whispers and hoped that he will hear her and wake up.

"Talía?", Axel's voice came from the side, and she whipped her head that way to see Axel and another man coming out of the bushes. The road was another way. How did they get there so quickly?

The unknown man was an older version of Axel, and he looked at her like he hoped to see what was under her flesh.

"Axel...", Talía said while turning to face them without standing up. She didn't want to increase the distance between her and Damon. "I assume that's Alpha Isaac."

The older man nodded stiffly, and his eyes moved to look at Damon.

"Thank you for coming.", Talía said. "Damon is like this for at least two hours, probably longer. Can you help him?"

"We will need to take him with us.", Alpha Isaac said with finality.

Talía pressed her lips into a line. She was hoping that they will give him medicine, or maybe perform a ritual, and Damon will be fine. But now it seemed it was not that simple.

"Can you tell me what's going on and how you will help?", Talía asked.

Axel stepped forward and observed Damon. "We can't be sure until we examine him thoroughly, but it seems that his powers are awakening. We have ways to make this process smoother, but we can't do it here."

"Is that why you took Meg with you?"

Axel confirmed. "She is doing well and looks forward to seeing you."

Talia was alerted. She had no intention of leaving Damon's side, but what if this was a plot to get her into the Midnight Guardians pack?

A sense of crisis descended on her. Those were two Alphas. If they want to take her away forcibly or harm Damon, how can she fight back?

Can she trust them?

What were her options?

Talia looked into Axel's golden-honeyed eyes and wondered if she made a mistake by calling him.

'He looks sincere', Talia's wolf spoke in her head.

'Are you sure?'

'Nothing is certain, but he has no ill intentions toward you.'

'What about toward Damon?'

'I don't know.', Liseli admitted. 'But if he doesn't want to hurt you, he won't harm Damon either.'

Under those brave words, Talia could clearly feel Liseli's uncertainty.

Chapter 454 Call for help (3)

Talia stared at two men who stood above her and Damon.

Liseli told her that Axel won't harm her, but what about Alpha Isaac?

The man's gaze made Talia uncomfortable at first, but then he was completely focused on Damon, his brows slightly pinched and Talia would give anything for a mind-reading ability.

She was painfully aware that Axel and Alpha Isaac they were here, in the middle of a forest... no witnesses. If they wanted to harm her or Damon, Talia couldn't stop them. It was too late to backtrack out of this, so she decided to roll with it.

"How do we do this?", she asked.

Alpha Isaac moved closer and squatted next to Damon.

Talia tensed but didn't interfere because the man was visually inspecting Damon's face without reaching to touch him.

She reminded herself that they came to help.

"Axel tells me you have powers.", Alpha Isaac said without looking at Talia. "What are they?"

Alarm bells rang in Talia's head, and she glanced at Axel who looked at her with curiosity. She concluded that Kai was true to his words and didn't tell him what happened in the car. But then... maybe he did, and Axel knew, and Alpha Isaac knew as well, and this was just a test.

How can she respond to the question about her powers when she was not aware of what she can do? Should she tell them that she was still figuring out that part, but so far she managed to swat away people without touching them, stop the water currents, energize Marcy's spirit to the point of bringing her out of the coma, and heal Damon and herself?

'Don't reveal more than necessary', Liseli spoke into Talia's mind. 'Little steps. Don't trust them until you know their motives.'

Talia was glad that Liseli was there to give her this advice. It made sense.



"Healing.", Talia responded. It sounded safest. She didn't want to appear as a threat.

Alpha Isaac's brows came together in a frown, and he turned his head to look at her.

Talia couldn't read his expression. Did he just confirm that she lied? Her heart thundered against her chest, and she hoped that he can't hear it.

"Healing...", he repeated and gestured at Damon. "Why didn't you heal him?"

"I can heal wounds of the flesh. I tried with Damon before calling Axel, it didn't work.", Talia responded, relieved that her voice stayed steady.

Alpha Isaac regarded her for a long second and then he lifted his arm to his face.

Talia's eyes widened when he bit his forearm harshly.

"Show me.", he said, and Talia stared at his bloodied forearm. What the hell?

She couldn't believe this. Did he bite off part of his flesh? What if she was lying? Even with his werewolf-enhanced healing, it was extreme.

But Talia understood that this was a test.

'Liseli, I will need your help with this. Just enough power to heal him, but not too much', Talia thought and put her palm to hover an inch above Alpha Isaac's wound.

Talia's palm radiated with heat, and then it cooled as the silvery light spread downwards and Alpha Isaac's wound healed at the speed visible to the naked eye.

Alpha Isaac's attention moved from his wound to Talia and his lips pressed into a line as he saw her eyes flickering in silvery light.

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Axel observed all this without a word and when Talia retracted her hand from Alpha Isaac's arm that had no remnants of the wound, she glanced at Axel to see him smiling at her.

She didn't know why, but Axel's expression warmed her heart. It was like he was silently telling her that she did good, encouraging her to keep going.

But she couldn't be happy. Not with Damon lying on the ground, and Alpha Isaac testing her like he didn't trust her motives.

"Is that enough, or do I need to pass another test?", Talia asked Alpha Isaac and before he responded, she turned to Axel, "Damon is not well, and that's why I called you here. Can you help him? Will you help him? If it's a no, then please help me carry him into the cabin, and you can leave. I will figure out something."

Alpha Isaac looked at her with a scowl. "And what will you do?"

Talia was not sure what she could do. "I would call Damon's Betas and the pack doctor, and..."

"No!"

Alpha Isaac snapped before Talia could say that she would call Gideon also.

"No one should know about this.", he squeezed through his teeth with eyes flashing in a warning.

Talia's expression steeled with resolve. "Then you better help me. Or leave. At this rate, you are not helping."

Alpha Isaac narrowed his eyes at her. "You obviously don't understand the dangers if people see him like this."

"I do. I heard it all before.", Talia barked back. She was irked that he would think about hiding the magic-wielding secret like it was more important than helping Damon. Was his life in danger? Talia prayed silently that it was not, but he was not fairing well either.

Alpha Isaac and Talia were engaged in a silent staring contest, neither willing to back down, and Talia felt the air changing. Was he using his Alpha aura to surpass her? She had no intention of shrinking.

"M-hm...", Axel cleared his throat. "We came here to help, Talia."

"But?", Talia asked stiffly without looking away from Alpha Isaac.

"As you heard, we need to take him with us."

Talia turned to look at Axel. "Then, why are we still here and your father is inspecting me like I'm an impostor?"

Axel shot a glare at his father, but then he responded to Talia. "I told you before. Not everyone is welcome to our territory. He was just making sure that you are one of us."

Talia swallowed a mouthful of air when she remembered that conversation. Axel also told her that once one is in the territory of the Midnight Guardians pack, he can't leave. Was she going willingly to a place where they will imprison them?

Damon groaned and Talia's heart leaped in hope that he was waking up, but then it cracked when she saw beads of sweat forming on his forehead. He was not getting better.

Talia put her hand on his cheek and prayed silently that she was not making a mistake.

"Will I be able to stay with him?", she asked in a whisper.

"Of course.", Axel responded. "We will never keep you away from your mate."

Talia's head whipped to look at Axel. "Never?"

"We respect the mate bond above everything else.", Axel said solemnly.

She wanted to ask how does the respect of the mate bond stack against them keeping their secret about magical powers, but this was not the time to stir that topic.

Talia gave a small nod and turned to look at Damon. He needed help, and as long as the two of them can stay together... they will figure out the rest. Somehow.

Chapter 455 In the Midnight Guardians pack (1)

Talia opened her eyes and looked around the unknown room that had pastel green walls and the window allowed for the light from outside to seep in, but it was somewhat dimmed, and Talia guessed that it was either cloudy or maybe it was getting dark.

Her movements were somewhat sluggish but other than that she felt fine.

How did she find herself here?

"Talia?", a female voice came from the side and Talia blinked to get into focus Meg's welcoming expression.

Meg's presence confirmed that Talia reached her destination, the Midnight Guardians pack. Well, at least she was greeted by a familiar face.

"Meg? Where am I?", Talia croaked while pushing herself up on the elbows. She was lying on the bed.

"Easy...", Meg said while helping Talia get into a seated position. "Here drink this." She passed her a glass with transparent liquid and Talia gave it a sniff.

"It's water.", Meg said with amusement in her voice, and when Talia started drinking, Meg answered Talia's original question. "You are in the Midnight Guardians pack. This is the center for people who need help with their powers. I know you are confused but give it a minute. It's a standard procedure for newcomers to be unconscious while passing the portal. It's for everyone's safety."

Talia cursed internally. Axel told her that they will need to blindfold her, and she agreed as long as she gets to hold onto Damon, yet they did something to knock her out. How long was she unconscious?

Talia jerked glass away from her lips. "Damon..."

"He is fine.", Meg said with haste and then added, "I mean... maybe."

"What do you mean, maybe? I want to see him.", Talia demanded. She kept the glass back on the bedside table and started scooting off the bed. She was eager to reunite with Damon. Why did they separate them?

"He is with healers.", Meg said. "Cassandra is personally looking after him."

"The oracle.", Talia said, and Meg nodded in confirmation.

"Don't you have other people who could help Damon?"

"We do, but it's not every day that Alpha is awakening his powers. Cassandra wanted to make sure nothing goes wrong. She is the best. She took care of me when I arrived. It's an honor.", Meg said. "I am so excited that you finally went through with the marking, but I must say that I'm surprised that you marked him."

Talia looked at Meg while wondering how much sincerity was behind that smile. Sure, Talia knew Meg from before, and she had a good opinion of her, but the truth was that they spent one shopping trip

together, and then Meg recognized Kai as her mate and... that was not much to establish a trustworthy relationship.

"You know I marked him?", Talia asked.

Meg nodded. "Axel told me when he said you and Damon are coming."

Talia was not sure what to believe anymore. It all made sense, maybe too much.

She wanted to call to her wolf, but somehow she got a feeling that she shouldn't, and she remembered Liseli's words to not reveal more than necessary. Who knows, maybe these magical people have a way of detecting that her wolf is special.

Little steps, Talia told herself. She will be careful, but if she treats everyone like they are enemies, she won't accomplish anything.

"How long are we here?"

"Two, maybe three hours.", Meg responded.

"Can I see Damon?"

"Of course. But maybe you should wait a bit. It takes a few minutes for the drowsiness to clear up."

One word stood out for Talia, drowsiness. Did they drug her? What the hell!?

"I'm fine.", Talia said. She was not fine. Her arms and legs were heavy and stiff, and her stomach was churning, but she needed to see Damon.

Meg looked at Talia skeptically, but she understood Talia's urgency. "Let me take you to him."

Talia followed Meg through the narrow hallway, and Meg chattered happily, yet Talia didn't hear a word of what Meg said. It was difficult to focus. She was anxious about this whole situation, they separated her from Damon, and her mind was still cloudy.

They took a flight of stairs down and then Meg stopped in front of one door.

"Talia...", Meg called to get her attention. "It might be difficult to see what's in this room. But remember, people here are trying to help Damon, and please... don't touch anything."

Talia gave a stiff nod. Did Meg think that those words will calm her down?

The door opened and Talia held her breath.

"Follow me", Meg said and stepped into the room.

They found themselves in a small hallway that had a big glass window on the right, looking into a room.

Talia's eyes fell on Damon who was lying on the platform that was made out of one big flat rock, and it had mysterious patterns etched into it. The patterns pulsed in silvery light making it look like they are taking energy from Damon and carrying it into the ground.

The shimmer around his body was much fainter than it was on the meadow, but it was still there.

Talia put her palms on the glass, wishing to pass through it.

"You can come inside..."

Meg's voice got Talia's attention and Meg gestured toward the door on the side that will take them to the room where Damon was.

Talia's eyes went back to Damon as she moved toward the door, and then into the room that was filled with various herbal scents which seeped from incense burners that were placed in each corner.

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Talia didn't stop until she was next to the platform where Damon was. She reached for his hand.

"Don't!", Meg exclaimed, but Talia was already holding Damon's hand, and lifted it up to lean her cheek at the back of his palm.

"You shouldn't touch him.", Meg spoke from behind Talia.

"It's fine, Meg...", a deep female voice sounded in the room. "You must be Talia."

Talia blinked and turned to face an older woman with waist-long black hair who smiled at her. The woman wore a white sleeveless dress that had a wide red sash at the waist level, and numerous bracelets and necklaces made out of small rocks, shells, and bones. Her face didn't look older than fifty years old, but her dark eyes spoke of centuries-deep wisdom.

"I am Cassandra. I heard a lot about you from Axel."

Talia nodded faintly and squeezed Damon's hand firmly like she was afraid to let go.

"I'm sorry oracle", Meg said with her head lowered. "Talia is a good person. She is just in shock."

Talia realized that she was rude for not greeting the oracle with respect, but she didn't like that Meg was making excuses for her.



Talia was not interested in shallow pleasantries when Damon was in trouble, and not when that woman made her wary. Everything about this place made Talia's hairs stand on the ends. They knocked her out without permission, she was in an unknown place, surrounded by strangers, and Damon was unconscious. How can she relax?

And why would Talia bow to the woman when every fiber in her being told her that Cassandra should be the one showing respect?

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Chapter 456 In the Midnight Guardians pack (2)

"Don't worry about it, Meg. I understand.", Cassandra said with a smile when Talia didn't greet her respectfully, even after Meg's reminder. "Kai was also ignoring protocols when he brought you here. The mate bond makes us do things we can't control. You can get a chair for Talia."

"Is it safe?", Meg asked.

Cassandra confirmed. "He won't hurt her."

"Why do you think Damon will hurt me?", Talia asked warily.

Cassandra glanced at Damon and then spoke to Talia, "His powers are awakening, and we still don't know what they are. At this point, he is unstable and might harm others unintentionally. That's why he is here. But you are his mate, and as such, his abilities won't work on you."

Talia was not sure if that made sense. If abilities don't work on mates, how was she able to heal him? But she didn't care about the details. Even if Damon was about to destroy everything in his reach, she had no intention of stepping away from him.

"How is he?", Talia asked.

"He is stable, but not responding to medications as expected.", Cassandra responded. "We are increasing the dose gradually. He is strong."

Talia smiled a little as pride swelled within her. Yes, Damon is the strongest.

Cassandra gestured to Meg to leave. "I'm sure that Talia will want some privacy."

"I will come and get you for lunch. In about one hour.", Meg said to Talia and she left before Talia responded.

Talia definitely wanted privacy, but Damon was unwell and she had many questions. "Cassandra, can you tell me what's happening?"

Cassandra stopped in her tracks and turned to face Talia.

"What do you want to know?"

"Everything. Maybe all this...", she waved toward Damon and the glowing stone platform, "Is normal for you, but it's not for me. I want to understand the situation."

Cassandra nodded in understanding and started explaining, "The powers that are awakening are unstable at first, and can flare at the slightest stimulation. The medication we gave him is helping him absorb the powers."

"What about this platform?"

"It's helping to drain excess.", Cassandra said. Seeing that Talia pressed her lips into a line, Cassandra added, "It is not taking what's inside him. Think of it like scooping foam from the top of boiling milk to prevent spilling over the edge."

"How long will this take?"

Cassandra shrugged, indicating that she is not sure. "It depends on his body and his ability."

Talia was not happy with all these unknowns. It all sounded fine, but she had no way of confirming that it was true. But at the same time, what were her options?

Since she came here, Talia didn't let go of Damon's hand. She could confirm that his temperature was stable and he was not groaning like before. He was definitely in better shape compared to what she saw in the meadow and that told her that Cassandra is helping him.

"Thank you for explaining. I apologize for being rude. I am just worried about him.", Talia said.

Cassandra gave her a reassuring smile and left the room.

The door closed and Talia's eyes moved over the space. Chairs, cabinets with glass doors so she can see boxes inside. On the opposite wall was a table with various jars, containers, spoons, and a small weighing scale. Talia guessed those are for mixing the medicine.

Talia had a feeling that someone was watching her, but no matter how much she looked around, she didn't see any cameras. However, that didn't mean they didn't have them. She remembered the latest cameras Damon installed in the packhouse. They were tiny and came in various colors to blend in with the surroundings. Unless one looked carefully and knew what to look for, it was nearly impossible to see them.

Talia leaned over Damon and put her forehead on top of his.

"Wake up, Damon...", she called, her voice barely above a whisper. "We are in the Midnight Guardians pack. I don't know if that was the right thing to do, but I believe they can help you. Please, wake up. I need you..."

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When Meg returned to take Talia for lunch, Talia was not willing to leave Damon's side, but she knew that Meg was right. She needed to eat, and a walk would do her good. In addition to that, she needed to explore this place. Something told her that she should come up with exit strategies.

"If anything changes, they will let us know.", Meg assured her.

Talia was surprised that Meg led the way down another hallway, and Talia wondered if the Midnight Guardians pack was completely underground. Is that why no one knows where they are?

Meg chatted about her life with Kai, and how she was training with him to be a Beta once Axel takes over as the Alpha. Meg was visibly excited.

"What does your family say about it?", Talia asked.

Meg's smile stiffened. "They still don't know. I mean, Axel told them that I'm mated to his future Beta and that I will be in touch when I can. I'm sure that my mother is happy to know that my mate is not from the Lightclaw pack, but still... she is probably worried."

Talia wanted to ask Meg about her plans to visit her family, but by then they were in a big space with many tables and benches for people to sit. There was a line where people stood with trays in their hands, and the scent of various foods permeated the air, making the whole space look like a cafeteria.

Windows were high on the walls, with the same dim lighting Talia saw in her room and in the room where Damon was, and she suspected that this is some artificial lightning. They were truly underground.

"Come...", Meg tugged on Talia's arm. "Kai and the guys are already there." She gestured to the left, and Talia saw Axel, Kai, and Tyler sitting at a table and waving at them.

Talia followed Meg's example and took a tray to stand in the line.

Talia noticed many curious gazes on her, but she knew it was because she was a new face.

The line moved slowly, and Talia thought of using this opportunity to get some information.

"I see you can control your ability."

"Yes.", Meg responded enthusiastically. "Actually, I'm still practicing to control my strength, but I am confident that I won't break stuff accidentally."

"And you are not glowing anymore.", Talia stated the obvious. "How long did it take you to get the hang of that?"

Meg puffed her cheeks. "At least a week for the energy to stop showing, and then two more weeks so that I don't blow up stuff accidentally."

Talia gaped at Meg. "Did you say, three weeks?"

Meg bobbed her head. "Give or take a day."

"But... It's only been a few days since you left the Dark Howlers pack."

Meg's mouth formed a big O when she realized, "No one told you. Time here passes differently."

Chapter 457 In the Midnight Guardians pack (3) [Bonus chapter]

Talia's ears perked up when Meg said that time passes here differently. "How differently?"

"A day outside is about a month in the Midnight Guardians pack."

Talia stared at Meg while processing this information.

From Talia's perspective, Meg left two-three days ago, yet for Meg that was two-three months. No wonder Meg was so sad when she said how she didn't visit her family. She really missed them, yet they saw it only as a few days of separation. For them, she would still be in the Dark Howlers pack for training.

Talia was relieved to think that Maya and Caden will not freak out about her and Damon's absence. They had three days, and since Talia and Damon were here, that would be three months. Why didn't they come here for their little escape?

Talia's mood dropped when she reminded herself that Damon was unconscious, and it was uncertain if they will face trouble when they decide to leave this place.

Meg mentioned a portal and there might be more things to consider. Talia took a mental note to slowly probe for information, without being too obvious about it. If she learned anything about the Midnight Guardians pack so far, that was how they were secretive.

Meg and Talia reached the serving area, and Talia took salad, fried chicken, and corn on the cob. There were many options, and Talia was confident that Damon would take steak and cut it for her. She really missed him.

"Make sure you take chocolate pudding...", Meg said while putting one cup on Talia's tray. "They are the best."

Talia looked sadly at the pudding. She could smell the cocoa and it reminded her of Damon.

"Are you alright?", Meg asked.

"Yes, yes." Talia didn't want to explain. "Thank you."

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"How are you feeling?", Axel asked Talia when she and Meg joined them at the table.

Talia's expression stiffened when she remembered that Axel knocked her out with some drug. OK. Maybe it was Alpha Isaac, but Axel was right there, allowing it to happen, and he didn't even warn her.

"Fine.", she responded curtly.

Axel realized that Talia's fine was not fine. "I apologize..."

"No need.", Talia cut him off. "Apology won't fix anything. If you are truly sorry about something, don't do it again."

Talia choked on her words as they reminded her of Damon. It was like he was standing right behind her and saying those same words while enveloping her in his presence. Her heart ached, and she really wanted to go back by his side. But she knew that skipping meals won't do good to anyone, so she started eating quickly.

"If it makes any difference...", Axel said carefully. "What we did was a standard protocol. It's for the protection of the pack and you. I promised that you won't be separated from Damon, and I made sure that doesn't happen."

Talia picked up the hidden meaning behind Axel's words. "Someone wanted me to be apart from him?"

"Only people who need help stay in the center.", Axel responded. "Think of it as a hospital. If you are healthy, you can't stay there."

Talia felt a little guilty. Axel seemed sincere, and she was sure that he had his own share of challenges.

"Thank you, Axel.", Talia said and resumed stuffing salad into her mouth.

"What do you think about our pack, Talia?", Tyler asked.

She swallowed before responding, "I don't have an opinion. I've seen the center where Damon is and this place."

"That's not much.", Kai said. "After dinner, we will go for a run to stretch our paws. Join us."

Talia understood that they will go outside and run in their wolf forms. She really wanted to get out from wherever she was, but then she remembered that she can't shift into her wolf form. "I will definitely join you for dinner. And after that, we will see."

"You should..."

"She was being polite.", Meg cut off Tyler. "I'm sure that Talia will rather be with her mate than anywhere else."

Tyler cleared his throat awkwardly and focused on the food in front of him.

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Later that evening, Axel came to see how Damon was doing.

"Talia left?", Axel asked Cassandra.

"About one hour ago. She fell asleep, and we carried her back to her room."

Axel thought how that was odd. "Why did you carry her?"

"The herbs in the room are like tranquilizers.", Cassandra said with a knowing smile. "I told her not to stay more than an hour at a time, but she insisted."



Axel pursed his lips. He wanted to check on Damon, but he was also hoping to see Talia. She barely spoke during dinner, and he wanted to see if Talia will loosen up in private. But if she was asleep, he will need to wait for the morning.

The door behind Axel opened, and he turned to see his parents.

"Tell us.", Alpha Isaac said to Cassandra as soon as Alpha Sophia closed the door behind them.

Cassandra glanced at Axel and Alpha Isaac waved at her to go ahead. "As the future Alpha, Axel should know that sometimes we make difficult decisions for the sake of the pack."

Axel frowned at these words. What did that mean?

Cassandra turned to look through the window at Damon. "His condition is the same. He is currently taking three times the maximum dose, yet his power is not diminishing. It's like a bottomless pit."

"What do you suggest?", Alpha Isaac asked.

"It depends on what you want to achieve.", Cassandra responded.

Alpha Isaac's eyes glazed, and Axel was alerted. Why did they switch to a mind-link?

"I want to know what's going on.", Axel demanded.

Cassandra nodded and responded, "Medications won't work. We need to use black runes."

Axel sucked in a sharp breath. They use those for prisoners, to suppress their magic abilities. "Alpha Damon is in the process of awakening his powers. Black runes might cripple him."

"Use your head, Axel.", Alpha Isaac said sternly. "He is not responding to medications. That should tell you how powerful he will be if he gets ahold of the powers he is currently absorbing. Damon is already

the strongest Alpha. Do you really want him to get into a position where he can single-handedly decide the fate of werewolves as a society?"

"I understand, but..."

"There are no buts, Axel.", Alpha Sophia said from the side. "Everyone knows that Alpha Damon is impulsive. What will you do if one day he decides to go after our pack? He already knows our secrets. Do you think he will leave us alone or make us do his bidding? Will you be willing to stay under his thumb? All-out war will only cause casualties. By acting now, we are preventing future catastrophe."

Axel rubbed his forehead while struggling to accept this. He knew that the words of his parents made sense, but Talia called him for help, she trusted him, and... can he disappoint her again?

Chapter 458 In the Midnight Guardians pack (4)

Anxiousness and guilt were swelling in Axel about the things that were yet to happen. He had to try something. Anything.

"Wouldn't it be better if we try to build a good relationship with Alpha Damon? Didn't you tell me that he is trustworthy? As the most powerful Alpha, he can help hide our secret, or maybe we don't need to hide anymore under his protection."

"Your idealism is admirable, Axel. But history teaches us that powerful ones seek more power.", Alpha Sophia said. "People easily get drunk on power and think they became gods."

Axel couldn't deny that, but... "What about Talia? Did you forget that she might be the child from the prophecy? She won't approve of this. They are mates."

"No one will know.", Cassandra said. "Talia is sleeping, and this will be done by morning. Even if she suspects that something is off, she won't know what's going on. When Alpha Damon awakens, we will say that we did all we could."

"You mean, IF he awakens.", Axel hissed.

"Mortality rate is very low. I believe he will survive.", Cassandra responded.

"Don't argue with him.", Alpha Isaac said to Cassandra. "Start with preparations and let us handle Axel."

Cassandra nodded and got busy with some things, and Alpha Isaac turned to Axel. "As an Alpha, you need to put your pack first."

"I understand your point but that doesn't mean I agree with it."

Alpha Isaac frowned. "Are you opposing us?"

Axel exhaled in frustration. "Why is it always with you or against you? Why can't we explore other possibilities before doing something drastic?"

Alpha Sophia took Axel's hand in hers and gave him a squeeze. "Being an Alpha is an honor and responsibility. You should know when it's time to think, and when you need to act decisively. Your father and I did many things we didn't like personally, but our pack is safe and that's what matters."

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"Talía... Talía...", Meg's urgent voice sounded, and Talía mumbled as she was shaken awake. "Snap out of it. We need you. Damon needs you."

Talía coughed at the sour smell that invaded her senses. What was that? She blinked once, twice, and then her eyes sprang open. "What's going on with Damon?"

It took her a moment to realize that Meg and Axel were in her room. How did she find herself here? Did she fall asleep on the chair next to Damon?

Talia's mind was fuzzy ever since she arrived at that Dark Howlers pack and she wondered if they did something to her. She was trying to figure out their current situation, and find how to leave this place, but it was difficult to focus.

Meg opened her mouth to speak, but Axel put his hand on Meg's shoulder, indicating that he will explain.

'THUD!'

Talia was shocked when Axel plopped on his knees.

"Please, forgive me, Talia. I didn't think it will come to this."

Talia didn't get it. "What happened? Is Damon alright?"

"He is fine, but not for long.", Axel said. "They are afraid that he is too powerful, and they want to suppress him with a procedure that can cripple him. We need to hurry."

Talia swallowed hard. Was this really happening?

A strange sense of calm descended on her like she was watching all this and it didn't involve her.

'We need to hurry!', Liseli spoke in Talia's mind, and Talia could feel panic swelling within her.

'Wait. Wait. They lied and manipulated us from the beginning.' And it was all her fault. 'Acting without thinking will only get us in more trouble.'

'But what if he is right?', Liseli asked.

'I'm not saying Axel is lying. I just want to understand the situation first. The last thing we want is to break some rules and give them a reason to imprison us. We are strong, but we don't know how many of them are out there and what they can do.'

Liseli agreed with this.

"I assume you have a plan.", Talia said.

"It's not much, but...", Axel swallowed hard. "Tyler will cut off the security feed. That should buy us a few minutes. Meg will blast that place open and make a mess, and you will take Damon out. Kai is waiting outside to lead you to a hiding place. You will need to stay low for some time while we leave trails as if you are going for the portal. Once the coast is clear, we will help you get out."

"You want me to take Damon and hide? But he is unwell.", Talia said.

"I will give you medicine we use to stabilize the newly awakened ones. I don't know if it will work and to what degree, but if we leave him where he is now, he will definitely be harmed."

Talia looked at Axel skeptically. Other than wanting her to come to the Midnight Guardians pack, he didn't show willingness for anything else. Was this a plot to get her in trouble? Or to get Damon in trouble? And there was also... "Won't this get you in trouble?"

"Not if we do this right.", Axel said. "The official version is that you went to see Damon and suspected that something is wrong, so you caused a commotion which triggered his ability and things exploded. My parents are set to keep this a secret, so only Cassandra is there, and you will inject her with this..." Axel showed a syringe in his hand. "This causes a short-term memory loss and the person becomes susceptible to suggestions, so Cassandra will confirm the story how it was only you and Damon, and that you are running to the portal."

Talia pressed her lips into a line. "Your parents want to harm Damon?"

Axel exhaled helplessly. "Please, understand. They believe that they are doing what's best for the pack."

"And you?", Talia asked stiffly. "Why are you doing this?"

"I won't be able to sleep peacefully knowing that a person was harmed when there was a chance for another way."

Somehow, Talia could feel his sincerity and she knew he meant it.

Talia smiled a little and cupped Axel's cheek with her palm. "You are going to be a good Alpha, Axel."

"There is no need for formalities between us, Talia. I think of you as my sister.", he blurted out.

"That's sweet.", Talia said honestly. "Family is not defined by blood connections. Family is made of people who stand by your side when you need it."

Axel wanted to say how he believes that she really is his sister or at least half-sister, but before he could say anything, Talia jumped on her feet and asked, "How do we do this?"

And just like that, Axel's opportunity to tell Talia his theory was gone.

"We need to catch Cassandra by surprise. She has ways to prevent us from acting.", Meg said. She was nervous but also excited to do this. Meg was training for months (literally), and this will be the first chance for her to use her abilities for real. But she also didn't want to hurt Cassandra, at least not seriously, so she will need to control her power. "Tyler is waiting for us to give him a sign to shut down the security feed..."

"Do you have security in the room?", Talia asked.

Axel shook his head. "Not in the room. They don't want to leave records about what's going on in there. But there are cameras in the hallways. Tyler cut off the feed temporarily so that Meg and I can come here. I will go and distract my mother while you take Damon out." He glanced at Meg. "Remember to use mind-link only in emergencies and talk in code. My parents might be listening."

"You will be with your parents?", Talia didn't like this. "Wouldn't it be better if you come with us and help us carry Damon?"

Axel shook his head. "My mother has the ability to see things. That's why even though there are no cameras, she knows what's going on in restricted areas. She is watching."

Talia shuddered at this. She had a feeling of eyes on her, but she didn't see anything.

Axel was still explaining, "My mother's ability requires full focus, and she needs to know where to look. I will be with her and distract her until Meg and Tyler confirm that you made a safe distance from here. Stay in the hideout. Don't come out until one of us tells you it's safe. You will have water, food, and blankets there..."

Chapter 459 In the Midnight Guardians pack (5)

Talia and Meg were in Talia's room, both looking at each other in silence and waiting for a sign they can move.

"Talia?", Meg called in a whisper, like she was afraid that someone will overhear her. "I didn't thank you for your help back there. Kai told me what you did when we left the Dark Howlers pack."

"Don't mention it.", Talia responded, tense nerves made her voice choppy. Thinking that Damon was in danger, yet they were just sitting there was driving her nuts. "Do you know how long until we can move?"

Meg shrugged. "Axel needs to distract his mother and make it look natural."

Talia nodded in understanding. The silence was pressing on her ears, and she needed a distraction. "Are all buildings here underground?"

"Most of them.", Meg said. "At first, I thought it was strange, werewolves love free outdoors. But then Kai told me how that's their way of not disturbing nature. We can go out anytime so it's not a big deal."

"Tell me about this place. Talk to me about your training. Just talk...", Talia demanded, and Meg obeyed.

They both knew that the longer they delay, the further Cassandra was with whatever she was doing, but rushing recklessly will only get them caught and not help Damon.

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Cassandra finalized the last rune on the floor with black chalk, completing the mysterious circle that she had drawn around the stone platform where Damon was surrounded by unlit candles.

She raised her arms up looking at the ceiling that had a skylight revealing dark purple sky above. The Moon was getting into the position to be fully visible through that long, narrow opening.

"Bless me, oh, Moon Goddess...", Cassandra spoke with a fervent expression of worshiping and pain. "One shouldn't have too much power. I am doing your bidding to save your children who turn to darkness when they have too much power, preventing a big disaster from happening..."

With one sway of her hand, numerous candles that were around Damon lit up and the stone platform hummed. In the next moment, the silvery light started flowing toward black runes much faster than compared to when it went straight into the ground.

Damon's head tilted backward, and veins popped on his neck as suppressed growl formed in his throat.

Cassandra swayed her arms up in the air and hummed unintelligible chants, her eyes rolled at the back of her head as she fell into a trance.

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Meg opened the door and after a quick glance, she confirmed that Cassandra was not in the small hallway.



"Crap!", Meg exclaimed angrily when she saw that Cassandra was doing the ritual. "I hope we are not too late..."

Meg was surprised when she saw Talia moving faster than she could follow with her eyes.

Cassandra was chanting and her mouth opened in shock when someone gripped her neck.

"Stop this!", Talia hissed while lifting Cassandra off the ground with one hand.

Cassandra wiggled her legs and tried to break free from Talia's hold. She didn't understand how can such a skinny girl be so strong.

"You can't stop this.", Cassandra struggled to talk. "This is the will of the Moon Goddess. He stepped on the path of darkness and needs to be purified."

Talia turned to see Meg sheepishly observe the stone platform where Damon was lying.

"I read about these.", Meg said while gesturing toward black runes drawn on the ground. "Whoever gets into the circle will be impacted. This is the first time I see such a complex pattern. Normally, they are used to suppress powers, but I think that this is much stronger than that."

Talia's heart clenched when she realized that some of those runes were flickering over Damon's body and he was frowning. Was he in pain?

Talia looked at Cassandra whose face was turning purple now. She flicked her hand and Cassandra plopped on the ground, gasping for air.

"Stop this!", Talia demanded.

"I can't. No one can until it's done. It's the Moon Goddess..."

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"LIES!", Talia screamed and her whole body glowed in silver, making Cassandra and Meg squint.

Cassandra groaned under the pressure that Talia released, feeling like her insides were being squeezed to the point of nearly bursting.

Talia looked up at the skylight that was now showing the Moon fully, the moonlight giving her a power boost. "Do you think that the Moon Goddess will allow for something like this to happen?"

Cassandra stared at Talia like she was growing a second head.

Talia's whole body was illuminated, and even her hair sparkled silvery while flowing behind her without any wind. She looked like a Goddess that descended to Earth.

Talia turned to Damon and started walking while Liseli urged her to hurry. With one thought, all candles around Damon were extinguished. As Talia stepped on a black rune, it disappeared from there with a sizzle.

"Be careful...", Meg said pleadingly. If Talia ended up sucked up in that cruel ritual, they would be doomed. With Talia breaking the circle of black runes, the light stopped flowing toward the black runes and was steadily pulsating toward the ground, but one can't be too careful.

Meg released the breath she was holding when she confirmed that Talia was not affected.

"Come, Damon. It's time to go home...", Talia said while putting her hands under his armpits and lifting him into a seated position.

She remembered how much she struggled to put those shorts on him, yet how she lifted him with ease like he was a child. She wondered if this was the effect of his mark on her. It was invisible, but Talia could feel that it was there.

Talia beckoned Meg to come and give her a hand. Damon was big for her but then... Meg was only slightly taller than Talia. This obviously required team effort.

Meg gingerly approached and took Damon's arm to wrap around her shoulders and they pulled him away from that platform.

Talia held half of Damon's weight on her shoulder, and she turned to Cassandra.

"You speak of the Moon Goddess, yet you don't know her."

Cassandra's chin trembled. Silver strands of light danced around Talia's form, like electricity that could discharge with deadly sparks at any moment.

"The Moon Goddess loves when her children grow strong. Who are you to take that away?"

Cassandra scrambled backward until her back hit the wall. "It was an order from the Alpha."

"Keep telling that to yourself."

"Talia? We should go. Inject her with that stuff.", Meg reminded Talia that they were in a hurry.

"No. I want her to remember.", Talia said sternly and leaned to stare into Cassandra's petrified eyes. "Remember that even when one turns to darkness, there will always be light to lead him to the right path. But if you give in to the darkness and refuse to see the light, no one will save you. No one."

Talia extended her hand and pointed her index finger at Cassandra's forehead.

Cassandra's body flashed in silver for a moment, and then the woman slumped on the ground.

"What did you do?", Cassandra asked Talia shakily.

"I took away your power."

"What? No!" She was waving frantically, but nothing happened. She groaned in frustration and desperation. "Please. I need my power."

Talia smirked. "It will come back if the Moon Goddess finds you worthy. If you tell anyone what you saw here, your powers will never come back." She pointed at the skylight. "The Moon Goddess is watching. Start praying."

Cassandra pushed herself to sit and she prostrated herself while mumbling prayers that only she understood. And maybe the Moon Goddess.

She didn't react when Talia and Meg left the room with Damon in hurry.

"Can you turn off the glowing?", Meg asked Talia in a hushed voice. "Someone will see us from a mile away..."

Talia smiled and rubbed her cheek on Damon's shoulder. She had no idea what awaits them at the end of that hallway, but she was glad that Damon was with her. Talia made a silent vow to never let go of him, no matter what.

Chapter 460 Hideout (1)

Meg lead Talia through numerous twists and turns before the last tunnel narrowed and curved to become an opening between two rocks.

Once Meg and Talia stepped out with Damon between them, they found themselves in the dark lush forest.

"Good that you are out...", Kai called in an urgent whisper while making his way toward them. "Stay low. We don't want to risk being seen."

After giving Meg a quick kiss, Kai got on his knee, and they hoisted Damon for Kai to carry piggyback style.

Talia turned to see from where they emerged. The opening between two rocks looked natural, and if she didn't know that was the entrance to a network of underground tunnels and dwellings, she would just walk by it without noticing it.

She wondered how many such entry points exist. Many, probably.

Talia walked behind Kai and her eyes were trained on Damon's listless body. Her brows came together whenever she saw a black pattern slithering over his skin and she hoped that it was not permanent.

Liseli was growing restless, they had no idea what those runes were doing to Damon, but they could guess it was nothing good. However, this was not the time to act rashly.

'We need to pay attention and not get caught. Everything else will come later. Damon and Sapa are strong. Believe in them...!', Talia coxed her wolf.

Everyone was tense. This was not a game.

Talia looked up to see tall trees with canopies connecting to block the sky completely, deepening the darkness that clung stubbornly as the dawn cracked in the face of the sunrise. Luckily, neither of them had issues with seeing where they were going.

The thick tree trunks were surrounded by bushes with occasional patches of grass and wildflowers that filled the air with a sweet fragrance. Talia spotted numerous rare plants she read about in books that Travis gave her, and it was beautiful, but Talia was not in a mood to appreciate any of that.

Part of Talia feared that this might be another trap. At the same time, she hoped that her instincts were right, that Meg and Kai were trustworthy, that Tyler did his part as expected, and that Axel was not watching all this with his parents like it's a twisted survival show.

On a few occasions, they stopped and listened, and then they would take a sudden turn like they were avoiding something.

Talia lost track of time as they navigated through the dense foliage.

Her anxiety was increasing because Damon was not showing signs of waking up, and his body seemed to twitch unnaturally whenever those black runes flickered on his skin. She wondered how far their destination was, wishing that it was close so that she can check on Damon properly, but also wishing that they keep moving as far as possible from that wretched place where Cassandra tried to harm Damon.

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Eventually, Kai stopped in his tracks. He turned to glance in all directions before ducking between two bushes on his right and his form disappeared together with Damon who was on his back.

Talia followed after him to find herself in a low tunnel that was wide enough for one person to pass without squeezing. Talia was half-bent while walking toward the beam of light ahead.

Eventually, the tunnel widened into a cave that twisted to the right. The cave walls were made of dark rocks with patches of moss, and the light seeped in through the opening that was on the high ceiling.

At the far end, there was a crude bed made of dried grass and leaves and two backpacks. A wide rock was sticking on the right and it had logs of various sizes stacked on it, obviously to build a fire in the circular area where the ground was charred.

Kai groaned while lowering Damon on the bed, and Talia rushed to help him.

As soon as Damon was down, Talia ran her hands over his face, feeling his temperature was high.

"He is burning up." Talia suppressed a sob that was stuck in her throat.

"It's time for the medicine...", Meg said and moved toward one of the two backpacks.

"Is this your place where you come in case of emergency?", Tala asked while looking around, trying to distract herself so that she doesn't start crying in front of Kai and Meg.

Backpacks were there when they arrived, and it was obvious that this cave was used before.

"Axel prepared these. I brought them here.", Kai said. "There is food to last you a week; dried fruits, cheese, and meat mostly." He gestured toward the left. "There, you will find a tunnel that opens to a small area that has a stream; water is safe for drinking. You have wood there and feel free to light a fire if you want." He pointed up at the opening through which daylight seeped in. "This tunnel branches while going up, so smoke will split and won't be visible. There are dry herbs next to the wood, put some in the fire to conceal the scent of smoke."

Meg found what she was looking for, and she said to Talia, "Watch me do it, so you can do it later."

Talia observed as Meg opened a light green bottle and used a syringe to measure the right amount of whitish liquid before injecting it into Damon's bicep.

"This will stabilize him, but for the most part, he needs to endure while absorbing the power.", Kai explained while looking at Damon with eyes full of awe. "This is more than any of us ever received, and the medication is barely working. I can't imagine how powerful he will be when the process is done."

Talia didn't think this was time to admire Damon's strength, as another black rune flashed on the left side of his ribs. "What are those?"

Kai pressed his lips into a line as he realized that they might have a problem. "I'm not sure. Black runes prevent us from using our powers. It's normally used for criminals while on trial or during imprisonment.

However, the runes are drawn around the area where the person is, they don't transfer onto the body like that."

"The pattern Cassandra drew was different from what I saw in books.", Meg said. "These rituals usually require several healers to ensure nothing goes wrong. I don't think Cassandra was just blocking Alpha Damon's powers. I believe that her goal was... more than that."

"I can't believe our Alphas approved. That goes against everything they taught us.", Kai stopped talking abruptly when he saw Talia's expression stiffening in rage.

"Hey...", Meg called softly while putting her hand on Talia's shoulder. "Medicine is keeping him stable which means he will be alright. He only needs time. I'm sorry but we need to go. I'm sure that Alphas know by now that you and Alpha Damon are missing, but they will not start a full-blown search because they want to conceal what happened. However, with the morning coming, people will notice our absence."

Chapter 461 Hideout (2)

Talia suppressed the tsunami of emotions and turned to look at Meg and Kai. "Now what?"

Kai responded, "One of us will come when it's safe to bring you more food and news but be prepared that it might be days. We can't risk someone suspecting that you are here."

"How many people know about this place?", Talia asked.

"It's me, Meg, Tyler, and Axel. We found this place years ago and would come here occasionally to hang out. It was like our hideout. Meg and I use this place when we want solitude during a run." His eyes shifted to Meg who smiled at him as they remembered some frisky scenes.

Kai cleared his throat and continued talking to Talia, "I never picked up any other scent. But just in case... stay here in the back. Alphas won't alert everyone of your absence, but someone will be searching."

Talia didn't know the details, but she was aware that Meg and Kai were knowingly working against their Alphas, which meant against their pack.



A sliver of doubt shot through her mind. Why were they risking so much for her and Damon? Was it just because she helped Meg once or was there more to it?

In any case... "Thank you.", Talia said to Kai and Meg.

Kai's expression hardened. "Thank us when we get you out of here. Until then, sit tight."

"If we get out of here, then what?", Talia asked dejectedly. Will Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia allow them to just be?

"WHEN you get out of here, you will be safe.", Kai said with confidence. "Our primary directive is to conceal our powers. No one will go after you if that means risking exposure. Since both you and Alpha Damon have abilities, you should not use them openly in order to avoid being hunted. There are people who will do anything to get ahold of your powers, use them for their benefit, or maybe dissect you in the hope to replicate them. Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia will count on that fear to keep you in check, and they will leave you alone."

"How can you be so sure?", Talia asked.

"I heard rumors about people who left.", Kai said. "We are warned about dangers, and Alphas are controlling who can get in and out of our territory. However, no one went after those few that sneaked out. Both you and Alpha Damon are high-profile individuals. Going against you would attract attention and we don't want that."

Talia knew that Kai was giving her a pep talk. It sounded good, but even though an open confrontation was not an option, secret plots were definitely a possibility.

"Don't lose hope.", Meg said to Talia seriously. "This is temporary. Alphas will be looking at the portal because Tyler left traces in that direction and rubbed your clothes to leave your scent. Alphas will assume that you left. We will find a way to get you out. Until then, try to rest and stay close to Alpha Damon. Your proximity will help him recover."

After saying the last few words of caution and encouragement, Meg and Kai left the cave and Talia found herself in silence that was disturbed by faint trickling sounds she guessed was a small stream of water Kai mentioned.

She released a long breath and looked at Damon who seemed to be in deep peaceful sleep. Medicine was working, and that allowed Talia to relax a bit.

A black rune flashed on his right shoulder, looking like a tattoo, and Talia remembered a hot afternoon on the beach when silly Alpha asked her to draw something on him with a permanent marker. His smile was brighter than the sun while she doodled a bird that turned ugly, yet Damon wanted to make a tattoo out of it because he thought that she likes them.

"Silly man...", Talia said and released a shaky breath while pushing an unruly strand of raven black hair from his forehead. "It's not about the tattoo. It was never about anything other than you."

A tear rolled down her cheek. Kai and Meg didn't tell her, but she knew that Damon might be crippled, they had no idea if he will wake up, he was tortured, and it was all her fault.

The strong, cheeky, caring, and overbearing Alpha was now unconscious, and the only thing she could do was wait and hope for the best.

Her body shook as the anxiety, fear, dejection, and anger rolled through her in waves, threatening to unhinge her.

She suppressed her urge to go back there and crush this whole damned place into smithereens.

Would she have enough power to do that? Will they catch her and put some restrictions on her before she can make real damage? But even if she has an infinite amount of power and no one stops her from wreaking havoc, it won't change the fact that Damon was like that because she marked him and because she made wrong decisions. What kind of Luna puts her mate in danger?

Talia released a slow breath while telling herself that the only thing that matters is Damon, and everything else will need to wait.

She laid next to Damon on the crude bed and snuggled close, hoping that her proximity will help him snap out of it.

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The sparks that prickled her skin where they touched told her that Damon was there, alive, and she inhaled his scent that reminded her of her favorite things: forest, dark chocolate, and Damon.

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"Kitten...", a familiar deep voice called and Talia's heart swelled at the sight of icy-blue eyes that looked at her with endless love.

"I really want to kiss you, but I fear that you won't like it. I fear that you will reject me. Tell me, kitten, can I kiss you?"

Her insides melted. He was so gentle and caring and nervous, and she loved him more. How can she deny him the kiss?

Before their lips connected, they were on the bed and he was pressing her hand against his bare chest.

"There. You will get used to touching me in no time."

Talia smiled at the cheeky Alpha. "Why would I get used to it?"

His lopsided smile made her heart flip. "Your memory is flaky, Mrs. Blake. As my wife, I expect you to touch me. Everywhere."

Before she could respond, the scene changed, and she ended up squatting next to the tub and washing Damon who was relaxing in the bubble bath.

"You like this, don't you, kitten?"

"No.", she lied. "Why would I like serving you?"

"Serving me? This is your punishment, not a job. If you see it as a job, I should increase difficulty..."

He yanked her hand and she fell into the tub where he was. Talia's heart rate increased. Not because of the sudden movement and intimacy, but because she knew that after this, he will remove her bra, and they will watch fireworks, and then... then he will carry her to bed and they will make love... for the first time.

Every time with Damon was like the first time.

Talia opened her eyes to find herself in a dark cave. Why was she wet?

It took her a few seconds to realize where she was and why, and that the wet sensation was from Damon who was drenched in sweat.

Talia scrambled to get the medicine. Meg told her that they are already overdosing him, so there was no set time when she should inject him with medicine, but to observe his condition. Damon's body was burning, and he was sweating profusely, so this was definitely the time.

Talia cursed herself. Why did she fall asleep?

With shaky hands, she opened the bottle, filled the syringe, and administered the injection.

After keeping the things aside, she sat next to Damon and stroked his forehead while smiling sadly at the thought of her dream. It was their first kiss, their first intimate moments. He was always caring and intense and he put her first.

Talia pressed her lips into a line and steeled her resolve while wiping the tears with the back of her palms. She wanted to be useful. She wanted to do whatever she could to help him.

Talia tore a corner of the blanket and went to find that stream of water. She will start by washing Damon's body. It might not be much, but it will be something.

Chapter 462 The silent emergency (1)

"Are you sure you had nothing to do with Alpha Damon's disappearance?", Alpha Isaac asked Axel sternly.

Axel thought it was interesting that his parents were only concerned about Damon. What about Talia? They definitely knew she was also missing. Did they think Talia was not important?

Axel looked to the side to see his mother.

Alpha Sophia was staring out of the window absentmindedly, but the silver light in her eyes was a giveaway of her using the ability to search for Damon and Talia; sweeping through the hallways, rooms, and forest with the goal to spot them.

"I was with mom. And just in case you forgot, you were there also.", Axel gave the same answer for the third time.

Alpha Isaac narrowed his eyes at Axel. "Don't play with me. I didn't ask you if you were with Alpha Damon. I asked you if you had something to do with it. Why were you with Sophia in the middle of the night?"

"I didn't think it was right to use black runes on Alpha Damon. I hoped we can find another solution, and since you told Cassandra to start right away, I didn't think that waiting for the morning was wise. I wanted to talk. I wanted to understand. I wanted..."

"The truth!", Alpha Isaac cut him off angrily.

Axel pressed his lips into a line. "It seems you are determined that I had something to do with it. Did you see me or any of my people on the security feed near that area?"

Alpha Isaac glared at Axel. "Cameras don't show anything, but that's the strange part. How did Talia and Alpha Damon leave without any camera catching them?"

Axel relaxed a bit. Tyler told him that he can alter security videos, and unless someone knows what to look for, the changes won't be detected. Alpha Isaac's displeasure about the lack of evidence confirmed to Axel that the operation was successful. Tyler will be an excellent Gamma.

"If you have no evidence, why are you on my case? I should be the least suspect because my abilities didn't awaken, and I was with mom for nearly two hours before the anomaly was reported." Axel made a thoughtful expression. "Or did Cassandra say something? She was incompetent and she decided to shift the blame on me because she witnessed me challenging your decision to use black runes. Is that the case?"

"She is not saying anything.", Alpha Isaac said and shoved a hand into his hair.

"Then why are you here accusing me? Make her talk."

Alpha Isaac shook his head. "She said it was the Moon Goddess."

Axel blinked, looking genuinely surprised. "The Moon Goddess made them disappear? And you believe that?"

"Of course, not!"

Axel snorted. "Now I see why you are on my case. Cassandra's story doesn't make sense, so you decided that I did something."

Alpha Isaac knew that Axel's argument was valid, but he also had a point. "Only the four of us knew what was about to happen. The timing of Alpha Damon's disappearance is too convenient to be accidental."

Axel frowned at this father. "So, it's not you nor mother. Which leaves me and Cassandra. Considering that you are accusing me instead of her tells me all I need to know about where your trust is. Cassandra didn't accuse me, but you are."

"Listen, Axel. This is important. Did you tell anyone about Cassandra using black runes on Alpha Damon?"

"To whom would I talk about it? After we parted, I went to my room, but my nerves were acting out and I couldn't sleep so I went to seek my mother. I told you that already. Why are we having this conversation? Cassandra was right there when it happened. Force her to tell the truth. Or do you believe it was the Moon Goddess?", Axel said mockingly and when Alpha Isaac's expression didn't change, Axel looked at him in disbelief.

"You actually believe Cassandra's story. But you know that's impossible."

"I know it sounds crazy but...", Alpha Isaac paused.

"But?"

"Alpha Damon and Talia are missing. Nothing is disturbed, it's like they disappeared into thin air. As for Cassandra, she lost her powers."

Axel's expression was a pure shock as he processed this information.

Didn't they agree that Meg will make a mess? The commotion would distract Cassandra long enough for Talia to inject her with the potion that causes short-term memory loss. How did they pull it off without disturbing anything? And there was the point, "Did you say that Cassandra has no powers?"

Alpha Isaac confirmed. "She has no powers. I checked."

They stood in silence for some time and Axel remembered the scene of Talia healing his father's arm. Her healing ability was top-notch, but even with that, he had a feeling that was not the only thing she could do.

Does she have the ability to strip others of their powers? If she can do that, Talia will definitely become a target of the ones with powers, and the ones who seek them, which was nearly everyone.

Talia definitely helped Meg that time in the car. Kai and Meg didn't tell him details, but both of them said how they owe Talia, and considering that Meg was stable during their ride, Axel could conclude with certainty that Talia is the one he should thank for keeping their secrets from outsiders.

He thought how it's ironic that instead of thanking her, his parents are set on catching her, and then... Axel didn't know what the plan was. Did they want to imprison her? Use Alpha Damon as a bargaining chip to force Talia into obedience? And if Axel's hunch that Talia is his sister was correct, this whole thing would become morbidly disturbing because his parents would definitely know who Talia truly is.

"Is Cassandra OK?", Axel asked, hoping to probe for more information.

"How can she be OK? She is praying constantly, saying how her faith in the Moon Goddess was corrupted and that only by praying she can get her powers back."

Axel had no clue what exactly happened, but the fact that his father was grilling him in the study, meant that Talia and Damon were really out, hopefully safe.

Axel thought of reminding his father about one thing everyone conveniently forgot. "You know that this confirms my theory. This is not about Alpha Damon. This is about Talia. She IS the girl from the prophecy."

Alpha Isaac's eyes flashed. Was it anger? Dejection? Axel wasn't sure.

"So now you believe that Moon Goddess came for her?", Alpha Isaac asked.



"Would you rather go with the theory of how I sneaked them out of here while I was with mother?", Axel asked flatly. "Talía is the child blessed by the Moon Goddess. By harming Damon, we would harm Talía, and the Moon Goddess couldn't allow it. That's why they disappeared. It's either that or they didn't leave the center at all. Talía went to the cafeteria several times. Maybe she spotted a storage room or an air vent where they could hide. I assume that you have people looking for them. How can I help?"

"You want to help?", Alpha Isaac asked suspiciously.

Axel nodded seriously. "Regardless of how I feel about the methods used, this concerns the safety of our pack. Once we catch them, we can see to mend our relationship with Talía. If she joins our pack willingly, we can only prosper."

Chapter 463 The silent emergency (2)

Axel saw that his father's expression stiffened at the mention of Talía cooperating. Considering what happened, chances of that were close to nil, but he didn't want to sound like Talía was a danger to their pack.

"I know Talía. She is a kind person, and I'm sure we can come to an agreement. But before that, we need to find them. Do we know if they are still here? Assuming that they managed to sneak out, they will be heading for the portal."

"Unless someone told them about the portal, they wouldn't know where to go. They were both unconscious when we brought them here." Alpha Isaac reminded them.

Axel cringed at his father's words. They said to Talía that she will be only blindfolded, but then they injected her with drugs. It was to conceal the location of the portal, but also to conceal his father's ability because Alpha Isaac can teleport not only himself but anyone else he touches. That's how they found themselves close to the portal within minutes, and then Alpha Isaac and Axel carried Talía and Alpha Damon through it before teleporting to the healing center where Cassandra joined them.

However, Axel truly believed that Talía could find her way if she wanted to.

"Talía is the child from the prophecy. She is under the protection of the Moon Goddess, and the Moon Goddess showed them the way."

"Do you really think that's possible?", Alpha Isaac asked skeptically.

Axel shrugged. "I'm sure that you saw many things you can't explain. Alpha Damon and Talia disappeared. I wouldn't reject the possibility of Talia having a way to conceal their presence and find a way out of here. If you want to find them, you will need as many people as possible without alerting the whole pack that we lost Alpha Damon and his mate. If our people knew this, they will start asking questions."

"There is no need for you to act, Axel. Our best trackers are out there."

Axel didn't like this. "You told our trackers? The news will spread."

"They don't know who they are looking for. I only gave them scents and that they are looking for a male and a female who got lost. Their instructions are to not engage and to notify me immediately when they find them."

Axel nodded in understanding. He really wanted to join the search party. That would give him the opportunity to move with an excuse that he is looking for Talia and Damon, and maybe check on them. But he didn't want to insist because he would normally stay out of such things.

"Alright. I guess we all had a long night. I will grab breakfast and catch up on my sleep. Let me know if I can help."

"Axel", Alpha Isaac called. "Don't talk about this with anyone."

"Of course.", Axel responded, and with that, he left the study.

Alpha Isaac looked at the door and his frown was deepening by the second.

His instincts told him that Axel had something to do with this, but he couldn't do anything without evidence.

Alpha Isaac checked on Tyler and Kai. Based on security feeds, Tyler and Kai stayed in their rooms the whole night.

Was it really the Moon Goddess? He was not sure, but he knew that they let down Talia as a child, and now they did it again. Axel was optimistic in thinking that they can mend their relationship with Talia. Even if she was not aware of what happened two decades ago, she definitely knew that something was off this time. Why else would she go missing?

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Axel went to the cafeteria to find Tyler, Kai, and Meg at the table. It was time for breakfast.

Tyler was mostly pushing food on his plate, and Kai was feeding Meg and himself.

They all ate in silence while thinking about how to convey the messages without anyone figuring out what they were up to. They were surrounded by people who had excellent hearing. Also, with Alpha Sophia's ability to see things, and Alphas being able to eavesdrop on mind-links, it was difficult to keep anything a secret. Someone was always watching.

"Are you alright?", Tyler asked Axel. "You look like you didn't sleep much."

"Alpha problems.", Axel responded. "There was a commotion last night. My parents are monitoring the situation, but so far there is nothing."

Tyler, Kai, and Meg collectively exhaled in relief at this news.

"If Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia say that there is nothing, then there is definitely nothing.", Kai said. "We are in capable hands."

The four people at the table exchanged meaningful glances and they all relaxed as they shared an understanding that things went fine. They accomplished their tasks without getting caught. For now.

Meg looked around. "I overslept this morning and I thought that Talia will come for breakfast. Should I go and check on her?"

Axel stiffened at the mentioning of Talia, but then he understood that it would be unusual if they just ignored her absence. "Talia also had a long night. I'm sure she is resting. I will send food to her room later."

"Poor girl.", Meg said. "I will ask her if she wants to join me for a stroll later. Some change of scenery will do her good."

"We are prohibited from going out for runs until further notice.", Tyler said, getting everyone's attention. "The word is that someone disturbed bears who were getting ready to hibernate, so we need to give them a few days of peace to settle down and nature returns to normal. You didn't know this?"

"Well, we know now.", Kai said. He and Meg closed off their mind-links in order to avoid detection until they returned home, so they missed the announcement.

Axel also missed it because he was being interrogated by his father.

They all knew this was just a coverup for people to stay inside so that scents don't mix, as selected soldiers are outside searching.

Axel rubbed his forehead while thinking that this is not good. The order that restricts movements will last until they find their target or give up, and that can take a while. He felt the urgency to become part of the search teams, but how can he do that without arousing suspicion? He decided to think about it later. A full stomach and rest will allow him to think better. After all, Talia and Damon have provisions for at least a week, so he shouldn't act rashly.

Axel wondered, how many of the previous restricted movement orders were just a coverup for silent emergencies like this one?

This was the first time for them to have visitors like Talia and Damon, but every once in a while, an unmated member would lose patience and make a run for the portal in the hope to find his other half in the outside world. Alphas were very strict on who can go out.

This whole realm was beautiful, and they had everything they would need, but in the end, it was just a jail that kept them from finding their mates.

Axel and Tyler were also getting twitchy. They were both in their twenties, able to identify their mates, as long as they get close to them.

Now that Kai found Meg, they could see what they were missing, and Kai teasing them about how he is the only man among them because he did the deed with Meg (many times), was not helping.

Chapter 464 Forgotten and abandoned

Talia's eyes snapped open when she felt movement next to her.

Did she fall asleep again? Was this a dream?

She was drifting in and out of restless sleep while looking after Damon, and it took her some time to confirm she was awake.

Talia blinked to see up. It was daylight. She had no idea how much time passed, but she knew that she wiped Damon's body repeatedly and she lost count of how many times she administered the medicine.

A low groan by her side got her attention.

"Damon?", Talia called breathlessly. This groan didn't sound like a pain, but it was what that lazy one Damon makes when he is waking up. Was this really happening?

"Damon?", she called again while getting on her knees next to him so she can see his face better.

His lashes fluttered and she cupped his cheeks. "Damon...", her voice was shaky and overwhelmed with emotions.

His eyes opened slowly, and he looked around in confusion.

She patiently waited for him to focus on her.

Their eyes met, and his brows furrowed.

"What...?" His question was cut short when he coughed.

"It's OK, Damon. Take it slowly.", Talia said with haste, her eyes brimming with tears that threatened to fall. "After marking, you didn't wake up. I panicked when you got a fever and I called Axel. We are in the Midnight Guardians pack but instead of helping you they tried to..."

"Who are you?"

Talia gaped at Damon. His words were like someone poured a bucket of icy water on her. "Are you serious?"

He shook his head while frowning at her palms that were touching him and then he shoved her away.

Talia didn't expect this, and she fell on her butt with a thud.

"Damon?"

He pushed himself into a seated position and observed the cave. "Where is this? Who are you? What did you do to me? Why can't I remember how I got here?" How long was he out? His memories of the last few weeks (or was it months?) were choppy like he was missing something important, and it left him unsettled.

Talia's stomach dropped when she realized that Damon was serious. "I told you. We are in the Midnight Guardians pack. I am Talia. Don't you remember me?"

He stood up and swayed. Talia swiftly got by his side to support him, but before she could reach him, he pushed her back with so much force that she made a few steps before losing her balance.

She landed on her butt again and cried, "Aww!" This one hurt.

"What did you do to me?", Damon asked through his teeth angrily.

Talia's eyes brimmed with tears again, from the pain in her behind and from her aching heart.

Was he joking? It would be a cruel joke. How was it possible that he doesn't remember her?

'His neck!', Liseli spoke in Talia's mind and Talia spotted a black rune on the left side of his neck.

"Damon...", Talia spoke in a shaky voice. "I brought you here to help you, but instead, the oracle cast a spell that made it worse."

Damon sneered. "Oracle? You expect me to believe that?"

"Why would I lie?"

"Maybe because you are one of those leeches who want to be my Luna."

"But...", she wanted to say how she is more than his Luna. They are mates! Can't he feel the bond?

'I think the rune is blocking the bond, Talia. I can feel the bond, but it's weakened, and I have a feeling that Damon doesn't feel it at all. When that is clubbed with him not remembering who you are, it's normal that he doesn't trust you.'

'What about Sapa?'

'It's like he is sealed somewhere, alive, but I can't reach him. I can feel his power in Damon.'

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Talia's heart ached like a barbwire tightened around it. "Damon, please..."

"Please, what? Do you expect me to believe you have good intentions when you are keeping me in a place like this? Did you enjoy touching me while I was unconscious? Remember that feeling because it will not happen. You are lucky I won't tear your limbs off but if you try to get close to me again, I might change my mind about it."

Talia clenched her teeth and stumbled to her feet. Her butt really hurt, but she endured because she didn't want to look at him from the ground.

She lifted her hands toward him, gesturing for him to be patient. "Damon, do you really don't remember anything? You found me in the Red Moon pack, and brought me home. We are mates. We..."

Damon snorted. "Mates? You must be joking. If you thought that crazy story will work, think again. Since you are saying nothing by lies, there is no point in me lingering."

Talia gaped at Damon as he turned toward the exit and started walking.

"Wait!", she shouted, but he didn't listen.

Talia tried using her aura to suppress him, but it had no effect. Damn! Mates can't hurt each other!

"You can't go out there!", Talia shouted desperately. "Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia are looking for us and they don't have good intentions! Please! Let me explain! ARGH!"

Talia limped after him, with every painful step cursing him and his nasty attitude.

Overbearing! Stupid! Stubborn! Blockhead!



'Stop, Talia.', Liseli spoke in her head. 'Let him go. You can't catch up to him like this and you are making your injury worse. Let me heal you first. Your tail bone is fractured.'

With a frustrated exhale and a few more curses, Talia gave up.

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Talia laid on the bed that Damon vacated and turned to find a comfortable position while Liseli healed her.

Talia took a deep breath, Damon's scent was still fresh and it filled her lungs. Just a minute ago she was hopeful when she realized that he was waking up, and now... there was a lot of uncertainty.

Tears rolled down her cheeks at the flashback of Damon looking at her like she was a stranger, and pushing her away.

How the hell did that happen? What's the point of going after him if he doesn't remember her?

'You are right.', Liseli said. 'There is no point in going after him. The rune did something, and unless we can reverse it, we will only anger him further if we insist.'

'So, what do you suggest?', Talia asked dejectedly, and she choked on her sobs.

'Why are you crying?', Liseli grumbled but she was sad as well.

'Damon said that he will never leave me. He said if we are ever apart, he will turn heaven and earth to find me and he will never give up. He said that only a few days ago, yet he left already. He left on his own, abandoned me. I am dying, Liseli.'

'Don't go there. This is just a spell, every spell has a way to reverse it. We only need to find a way to fix it.'

Talia was clueless about spells and runes and whatever Cassandra did. 'What if we don't find it?'

'Don't give up without trying.'

'I'm not sure how much you witnessed from my past, but I will remind you that Damon is my rock. I can do anything with Damon by my side, and without him, I am just a scared girl who hides in the attic. How can I fix this when even your power doesn't reach him?'

'Listen... We will find a way. There must be a way. My mother didn't send me back only to see Sapa leave me. She wouldn't do that.'

Talia snorted. 'You really have faith in a person who tortured you for centuries by keeping you away from your other half while showing you images of him moving on.'

Liseli whimpered. 'That was then, and this is now. I am not stuck in a different dimension. Sapa is right here, in my reach, and I will be damned if I don't do everything in my power to get him back. There is only one question, Talia. Do you want your mate back?'

'Yes.', Talia responded without missing a beat.

'Then, our path is decided...'

Chapter 465 Meeting with the Alphas of the Midnight Guardians pack

Damon walked out of the cave and found himself in a dense forest.

Trees, plants, scents... everything was unknown. This was not the Dark Howlers' territory.

Damon didn't remember the girl he left behind in the cave, and even though her expression seemed sincere, maybe she was just a good actress. He always hated when women cry, like that will solve anything.

She spoke like they had some history together, but he couldn't remember. And who would believe the nonsense that they are mates? Shouldn't there be attraction and sparks and his wolf should confirm that they are mates? There was none of that.

'Old guy!', Damon called, but he got nothing in response. Useless wolf, showing up only when he feels like it.

Damon frowned at the narrow entrance from where he emerged. He was born for the forest and freedom, but this was not his forest.

Was this really the territory of the Midnight Guardians pack?

He pursed his lips while thinking about his options.

It is known that members of the Midnight Guardians pack are not kind to intruders, and if that girl brought him to the cave, they were definitely not welcome here. Who knows how many people conspired with that girl to keep him stuck in a cave? Why would they do that? Is this some ploy to keep him away from his pack while they attack the Dark Howlers pack?

His skin crawled in need to go home.

Damon remembered the intelligence documents that spoke of a portal that separates the territory of the Midnight Guardians pack from the rest of the world. That portal is the reason why no one knows exactly their location and size. As much as this was a good opportunity to scout and gather information, he had no idea how long that girl held him there, and if he was away for more than a few days, the Dark Howlers pack might be in danger.

But how could he leave? Should he go back and ask that girl for directions?

He rejected the idea. There was no guarantee she would tell him the truth, and he didn't want to deal with a weeping woman.

He thought of something. A portal would cause disturbance in the energies and if Damon taps into his wolf's powers, he might be able to sense the location of the exit.

It took him only a few seconds to look to his right, and then he moved stealthily that way.

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Axel rushed toward his father's study.

Since Talia and Damon escaped, Axel was mostly in his room, listening to various mind-links in the hope to get some information. There was nothing. He also checked on Cassandra, but she was only praying and avoiding all other duties. Her helpers believed that she was on the verge of some epiphany or developing a new way to strengthen one's soul, but Axel knew that this was Cassandra grasping the straws in the hope to regain her powers.

Three days. For three days, there was nothing, and now Axel overheard that a young woman was brought in, wanting to talk to Alphas. Was that Talia? If it was, then, where was Damon? Or did something horrible happen to him and Talia came to seek revenge while disregarding her safety?

His stomach dropped at the sight of two warriors standing at the door. They never guard this place.

"Are my parents inside?", Axel asked warriors.

Both warriors nodded in unison, and one said, "I apologize, future Alpha Axel, but our orders are that no one should disturb them."

Axel lifted his chin proudly. "I am the future Alpha. If they have any problems with me coming, I will handle it. Now move aside."

Axel didn't have his powers, but he had his Alpha aura and a helluva lot of pride.

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After a moment of hesitation, two warriors moved to make way, and Axel put his hand on the handle while silently praying that Talia was not inside.

"Talia", Axel called in disbelief when he saw the familiar face. She was sitting on the sofa, with Alpha Sophia and Alpha Isaac facing her from the sofa chairs, their backs facing the door.

Axel moved swiftly to sit by her side. "Are you alright? Where is Damon?"

Talia shook her head. "I don't know where he is. I came here because I want to talk to Cassandra. I need to know about black runes."

"Nothing good comes out of black magic.", Alpha Sophia said, and she groaned when Talia cocked an eyebrow at her.

"They refuse to summon the oracle.", Talia said. "I would rather not harm them, but if they don't cooperate..."

"I will get her.", Axel said with urgency.

He had no idea how Talia can harm two Alphas, but his parents were sitting there and not moving even after Talia's threat. Normally, his parents would blow a fuse at this provocation, but now they just sat there obediently.

At first, Axel thought that their stern expressions were because they were angry, but now he had a feeling that their displeasure is because they can't get up. What exactly are Talia's powers?

Actually, even Talia was not aware of the power boost she got after Damon marked her. Talia was stronger and faster, and her aura became almost tangible.

For this operation, Liseli told Talia to focus on interrogation and that Liseli will make sure those two can't move without breaking any bones unless it was necessary.

"You will do no such thing!", Alpha Isaac squeezed through his teeth at Axel. "She is keeping us hostage! Will you give in?"

Alpha Isaac was furious. Talia just appeared and demanded to talk to Alphas, so warriors brought her there thinking that she is the esteemed guest from outside. They saw her in the cafeteria with Axel, so they didn't suspect anything.

Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia didn't alert anyone that Talia is a fugitive, so it backfired on them. They saw Talia as an ignorant girl, and they were confident that they can talk her into giving up on Damon's location. Who would have known that Talia could use her aura to suppress them to the point of their limbs not reacting? Alpha Isaac tried teleporting, but even that didn't work. Did she drug them?

"Father", Axel said sternly. "Don't you want answers? Cassandra has them. You said that she is not willing to talk to us, but maybe she will talk to Talia."

Before Alpha Isaac could object, Axel's eyes lost focus for a moment as he mind-linked Cassandra, 'Come to the main study. Alphas need you.'

'I am praying. Is it urgent?', Cassandra responded.

'This is related to the Moon Goddess.'

'I will be there in a minute.'

Axel's lips lifted into a smile. "She is coming." He turned to Talia. "About Damon..."

Talia shook her head. "I really don't know where he is. He woke up and left."

Axel blinked. "He left you behind?"

Talia's chin shivered. "He doesn't know who I am, Axel. Runes did something to him and he is not himself anymore." And Sapa was not reachable either.

Alpha Sophia bolted to her feet. With Talia (and Liseli) being distracted, she found that she can move.

"SIT!", Talia said through her teeth and Alpha Sophia plopped back into the sofa chair, like someone yanked her there with force.

Chapter 466 Family's secrets (1)

Axel was not sure what to think about Talia's words. "What do you mean, Alpha Damon doesn't know who you are? You are his mate. Even if his head is muddled, the bond should force him to recognize you."

"I don't know, Axel. When he came around, he looked at me like I'm a stranger. I could feel the bond, but it seems he can't. I need to know what those black runes do. I need to fix him."

"I understand.", Axel responded.

"Why are you helping her?", Alpha Isaac asked. "Were you the one hiding them until now?"

Axel ignored the second question. "What do you think I should do? Do you want me to knock her out? Or cripple her? She came to us for help. She trusted us, yet we..."

"Don't you see that she is harming us?", Alpha Sophia asked. "We are your parents!"

Axel hissed at these words. "I see that you are just fine. As for parents..."

Both Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia glared at Axel, wondering what he will say next, but then there was a knock on the door and Cassandra appeared.

Cassandra's eyes flashed when she saw Talia and she bowed quickly while moving toward Talia, and then she prostrated herself next to the coffee table.

"Stand up.", Talia said stiffly. This was all too theatrical. "I need you to tell me about the ritual you performed on Damon. Tell me about the black runes. I need to know everything."

"Yes, yes.", Cassandra said. But she didn't get up completely as she remained sitting on her knees. "The black runes are recorded in ancient books that are passed through generations. We use them to restrict magic and to punish prisoners..."

Talia listened to Cassandra's explanation, but it sounded like she was talking about how to use a weapon without understanding how it works.

"The ancient books about black runes. Where are they?", Talia asked.

"I will bring them. If you allow me to."

Talia waved at Cassandra to get going. "Get all of them."

With Cassandra hurrying out of the study, the four people were left in silence.

Axel reached for Talia's hand and gave her a squeeze. He wanted to pull her into a hug and tell her that things will be alright, but he didn't know if she will be fine with hugging, and he definitely didn't know if things will be alright. He felt so helpless, and he hated it.

"Why are you so docile with her? Is that how a future Alpha behaves when his parents are in danger?", Alpha Isaac asked Axel.



"If the two of you ended up like that, what can one small me do? Should I attack her and end up stuck like the two of you? Besides, I told you that I didn't approve of what you were doing. I am determined to make this right. Since when are we harming people who come to us for help? And they are not random wanderers; they have powers, our powers. That makes them our people. It's our duty to take care of them.", Axel was heating up. What his parents did contradicted everything they taught him so far.

"How can you ignore what she is doing to us? We are your parents!", Alpha Sophia hissed.

"Are you?"

Alpha Sophia was shocked. "Are you denouncing us?"

"No. Your blood flows in my veins. My question was, are you ONLY my parents?", Axel asked and looked at Talia.

Talia could see that Axel gave her a meaningful gaze. "Should that mean something to me?"

"Axel! No!", Alpha Isaac shouted.

Talia looked at three people in the room and then focused on Axel. "If there is something you want to say, just say it." She was not in the mood for solving riddles.

Axel released a long breath. "Talia, I believe I am your brother."

Talia gaped at Axel. Did she hear him right?

She looked at Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia who both visibly paled.

It can't be true, Talia told herself.

She spent years suffering and wishing for her parents to come for her, wishing that her presence in the Red Moon pack was a big misunderstanding. Someone kidnapped her. Or maybe her parents were poor, and they didn't have the resources to come and get her. Or maybe they were dead. Or maybe... anything other than her parents being Alphas who took away Damon from her, the only man who looked at her like she was important.

Talia refused to accept this. She laughed weakly. "What are you saying, Axel? I appreciate you wanting to lighten up the mood, but this is not the time for jokes."

"I am not joking, Talia. The moment I met you, there was a sense of familiarity. When I realized you have powers, I confirmed that you belong to the Midnight Guardians pack. And then your aura... it's definitely Alpha aura, the strongest one I felt. And eyes... don't you see that we have the same eyes? Based on all that, there are only two Alphas who could be your parents, and they are in this room. So either one of my parents cheated and you are the result of that affair, or we are sitting with both of our parents right now."

Talia didn't dare to turn and look at Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia, fearing that she might blow up in rage or maybe dissolve into tears. None was good because this was about Damon, and she needed to keep her head cool.

"Hear me out.", Axel said. "There is a prophecy. The Moon Goddess descended on Earth to bless a newborn with unimaginable powers. The prophecy continues to warn that whoever knows about the child's true nature, will be consumed by greed and bring calamity."

"And you think that's me?", Talia asked.

'It is you, Talia.', Liseli spoke into Talia's head. 'Selena's blessing was making me your wolf.'

'Did you know about this?'

'No. But it makes sense. They probably saw moon rays and interpreted them as Selena descending. But it was me merging with you.'

"I believe it's you.", Axel spoke this time.

Talia now turned to look at two Alphas who stared at her with shock and regret. Did they regret that she grew up away from them, or that she found out about this?

Images of her being neglected and abused flashed in Talia's mind, and she couldn't imagine that any parent would leave their child to such a fate. And these were not just any parents, they were Alphas, in charge of a pack and their actions would impact many. If they would neglect their child like that, how are they taking care of others?

"Assuming you are right. How did I end up in the Red Moon pack?", Talia asked Axel.

"I can't be sure, but my guess is that they believed they are protecting the pack. If your powers will bring calamity, the safest thing would be not to awaken them."

Chapter 467 Family's secrets (2)

"There is a possibility for you to not awaken your powers?", Talia asked.

Axel licked his lips and shifted in his seat before explaining, "Our powers awaken only after we give ourselves mind and body to our fated mate. If it's anyone else, we will be normal werewolves for the rest of our lives."

Talia's eyes flashed in understanding. "Is that why you practice celibacy?"

"Yes.", Axel confirmed, and his cheeks turned crimson. Somehow, discussing this with Talia made him uncomfortable. Isn't she his sister? That topic was NOT appropriate.

Talia's eyes darted randomly as she tried to connect the pieces, and Axel continued talking.

"In order to avoid the calamity from the prophecy, they wanted to prevent you from awakening your powers. By removing you from the Midnight Guardians pack, you wouldn't know about the importance of saving yourself for your mate, and then you will be harmless."

It was Talia's turn to blush. "But... Damon is my mate."

"Exactly. So, you can say that their plan failed." He turned to look at his parents. "Did I miss anything? Am I right? Is Talia my sister? Say something!", he ended with a shout.

Talia put her hand on Axel's forearm to get his attention. "Don't."

"Don't you want to know what exactly happened?"

"It won't change anything.", Talia said, surprised at how calm she was about this. Maybe because Axel was angry for both of them, or maybe because this thing with Damon drained her emotionally. In any case, Axel's concern was genuine, and it warmed her heart.

"I will rather think that my parents died or that they were incapable of protecting me than to confirm I was unwanted and discarded. If you think of me as your sister, I will think of you as my brother. And that's enough."

Axel's brows came together in a frown as his heart cracked. "I wouldn't be so forgiving if I was you, but... thank you."

And then he moved closer and pulled her into a hug. This time, he had a strong feeling that Talia will need a hug, and he needed one as well.

Axel was aware that he was at the turning point. He openly acted against his parents, and he had no idea how they will retaliate or how this will affect the Midnight Guardians pack, but his heart was beating steadily because he believed this was the right thing to do.

Talia's arms moved gingerly around Axel. It was the first time for her to hug a man other than Damon, but it didn't feel awkward. Maybe Axel was her brother for real.

'Is this true?', Talia asked Liseli. 'Are they my parents?'

'I don't know.', Liseli responded. 'I spent the first few years of your life in hibernation, adjusting to being part of a human, so... I'm sorry, Talia. The first memories of us together I have, are from the Red Moon pack.'

'It's OK. I am glad to have you.'

'Same here, kid.'

Talia allowed herself to rest on Axel. Somehow, his presence made her safe and she needed that strength.

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The door opened and Cassandra walked in carrying two scrolls and one leather-bound book that was faded.

"This is all of it.", Cassandra said, and Talia beckoned her to come closer and put what she got on the long coffee table.

Talia looked at the scrolls first. Runes, diagrams, and some notes in an ancient language she didn't understand.

"What does this say?", Talia asked.

Cassandra started pointing and explaining, "This one is about the arrangement of runes in order to prevent the power of the Moon from being used..."

They took their time going through each note and picture, but it didn't take long for Talia to realize that this wasn't helpful. It was like a manual on how to use the runes, but it didn't explain their nature,

Cassandra didn't know what half of the runes symbolize, and there was definitely no information on how to reverse the negative effects.

Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia sat there without moving a muscle, and Axel was not sure if they were ashamed to say anything because he exposed them in front of Talia, or maybe Talia was pinning them down somehow.

"Is there such a thing as white runes to negate these?", Talia asked Cassandra.

Cassandra shook her head. "Black magic doesn't have a failsafe." She thought for a moment before talking again. "Every magic is effective only while cast. These runes work while the person is in the circle."

"But what if it's a curse that sticks to the person?", Talia asked dejectedly.

"Then... there should be a way to revert it, but I don't know how."

Talia pinched the roof of her nose, and she felt Axel's hand squeezing her shoulder.

"Cassandra...", Axel's deep voice broke the intense silence. "It's obvious that you don't know much about black runes. From where are they originating?"

Cassandra blinked. "You mean...?"

"I mean, someone came up with these runes. Didn't your predecessor talk about it?"

Cassandra pressed her lips into a line. "This is ancient, and the origin of black runes is just a legend."

"Don't!", Alpha Sophia hissed.

Talia frowned. "How long are you going to stand in my way?"

Alpha Sophia's face contorted in pain as Talia's aura tightened against her.

Rage rippled through Talia and her eyes flickered in silver light. It was one thing to discard her as a child, but why couldn't they leave her alone? When will it stop?

"You gave up on me twice so far. Once when I was a baby, and the second time when you decided that my mate is less important than you maintaining your power. Is that what you are after? Power? I believe the prophecy is true. You know who I am and what I can do, and you became greedy."

"We don't want your power.", Alpha Isaac said.

"Let's assume that's true. However, you are desperate to keep yourself at the top. Let me fulfill the other part of the prophecy." Talia pointed her finger at Alpha Isaac. "Calamity."

Silvery light flashed from Alpha Isaac's body, and he slumped back in the chair with a groan.

Talia's face was deadly still as she moved to look at Alpha Sophia. Was that her mother? No, it can't be her mother. A mother wouldn't give up on her child because she was afraid. A real mother would protect her child from greedy people and teach her how to use her powers for good.

Talia's expression hardened as she pointed a finger at Alpha Sophia.

"No... No...", Alpha Sophia said weakly. She could feel that Alpha Isaac's power was depleted. "No!", she shrieked when her body flashed in silvery light, and then she slumped listlessly in the sofa chair with her eyes rolled at the back of her head to show white.

Talia exhaled a sharp breath and turned to Cassandra. "Where were we?"

Chapter 468 The legend about witches

Cassandra's insides shook at the scene in front of her.

She recognized the effects and knew what Talia had just done. Taking away Cassandra's powers was one thing, but Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia have the strongest spirits, yet Talia sucked them dry like it's a child's play. Scary.

Cassandra took in a breath before explaining, "The legend talks about a coven of witches. A hundred generations ago, one of our predecessors had a mate there, and that caused us to mix more than just bloodlines. We would go there freely, and they would come here. The legend doesn't say why the passage between our worlds was sealed. This was left behind.", she ended by gesturing toward the scrolls and the leather-bound book.

Talia soaked in every word greedily. "Do you know something about the passage between the worlds?"

Cassandra lowered her head. "No. I am sorry."

Talia's stomach dropped.

Is this really a dead end and there is nothing she could do?

Damon won't recognize her? Sure, maybe the rune wears off in time, but every moment of him looking at her like a stranger was killing her on the inside. Was she supposed to go back home and hope for the best?

A sense of crisis gripped her heart when she remembered what awaits them at home. There were greedy Elders, manipulative Alpha Edward, the danger of war, and... Marcy. Marcy believed that Damon will come to her after three days to make her his Luna and if he doesn't remember Talia... she choked on a sob that burst from her chest.

If Damon ends up marking Marcy, what will that do to their bond? Even without marking, if he gets close to Marcy... she didn't want to think about it. Talia already saw Marcy between Damon's legs with his cock in her mouth, and she saw a video of Damon fondling Marcy. Talia told herself that's in the past and she won't think about it, but if Damon touches Marcy again...

"Hey... hey...", Axel's voice reached Talia. Why was he rubbing her cheeks? Was she crying? It seemed so. "Portal...passage... parents..."



"What?", Talia asked while blinking her tears away. She didn't understand what he was saying.

"I said", Axel spoke to her seriously. "Don't give up hope. If anyone knows about passages and portals that lead in and out of our territory, that would be our parents."

Talia cringed at the words "our parents", but she pushed that away as she looked at Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia anxiously.

"Is that true? Do you know about other portals?", she asked with urgency. When the duo didn't respond, Talia lost patience, "TELL ME!"

"Yes. We keep it in the secret compartment. The bookshelf behind my desk has a mechanism...", Alpha Isaac responded against his will. He couldn't believe that Talia used her aura to force him to tell the truth, and her aura was pure and so much stronger than his. He felt ashamed. How come they didn't see how much more powerful she was compared to Alpha Damon?

He cursed himself for neglecting the obvious. He doubted that Damon marked Talia because her neck was clean. However, if she marked him, it would confirm that Talia's wolf was stronger than Damon's.

"I know where the secret compartment is...", Axel was quick to move toward the bookshelf. He rotated a wolf figurine that was on the third level, and there was a click before part of the bookshelf swayed open.

Talia moved after Axel to see him rummaging through parchment papers and old books.

Her heart thundered against her chest. Are they really going to find what's needed and be able to help Damon? She didn't want to get her hopes up only to be disappointed again, but the light of favorable possibility was ignited again, and she was unable to ignore it.

This whole thing was a rollercoaster and Talia had a feeling that they were still climbing before the big fall. She hoped that her heart will be able to keep up and she doesn't fall apart before the ride ends.

Talia didn't want to give up. She couldn't give up. Giving up on Damon was giving up on herself. He helped her out of a predicament so many times, and now it was her turn.

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"I can't believe we have all these portals on our territory...", Axel said under his breath while looking at the map he spread on his father's desk. He pointed at one in the far-right corner. "This one leads to the outside world where humans are. I don't know what others are for."

"The legend says that witches are in the South.", Cassandra chimed in.

Axel's hand moved to point at the portal on the bottom of the map. "Then this one must be it." His eyes widened. "It even has a Wicca symbol next to it. That's the one!"

"How far is that?", Talia asked.

"We are here, and that portal is about... Two days walking. One day in wolf form.", Axel said. "My father could get us there within minutes. He can teleport."

"If he has his powers, is there a way to prevent him from fleeing?", Talia asked.

"No. He can move wherever he wants, as long as he knows where he is going.", Axel explained. "That's how we reached you and Damon in the first place. I used GPS positioning to locate your phone, and my father took us there."

"There is a movement spell.", Cassandra said, making both Axel and Talia look her way. "It will take us there in a blink of an eye."

Axel was skeptical, but Talia didn't want to waste time on travel, and she believed that Cassandra was too desperate to get her powers back, so she won't trick her.

"Alright. Get what you need to make it happen.", Talia said.

Axel was alarmed. "You are going, just like that? That portal is sealed, and we have no idea how to open it, or what's on the other side. What if it's dangerous?"

Talia glanced at Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia who listened to all this from the side. "Someone will know how to unseal passages. Your ancestors might be cautious, but they were not stupid."

"Assuming that you can get through, it's still dangerous."

"It's a risk I'm willing to take, Axel.", Talia said with finality.

"I'm not saying that you shouldn't go.", Axel said. "But I will go with you."

"No!", Alpha Sophia exclaimed weakly. "You can't. If they find out who you are..."

"Stop it, mother!", Axel snapped. "Can you stop thinking about what's best for the pack, and just do what's right?"

"We don't know why the portal was sealed, but we know there was a reason for it. What if you end up killed?", Alpha Sophia said and then glanced at Talia. "Both of you."

Talia snorted at Alpha Sophia's fake concern for her wellbeing.

Chapter 469 Taking over as the new Alpha

"Do you really think that the solution to your problems is controlling everything?", Talia sneered at Alpha Sophia. "Axel is a grown man. He can decide for himself. As for me, life without Damon is not a life worth living. You have a mate, what would you do if one day he is taken away from you? What if he is right by your side, but he treats you like a stranger?" She turned to look at Axel. "I am going. I won't force you to join me, but I need your help to get there."

Axel put his hand on Talia's shoulder and gave her a squeeze before looking at his parents. "I will do whatever I can to fix the wrong you did. Because of you, I lost my childhood with a sister, and she lost her whole family. You can help us willingly, or we will make you, but you won't stand in our way."

The weight on Talia's back lightened somewhat like Axel took a part of it away. Was this support of a big brother? She thought how her life would be different if Axel was by her side while she was growing up. He would chase away the bullies, and she wouldn't go hungry.

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Talia used her aura to pressure Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia into spilling everything they knew about sealing and unsealing portals and Cassandra took notes fervently.

It was not much, but it gave them something to work with and Talia hoped that Cassandra will prove herself useful.

Cassandra also brought some candles and herbs, and she explained that once she draws the diagram with chalk and places the candles and herbs in the right position, they will be ready to go. She also prepared things for unsealing the portal and herbs that Talia asked her to bring.

Talia selected the herbs she needed and stuffed them into her mouth. Damon said that he loves her scent, but with him not recognizing the bond, it was just a sentiment not worth holding onto. It was safer if she can move without leaving her scent behind.

Axel looked at Talia with a grimace. "I know things are uncertain, but you don't need to poison yourself."

Talia's chewing slowed down and it took her a moment to understand what he was talking about. She swallowed. "This is not poison. It's for concealing one's scent."

Axel moved closer and sniffed the air around Talia.

"Give it a minute to enter my bloodstream.", she said.

A few minutes later, Axel was also chewing on the herbs. "We have no idea if witches have a heightened sense of smell, but if we need to move stealthily, this will help."

Talia thought how that made sense. She separated another batch of herbs and handed it to Cassandra.

Cassandra eyed the plants suspiciously. "Are you expecting me to eat those?"

"You are coming with us.", Talia said to Cassandra. "You will need to tell witches exactly what you did for the ritual." If they don't kill us before that. Talia didn't say this last part aloud because Cassandra was fidgety already.

Cassandra swallowed a mouthful of air and then she put the herbs into her mouth.

Talia prayed that their vague plan will work. They will find witches, get the solution to remove magic from Damon, and return home safely before anything bad happens like Elders running amok or Alpha Edward taking over the Dark Howlers pack in Damon's absence. Was that too much to ask?

"You are leaving us like this?", Alpha Isaac asked Talia in disbelief when he saw that they were about to leave the study.

"Like what?" Talia cocked an eyebrow while wondering what they were up to. "You are not coming with us." She thought for a moment before asking Axel, "Should we imprison them, so they don't cause trouble?"

Axel was not sure how to respond to this. He didn't want to put his parents into a dungeon, but... "Leaving them free is a recipe for disaster. Even without their powers, they have authority over their subordinates, which is pretty much everyone in the pack."

Talia pursed her lips while thinking about how to handle this. "What do you normally do when both Alphas are absent?"

"That doesn't happen, but when one of them is not here, their proxies are in charge."

Talia thought how that made sense. "Betas and Gammas are Kai's and Tyler's parents, right?"

"Right.", Axel confirmed.

"Do you trust them?"

"They are good people but..." Axel shook his head. "They are loyal to our parents."

Talia cringed at the 'OUR parents' part, but she didn't want to correct Axel. It was not important. "What about Kai and Tyler?"

"I trust them with my life."

"Then it's settled.", Talia said with a smile on her face. "You will take over as Alpha and assign Kai and Tyler to take care of the pack until you are back."

"Not possible!", Alpha Isaac hissed. "Axel doesn't have his powers."

Talia realized that the old man has a point. "You need an Alpha with powers. What about Beta or Gamma? Can Tyler be Gamma without powers?"

"Others don't matter, but Alpha must have powers or the pack will be in danger.", Alpha Sophia said with the hope that Talia will give them their powers back.

Talia turned to look at Axel. "Alright. I will be Alpha, and you will be my proxy. How about that?"

"What did you say?", Alpha Sophia asked under her breath.

Talia was losing her patience. She didn't have time to argue. "I am of an Alpha bloodline. You can transfer the position of the Alpha to me, or I will take it myself with an Alpha challenge. You both should know that I can take you down in a duel without lifting a finger. It's your choice if you want to preserve that little dignity you have left. You have one minute to decide."

Talia turned to Axel. "People don't know me, but they see you as their future Alpha. If I name you my proxy, my power will secure the position, and your identity will ensure loyalty. Call Tyler, Kai, and Meg here. We should give them instructions and make all this official before we head out..."

Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia nearly passed out from anger. How can Talia talk about it like they were not important?

...

"Oh, Talia...", Meg got inside the study and threw herself at Talia to give her a hug. "Why are you here? I was hoping you went home by now."

Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia frowned at this. Were these youngsters behind Alpha Damon's escape after all?

"It's a long story, Meg.", Talia said while returning the hug. "I lost Damon."

Meg jerked backward and looked at Talia in horror. "Is he... dead?"

"No. But I am to him."

Tyler and Kai huddled close to Meg (Kai much closer than Tyler who was careful not to get too close to Meg), so now all three of them looked at Talia questionably.

"The ritual caused a memory loss and Damon doesn't feel the mate bond. When he woke up, he had no idea who I was, and he thought I did something to him so..." Talia released a shaky breath while remembering Damon pushing her away ruthlessly. "He left."

Meg's lips curved downward. "I'm so sorry, Talia." If that happened to Kai, Meg would be devastated.

Chapter 470 The new Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack (1)

"I assume you are here because you have a plan.", Tyler said while his eyes shifted from Talia to Axel.

Talia responded, "As soon as Alpha Sophia and Alpha Isaac sign the document and Cassandra performs the ceremony, I will become the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack."

Meg, Kai, and Tyler gaped at Talia while processing this information.

Kai was first to recover. "They agreed to hand over the Alpha position, just like that?"

"It's either that or I issue an Alpha challenge. Do you think they have a chance?"

Tyler, Kai, and Meg turned to see Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia sitting on sofa chairs with sour expressions. In the next moment, Talia's Alpha aura enveloped three young people. It was strong, yet gentle like an embrace all over, and they all turned to gawk at Talia who continued talking like she was discussing the weather.

"I will make Axel my proxy, and he will assign you duties. The Midnight Guardians pack will be in your care while we go to the realm where witches are. Based on information Cassandra has, black runes originated from witches, and we will seek their help in reverting Damon's condition." That was the short version.

Tyler, Kai, and Meg looked at Axel questionably who confirmed what Talia said. "We don't have much time. So, let's get started."

Axel delegated duties with ease. Since they were teens, Axel, Tyler, and Kai role-played how things will work when Axel becomes an Alpha. The only difference was that this time, it was real, and Kai got to share his part with Meg.

In the middle of talking, Axel stiffened and turned to look at Talia.



"What?", she asked.

"It's Damon.", Axel said and everyone looked at him with anticipation as he continued, "Our scouts spotted him close to the portal to the outside world."

Talia released a shaky breath. "Tell them to let him go through."

"You are letting him go?", Meg obviously didn't approve. "With his memories tampered, who knows what might happen?"

"What's the point in keeping him here if he doesn't recognize me as his mate? He probably wants to go home. That's what I would do. With him on the other side of the portal, we will get more time to make things right. Also, when he sees my things there, it might jog his memory.", Talia said while fighting the sadness that was overwhelming her.

Meg realized that Talia was right. "It's more than things, Talia. You have friends there."

Talia realized that Meg was right. Maya and Caden were there, and also Dawn, Zina, and Stephanie. They will definitely ask about Talia. She wished to contact Mindy somehow. That spitfire would give Damon a piece of her mind for showing up without Talia.

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The preparations for the ceremony were made on the terrace which opened up to a garden that looked like a meadow with low shrubbery.

Axel told Talia that this was one of the rare dwellings above ground, reserved for the Alpha family. Other than living quarters, it has a study, meeting areas, and rooms that should be for hosting and entertaining guests, but they were not used for ages. "Now that you are going to become the Alpha. This will be your home."

Talia was not sure she wanted to settle in that place, but she didn't have the heart to say that aloud because Axel looked kind of happy. Well, she would be happy to have a brother if she didn't lose her mate on the same day.

Axel used the mind-link to send a summon to all members of the Midnight Guardians pack, without telling them the reason.

Cassandra and her helpers prepared everything in under an hour.

Kai, Meg, and Tyler were busy discussing how things will work going forward with Kai's and Tyler's parents, and Talia used this time to ask Axel about the Midnight Guardians pack.

Axel understood this as Talia's attempt to keep her mind occupied and not think about Damon and the danger that might await them while seeking help from witches.

Cassandra warned them that witches are wicked and that they will try to take advantage of the situation. Talia cringed while thinking about Cassie, Elders, Lisa, Nora, Marcy, Alpha Edward... can people be more wicked than that? She hoped that the answer will be, no.

"We are not many. Under five hundred bodies.", Axel started his talk about the Midnight Guardians pack. "Every mated pack member has some abilities. Some are useful for tracking, some for transportation, and then there are those like an ability to attach and detach limbs at will." Axel stifled a chuckle. "Poor Steve. That's a useless ability, but it would be handy if he ever goes outside for Halloween..." Axel cleared his throat when he saw that Talia was not amused by this, and he continued seriously, "The nature is mostly untouched, the animals are plenty and so is clean water."

"The nature is beautiful here.", Talia said. There was no pollution. "You don't need to worry about humans freaking out if they see you shapeshift or move too fast." Tatiana was talking about this as the biggest challenge while living among humans.

"True, but people still want out.", Axel said.

"Why?"

"Because our mates are not here."

Talia remembered the scenes from the cafeteria where couples sitting together was a rare sight, and she realized how that IS a problem. If no one had a mate, they would probably be fine, but with people like Kai and Meg snuggling, others definitely noticed what they were missing and were eager to go out.

"Are your parents preventing them from going?"

Axel was not sure how to respond to this.

"Not intentionally.", he said. Seeing Talia's confused expression, he clarified, "In the interest of keeping our secret safe, exit is strictly controlled. Unless one has official business outside, exit won't be allowed, and you can imagine that regular pack members don't have a valid reason to step outside. We have people sneaking out occasionally when they become desperate..."

Talia thought about how this was something she can work with. Axel is established as the future Alpha, but she is an unknown variable, an outsider. Other than showing them her powers, Talia will need to assure them that she won't harm them or abuse her newly acquired position, and this might be it.

By the time ceremony was ready, around four hundred people gathered in the garden, standing densely packed and looking toward the terrace to see their leaders, Alpha, Beta, and Gamma family with the oracle and her helpers, and a new face (aka Talia).

Cassandra stood in front of the altar where a fire crackled already, and others stood around her to form a semicircle, Cassandra's helpers were ready with herbs, crystals, and other ingredients that should be passed to the oracle during the ceremony.