

Alphas Bride 531

Chapter 531 The summon for the Council of Alphas

Caden's phone beeped, and everyone looked at him.

Caden looked around apologetically. "I swear, I thought I had it on silent." He was confident about it because he could feel his phone vibrating in his pocket while they were talking. Only super-urgent notifications would make his phone break the silent mode.

Caden's eyes widened when he saw the message. "Damon...", he called. "The Council of Alphas was summoned. You need to be there at dawn."

This was the first time for Damon to be summoned to attend the Council of Alphas, but he knew what it was. He couldn't help but frown at the timing. "Now?"

"My father is behind this.", James said with certainty.

"Do you think Alpha Edward can use the Council to pressure Alpha Damon?", Maya asked.

James confirmed. "He only needs to make his case and put it for voting. The majority wins. Considering what happened here, Alpha Damon will face an attack on his character, and it will escalate into a challenge to his ability to be the Alpha of the largest pack in North America. If Alpha Damon doesn't agree to give up on whatever they demand, they will form an alliance to impose sanctions on the Dark Howlers pack, or maybe even threaten with open war, depending on how confident they are."

Talia was restless. This all sounded like big trouble! But first, she had one basic question, "What is the Council of Alphas?"

Damon responded, "Alphas of packs gather and make decisions that will impact all werewolves." He released a frustrated breath. "Caden, you will come with me."

"I want to come also.", Maya said.

Damon refused. "We need you to stay here and ensure everything is ready for the pack run. Besides, only the Alpha and his Beta are allowed to go."

Talia didn't like this. 'What if the potion wears off and you forget about me?', she spoke to Damon through their mind-link.

'Caden will go with me.', Damon said. 'Give him the potion and instructions, and do not worry.' He pressed his lips against her forehead. "Knowing the methods of Alpha Edward, the news about the Council meeting and me being in trouble will spread with the goal to confuse our people. You will be needed here to work with Maya and ensure things are in order. I promise to be back before the pack run."

Damon gave Talia a reassuring smile and turned to Caden. "Where will the meeting be held?"

"GPS coordinates came with the summon. It's close to the territory of the Lightclaw pack. I will get the plane ready because with a car we won't make it even if we start now."

Damon puffed his cheeks. That meant they can stay until dinner if they give up on sleeping, and they had a lot to do until then.

He ran his hand through his hair and looked at the people gathered. "Let's end this meeting for now. Maya, Caden, can you stay here and help to discuss plans while Caden and I are away? Mindy, Gideon, if you can help Maya and Talia regarding plans for tomorrow's pack run, that would be great."

Talia looked at Cornelia. "I hope you can double-check I have everything ready for the ritual to dispel the black runes."

Mindy waved at Talia, indicating that she will help with that also. "I want to be a part of that conversation." Tomorrow at the ceremony, Mindy will be introduced to the pack as Gideon's mate, and she will officially become a member of the Dark Howlers pack. She was looking forward to it.

"Can we help?", George asked.

Damon thought of something. "As a Commander, do you have people you trust that can tell us more about what Alpha Edward is up to?"

George confirmed. "I will contact them."

Before Damon could give a task to James, James was talking to Talia, "Miss Talia, can we have a word? I would appreciate it if you could explain in detail the passages you know in my packhouse. It will help me look for journals."

"Sure.", Talia agreed. "Let's go to a different room..."

James and Talia walked out of the study, and into a spare room on the first floor.

The room was on the smaller side, with one wall covered in enclosed storage where they kept plates and utensils used when they hosted large parties. On the wall opposite the door, was a window with a small sitting area below it that consisted of a two-seater sofa, one coffee table, and two ottomans tucked in under it.

James closed the door behind them, and when both of them were seated on the sofa sideways so they face each other, Talia kept the notepad and the pencil on the table, and asked, "What do you want to know about passages?"

She assumed that James was onto her about being in the Red Moon pack. Did he recognize her? Was that a good thing? Talia was not sure.

"Are you going to let Damon do this on his own?"

Talia didn't get it. "What?"

"Only Alphas of packs have the right to vote in the Council. Your proxy might attend, but his vote won't count, Alpha Talia."

Talia's eyes widened when she understood where James was going with this. He knew that she was the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack. Somehow, she forgot about it. Maybe because she always saw Axel as the Alpha, and from Talia's point of view, she was still the timid girl hiding in the attic.

"Is this why you pulled me out of the study?", Talia asked.

James shrugged. "Based on my observation, Alpha Damon doesn't know you have a pack of your own, and I don't care about your reasons for concealing it. But is that secret more important than helping him?"

Talia pressed her lips into a line. It was not really a secret, but with all the things going on, she didn't get a chance to tell Damon about it. Getting rid of black runes, Marcy, and preparing for the upcoming pack run seemed awfully important, and everything else could wait.

"How can I help him?"

Talia felt silly asking.

James was a teenager, the young master of the house where Talia lived while hiding her presence, yet now she was seeking advice from him. It all looked like some twisted reality. But James was serious, and he didn't seem to be joking.

He took the pencil, opened the notepad, and started writing down while talking, "There are currently fifteen packs that are large enough to get a seat in the Council of Alphas. Every vote counts. Assuming that all of them will be present, Alpha Damon will need seven votes on top of his to be safe from open attacks. Of course, even if my father fails, he won't give up, but at least his allies won't dare to support him openly. Most of the Alphas will go with the flow because they fear retaliation from bigger packs. However, you should be wary of four packs that will support my father no matter how flaky his arguments are..."

Chapter 532 Mysterious Talia

While explaining about the Council of Alphas, James was writing down names and relevant notes that contained reasons why some people will definitely side with Alpha Edward, who will side with Damon, and who will be easily swayed.

As the names appeared on the paper, Talia recognized most of them. In the last few weeks, Talia was working as Damon's assistant, she exchanged emails with them, and with a few, she even spoke on the phone. Alpha Edward, Alpha Magnus (aka Tony's father), Alpha Richard (aka Cassie's father), and Alpha Maddox, fell into the category of Alphas that Talia saw in person.

Talia was not surprised when James put Alpha Richard in a group of hostile people.

"He doesn't like Alpha Edward, but they have a common enemy.", James said. "After the incident with Cassie at the Lightclaw pack, Alpha Richard is talking openly about how Alpha Damon is using his position to terrorize others."

Talia felt guilty about this. It was her idea for the Steelbite pack to pay tribute, and she even got Cassie's head shaved. But more than punishing Cassie, Alpha Richard was pushed into a corner, humiliated, and thirsty for revenge.

Talia couldn't accept that Tony's father will also be against Damon. James said that Alpha Magnus is greedy, and he will vote for the one who gives him the most benefits. Tony came to train with Damon, and Kalina was a good friend with Talia, but that didn't seem to compare with the monetary benefits or territory that Alpha Edward would offer.

"My father will tempt them by promising them a piece of the Dark Howlers pack's territory or resources. It's easy to give away what was not his in the first place, but those will be just empty promises. Once Alpha Damon loses his footing, my father will scheme against his allies to squirm out of those deals, and he will end up giving away only a fraction of what he originally promised."

Talia stared at James while wrapping her head around that information. "You talk like no one cares about what's right. Is it possible that everyone is just looking to backstab others?"

James chuckled. "Wake up, Alpha Talia. Idealistic people are sabotaged and eliminated, and you don't want to end up like them. No one likes a person in power that can't be controlled, and that is why Alpha Damon is the biggest problem for existing Alphas."

"What about Alpha Maddox?", Talia asked.

James shrugged. "The Blue River pack has a non-militaristic reputation, so they are not an active threat. In addition to that, they are taking in people no one wants. My father calls Mindy's charity work as taking care of trash. If the Blue River pack falls, someone will need to accept those unfortunate souls or we will risk a surge in the population of rogues. People like my father will only see them as a burden."

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Talia puffed her cheeks. "I still don't understand. Damon has a strong military and he has the support of his people as well as several other packs. How can your father think that he will win?"

James leaned on the backrest of the sofa completely and stared at the ceiling while explaining, "My father will not dare to do this on his own. He will spur others to do the dirty work for him. Alphas would band against Alpha Damon a long time ago if they didn't fear retaliation because if they can't take him out in one swift swoop, heads will roll. That's why they need a show that's going to make it believable; like that, their people will stop looking at Alpha Damon as a young rebel who is doing the right thing."

James shook his head. "The ironic thing is that if my father's ploy succeeds and Alpha Damon is removed from power, Alphas will move to their next target which would be my father, but my father doesn't think that far because his eyes are stuck on Alpha Damon who is above him and only when he is left at the top he will realize that the ground under his feet is crumbling."

James turned his head to look at Talia. "Our kind is controlled by greed for power. Even if you want to fight for the greater good, you can't show that to anyone because they will use it against you."

James saw that Talia's face fell. "What? Is that too much for you?"

"I am sorry.", Talia said. "I had no idea how difficult it was growing up as the future Alpha of the Red Moon pack."

If it was a happy childhood, he wouldn't have such dark thoughts. Her heart cracked for the sixteen years-old boy who was sitting right there and talking like an old man who saw the ugly side of life and gave up on humanity.

James sat up straight and stared at Talia. They were discussing his father coming after Damon and everything he holds dear, yet Talia looked like she wanted to give James a comforting hug, and suddenly... he wanted one. But he didn't want to act on that impulse. It wouldn't be appropriate.

And before he could react, Talia scooted closer to James, invading his personal space and her arms wrapped around him. James sat still like a statue while considering his options. No one ever gave him a comforting hug. Not even his mother.

Talia's hand patted his back gently and... damn it! James' arms moved on their own around her.

"There, there...", Talia said, like she was comforting a child. "Considering how you grew up, you are a fine young man, James Redmayne. I am confident that great things are ahead of you."

James froze. Was she talking in the context of him being the future Alpha of the Red Moon pack?

He released Talia awkwardly and inched away. "You don't know what you are talking about."

Talia smiled and her eyes lit up in a silvery glow. "Did you forget that I'm the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack? I have mysterious powers that are telling me you will do just fine."

James had to agree that mysterious was an adjective that went great with Talia. She looked weak and fragile, yet she had the most powerful Alpha of their generation as her fated mate and James definitely noticed marks on both Talia's and Damon's neck which put them as equals. And Talia also had a circle of friends that was charged with influence and power in front of which the older generation would tremble if they only knew about it. People followed Talia and listened when she spoke, even though she didn't use anything to suppress them or announce her high ranking.

Alpha Edward was set on toppling Damon, and James had a feeling that Talia was a much greater danger compared to Damon.

James shook those thoughts away. "Let's focus and finish this before others come looking for us." And he was eager to go back to Cornelia.

Chapter 533 Feeling important

Talia understood that James was telling her all that about the Council of Alphas with the intention that she should attend it, as an Alpha.

The idea of her being stuck in the same place with Alphas who had bad intentions toward Damon, and maybe they were involved in the witch-breeding nightmare, made Talia's skin crawl, but she liked the thought of supporting Damon.

Talia was aware that since Damon became the Alpha of the Dark Howlers pack, he faced many challenges alone. Sure, there were Caden, Stephanie, Maya, and maybe a few others, but they could only offer their advice and support from the side. Damon had to tackle one challenge after another on his own; he negotiated and fought as one against many, and this was Talia's chance to stand by his side when it counts, as his equal. It made her feel important.

"Usually, the Midnight Guardians pack doesn't involve themselves with matters of other packs, so my father probably thinks that Alpha Isaac won't come.", James said. "And no one has a clue that the leadership changed."

"Do you think they will recognize me?"

James looked at Talia seriously for a few seconds before responding, "No."

"How can you be so certain?"

"Alpha Damon's reputation as a womanizer made women by his side invisible.", James responded bluntly. "There were so many that people stopped caring. And my sister created such a hype about her being his Luna, that no one spared you a second look."

"You say that like it's a good thing.", Talia said dryly.



"But it is. Everyone will be intrigued by the new Alpha. The fact that you are from the Midnight Guardians pack will work in your favor because no one really knows what's going on there. You can say that you are the daughter Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia kept hidden, or you can spin the story and say that you are the dark horse who took over with a display of power."

Talia thought about how both of those apply. Was James smart, psychic, or just lucky? In any case, it was scary how spot-on he was.

James chuckled. "Most of the Alphas of the older generation are misogynic. The fact that you are female will rub them the wrong way, yet they won't be able to do a damn thing about it. I would give anything to be a fly on the wall in that room when you show up so I can see my father's face."

Talia cocked an eyebrow. "You know, maybe Cornelia can make it happen."

James shifted uncomfortably at the thought of him actually turning into a fly. What if a frog eats him? Or someone splats him into a mush?

"It was just a figure of speech.", he said awkwardly. "Besides, as an unknown player, you can have fun. Make them believe you are considering to vote for their side, let them lick your shoes, and then deliver slaps as you see fit. In any case, I leave those fine details to you. I told you what I wanted to say, and I recommend that you go there, but in the end, it's your decision. We are done here."

James stood up and bowed a little before leaving the room.

Talia didn't move as she was thinking about the information James provided and she frowned at the names of Alphas who will face Damon with bad intentions tomorrow morning.

Damon didn't say anything and she sensed his anxiety, but she didn't know it would be that bad. If those people vote against Damon, he will be in trouble; his whole pack will be in trouble. Their pack. Isn't that why Damon concealed her identity as his mate? But... she was weak then and now she is an Alpha. Surely, she can do something to help him.

Talia was attracted to the idea of putting those greedy old geezers in place. How dare they threaten her mate!?

Liseli was quiet, but Talia could sense that Liseli approved as the old creature boosted Talia's confidence, reminding Talia that she was not alone anymore. Talia had her wolf, her powers, her mate, her pack, and friends who were willing to help.

James told her that the Council of Alphas has ways of confirming who is the real Alpha of a pack in order to avoid frauds. He didn't know details about this because his father never mentioned it, but James remembered that his father has a token with the crest of the Red Moon pack, and he guessed that the token must be part of verifying the identity as legitimate rulers.

Other than getting her token, Talia needed to firm her resolve, and... she needed a Beta who will accompany her.

With those thoughts, Talia got her phone.

First, she needed to call Axel!

James returned to the study in search of Cornelia. He found her sitting on the sofa, surrounded by Dawn, George, Mindy, and Gideon. Cornelia was talking in a low voice while drawing some complex patterns on a paper and James guessed that she was explaining things for the ritual they will perform tomorrow evening.

Damon was at his desk now with Maya and Caden. The three of them were sitting around Damon's desk while two faces were on the computer screen, obviously on a video call. James recognized them as Alpha Maddox from the Blue River pack, and Alpha Cristian from the Spring Leaf pack, and he already knew that those two were Damon's close allies.

Damon waved at James to come closer, and he announced to two people on the video call, "The future Alpha of the Red Moon pack, James, is here."

Both Maddox and Cristian were visibly surprised to see James. They were aware that Alpha Edward was hostile, and with Marcy announcing her departure from the territory of the Dark Moon pack, they would never guess that James was present.

Of course, Maddox was about to get another shocker soon when he finds out that Marcy was heading his way, but that will happen when Mindy remembers to notify him.

James thought that Damon will ask him about Talia, but instead, Damon said, "We are discussing strategies to protect our borders while we are away. With this sudden summon for the Council, Max, Chris, and I suspect that someone might use this to attack us and we want to decrease risks to our people. Can you share your ideas?"

James was surprised that Damon was including him in the conversation. His father would normally shoo him away when something crucial was happening, and Damon showed him more consideration and care in these few days than his father did in a lifetime.

James' impulse was to decline and to continue his act as an ignorant youngster, but something told him to do otherwise.

With every passing day, James' understanding of why people followed Damon willingly was becoming clearer. Damon didn't classify people based on status and he didn't push others down out of fear that they will take his spotlight.

Damon acknowledged James as someone who can contribute, and he was not shy about asking him to share his thoughts in front of other Alphas which gave James an opportunity to shine.

This treatment made James feel important, and he hoped that Cornelia was paying attention because he was about to show what he can do.

Chapter 534 Strategizing as equals

"I would suggest that Commander George joins this discussion. He can help.", James said while approaching the desk where Damon, Maya, and Caden were with Alpha Maddox and Alpha Christian present via video conference.

As soon as James finished talking, George was already by his side, pulling a chair so he can join the group. He was eavesdropping from the side, but since no one invited him, he pretended to be interested in whatever Cornelia was explaining.

"What are you trying to achieve?", James asked while taking a seat.

"The summon for the Council of Alphas is unexpected.", Damon said. "With every Alpha getting an invitation, it's inevitable that the news will spread. A pack without its Alpha and Beta is vulnerable. Our warriors have their orders, but if they are facing an unexpected situation, without leadership to guide them, they might make mistakes and that can cause casualties. We are trying to prioritize spots where attacks might happen so that we reinforce our borders in a smart way."

Damon showed James a map he had in front of him with some areas marked in red. "The red areas are where we experienced attacks in the previous year."

After looking at it for a few seconds, James turned to look at the wall where the map of North America was hanging with outlines of pack territories. Every pack (other than the Midnight Guardians pack) had precisely determined borders, and between two packs was a few miles-wide neutral territory that didn't belong to anyone. That prevented packs from accidentally crossing into another pack's territory (which happened often, and the fights would escalate), but unfortunately that gap between territories also allowed for rogues to move freely.

"Do you think that the young Alpha from the Red Moon pack will have anything useful to say?", Alpha Cristian asked without concealing the mockery in his voice. He didn't like the Red Moon pack, and he didn't bother with being polite.

Damon raised his hand, indicating to Alpha Cristian to be patient. "Maybe he doesn't, but we won't know unless we hear him out. Our plan so far is solid, but this is what we always did, and I have a feeling that even rogues can see through it. I believe that a fresh perspective might be useful."

James didn't bother with Alpha Cristian, as he focused on talking to Damon.

"Your packs share borders, with the Spring Leaf pack between the other two. Depending on your level of trust, I would suggest that you temporarily merge territories. The neutral land can stay unused after you comb it to flush out lingering rogues. In that way, you can rearrange your warriors to protect external borders."

Everyone looked at James like he said something outrageous. And it was outrageous because Alphas would never merge territories in a way that would make them vulnerable, but at the same time, it made sense.

Damon was first to react. "If I don't need to protect my North border, we will have more manpower for other areas.", Damon said and turned to look at the monitor.

Maddox was next to agree. "With Alpha Cristian's warriors assuring no one will attack my pack from South, that works for me also."

Alpha Cristian burst into laughter. Who would say no to more land and less manpower to secure it? "Why not? If this crazy experiment works, maybe we could make it permanent!"

Maddox snorted. "How can you be so quick to agree? Didn't you imply that James won't have anything useful to say?"

Alpha Cristian narrowed his eyes, probably at Maddox, but he was on the screen, so it looked like he was glaring at everyone. "I admit. I was quick to judge. Maybe I am getting old."

Damon shook his head. Alpha Cristian was in his mid-thirties. How can that be considered old? But he didn't want to stray off the topic because time was running out and they had a lot of things to do.

"Since we all agree, let's get into details.", Damon said. "We need to determine who will be responsible for which stretch of the outside borders so we don't have gaps, and we should coordinate sweeping the neutral territory from rogues. Let's finish all this today so that tonight we can head to that meeting without worrying about our people..."

James was glad that he could contribute, and he was recognized. George was not the one to be left behind as he showed expertise related to techniques for communication between patrols belonging to different packs. As a Commander, George studied military tactics, so he was comfortable in this setting.

What was novel for both James and George was that three Alphas were discussing things openly, as equals.

Alpha Edward never showed such trust and respect toward anyone; in cases when he cooperated with someone, it was shallow, and Alpha Edward made sure the other party knew he was in charge. People in

this room (and on the video call) were aware that Damon had the most power, yet Damon didn't impose his opinion on others, and it created an atmosphere where everyone was free to voice their thoughts.

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Talia entered the study to find that Cornelia, Gideon, Mindy, and Dawn were on the sofa and talking in hushed voices while Damon was at his desk with Maya, Caden, James, George, and Alpha Christian and Alpha Maddox on the video call.

Somehow, the air in the room was harmonious, and Talia thought how it would be wonderful if they could all work together like that. Of course, she would add Tatiana, Kalina, Tony, Axel, Yasmin, Zina, Meg, and a few others into that mix.

This was the opposite of the cutthroat situation that James described to Talia earlier and she hoped that James will see that not all Alphas are greedy and backstabbing. The boy was full of bitterness and bad experiences, and Talia wished that Damon takes him under his wing and shows him a brighter side of life. Unfortunately, that won't happen as long as Alpha Edward has the resources and power to bully others. Was there really nothing they could do?

'You are back', Damon's voice sounded in Talia's head, and she could feel the happiness her presence brought him.

'I came to check what you guys are doing.'

Damon looked at her guiltily. 'We need to finish this before I leave tonight.'

'Don't worry about it.', Talia responded.

Talia was aware that Damon had his hands full and he couldn't indulge in a lovey-dovey mood. Damon was normally busy, and the situation with Marcy made things worse, and now this unexpected meeting came on top of everything.

Talia was happy that she could come to see Damon like this and she wondered if she will get a chance to talk to him in private and tell him about the whole Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack business.

Talia noticed that Cornelia, Gideon, Mindy, and Dawn were sitting there without much to do, so she offered them to join her in the kitchen.

Dawn was first to get up. She wanted to see Zina and catch up with her bestie but was feeling awkward about just leaving.

Cornelia and Mindy got up next, and Gideon grumbled something, but he followed after Mindy.

Chapter 535 Chatter in the kitchen

Stephanie, Zina, and Rose were busying themselves with lunch preparations in the kitchen.

"Zi!", Dawn exclaimed when she saw Zina, and then they plunged into each other's arms like they didn't see each other in ages.

Stephanie greeted everyone, and after exchanging names with Cornelia, Stephanie was quick to assign tasks to the ladies when she heard they were there to help.

"I apologize for not greeting you properly, Shaman Gideon", Stephanie said respectfully. She knew that he was staying in the packhouse, and she saw him at the dining table during meals, but at that time Stephanie was serving food and it wouldn't be proper for her to greet him.

Gideon waved like it was not important. "What can I do?"

Stephanie's eyes widened. Did Shaman want to help in the kitchen? Gideon was regarded with respect by all pack members and Stephanie didn't dare to let him get his hands dirty. "It's not necessary. Please, sit and relax. Can I get you something to drink? A tea, maybe?"

"You can help me prepare vegetables for the salad.", Mindy said to Gideon in a singing voice.

To Stephanie's surprise, Gideon moved there, and he started peeling cucumbers that Mindy gave him, while she chopped bell peppers. It took less than a minute for them to talk in whispers and nudge each other playfully.

"They are mates.", Talia told Stephanie, unsure if the woman knew about it. "They will announce it before the pack run tomorrow."

Stephanie pressed her lips into a line and turned to Talia. "And you, my dear? How are you? Is Damon mistreating you?"

Talia's heart warmed. Stephanie was considerate and caring, and she gave Talia a glimpse of how it would be to have a mother. Talia didn't know that Stephanie gave Damon an earful on the previous day, but she guessed that Stephanie knew bits and pieces and the woman was confused.

"Damon is facing many challenges, but he is not mistreating me. The last few days were part of the plan to get rid of Marcy without jeopardizing the pack. From the moment I got here, he was supportive, in his own way.", Talia said and smiled a little. "Tomorrow, I will be leading the pack run with him."

Stephanie opened her mouth to speak, but then her eyes fell on the pinkish mark on Talia's neck.

'CLANG!'

A heavy knife fell on the kitchen countertop from Stephanie's hand.

"You are marked?", Stephanie asked.

Talia's smile widened. "Damon and I are fated mates."

Stephanie needed a moment. She knew that Damon didn't want to let Talia live outside of the packhouse, she saw them getting cozy, and she heard rumors, but she thought if it was serious, they



would say something openly. Stephanie knew that during the dinner with Elders, Damon announced that Talia was his mate, but with Marcy there, Stephanie was not sure what to think.

"I'm sorry, Talia. I am happy for you it's just... Why didn't you tell me when you arrived here? Why is not the whole pack celebrating their Luna?"

"It's a long story, Steph. When I came here, my wolf was weak and I didn't know. And when I found out, it was difficult to process. And when I was ready to embrace it, Marcy started pressuring Damon and we decided to wait with the announcement until the air is clear. He did it to protect me. Tomorrow evening, the whole pack will know. I hope you will support us."

Stephanie's eyes were full of tears. "Of course, I will support you." She took a step back and bowed. "It's an honor to greet you, Luna Talia."

Talia was speechless. She really didn't expect that Stephanie will be so official. "Please, don't."

Stephanie raised her head. "Violet would be so happy."

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Stephanie resumed cutting chicken pieces and said, "I am glad it's you, and I'm glad you told me. I plan to leave so I will hand you over managing the packhouse. There is a schedule for cleaning and for kitchen duties that are standard, as well as garden maintenance. And then there are extras to keep in mind when we have guests. You should memorize the names of Omegas who are allowed to come here. Damon was always specific about it."

Talia's brows came together. "You are leaving? Where? When?"

"I will leave after the pack run. Damon knows about it. I hope that I can take Lisa with me." She didn't say where she will go because she was not sure.

"Steph", Talia called. "You know that this is your home, and always it will be."

Stephanie smiled sadly. Was this her home? A home was not about the place, it was about people. Stephanie came to the Dark Howlers pack because of her mate, and she made a friend, Luna Violet. They had a daughter, and her life was complete. Stephanie lost her mate and her friend, and she sent her daughter away. In a way, her home was gone, but she stuck around with the hope to help Damon.

Lisa was now in the dungeon with her behavior escalating, and Stephanie had a feeling that Lisa won't get better as long as she was surrounded by the ghosts of what might have been.

"Thank you, Talia.", Stephanie said. "But I believe it's for the best if I leave. I always wanted to see some distant places, and this is my chance. Now that you are here, I am relieved that I won't leave that naughty boy on his own. Take care of him."

Talia's eyes filled with tears. She knew that Stephanie wanted to retire, but she felt that her leaving like this was wrong. Would she go if not for Lisa causing trouble? Maybe she would stop working, but she would remain in the territory of the Dark Howlers pack. Stephanie was about to leave everything she knew because Lisa was delusional, but then... maybe that's what mothers do for their children.

"Talia!", Damon called from the door with panic in his voice, and in the next moment, she felt a pair of strong arms wrapping around her.

They were close to ending the meeting when Damon sensed Talia's emotions fluctuating and he told Maya and Caden to finish without him as he rushed to see what was going on.

"Are you alright?", Damon asked.

Talia looked at him helplessly. Silly man, he could have asked her that through their mind-link, but the fact that he had such an exaggerated reaction, told her he was anxious.

"I am OK.", Talia said. "Stephanie told me that she is going to leave, so I got emotional."

"You don't need to leave.", Damon spoke to Stephanie without letting go of Talia. "I was an ass, but I am better now. Tomorrow, everyone will know that Talia is my mate, and our pack will start new normal."

"That is lovely.", Stephanie responded. "But that new normal will be without me."

"Contact us often, and come to visit whenever you can.", Talia said.

"Thank you. As for the packhouse, I recommend that you get a few people to help you. Don't allow things to stop if you have something else to do."

Talia was thinking about it from the moment Stephanie told her about retirement which was a while ago. "I will ask Zina and Rose to help." Talia turned to see two Omegas in question staring at her. "Zina, I hope you will accept to take care of the kitchen, and Rose, I will be grateful if you help with the rest of the packhouse. I believe the two of you know what needs to be done, and if you doubt anything, this is a perfect chance to ask Stephanie for clarifications."

Both Zina and Rose smiled and nodded vigorously.

Talia would ask Dawn also, but Dawn was about to leave for the Red Moon pack with George.

Talia was hoping that Mindy will take an official role, but she didn't want to talk about it now. They had a lot of things going on and with Mindy being Gideon's mate, she was not going anywhere.

Talia wanted to resume work, but Damon's hug blocked her arms.

"Can you let go?", she asked.

"Never.", Damon responded without missing a beat and she smiled foolishly.

Chapter 536 Greetings for Luna Talia [Bonus chapter]

After lunch, everyone went to the training grounds.

Caden, James, and George were set to train with warriors so that the reporter (aka Calvin) can take some photos that will go with an article on the topic of cooperation between the Dark Howlers pack and the Red Moon pack. Maya will give an interview with the goal to prevent Alpha Edward to twist this situation into James and George being held captive.

With the changes in protecting borders, Damon wanted to address his warriors in person, so that they know that things were under control, and due to that, he was heading to the training grounds also.

Dawn and Cornelia accompanied the group because they were curious about the training, and they wanted to see their men in action. Exciting!

Damon and Talia didn't separate not even for a second, but they always had company and a million other things to do, and Talia didn't get a chance to tell him about her being the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack or about her intention to attend the Council of Alphas. She really wanted to discuss some strategies with Damon, but the timing was not right and this was not something they could talk about with an audience.

Talia intentionally slowed her steps as they walked to the training grounds, and when they trailed behind others, she thought that this might be a good chance to speak up.

"Damon, about the Council of the Alphas..."

"Don't worry about it, kitten.", Damon interrupted her. "I will handle this. Trust me."

"I trust you but..."

"No buts.", he said sternly. "I know you want to help, but I want you to stay here and stay safe. If we get attacked, leave it to the warriors. I know that you can blow them away with a thought, but that would expose you. We are still not ready to make your abilities public."

Talia puffed her cheeks in frustration. "You asked me if I trust you, but... Do you trust me?"

"With my life.", Damon responded without missing a beat. "However, I also know you are reckless. Don't take unnecessary risks and don't expose your powers, and don't go running into the woods and being a hero. All this doesn't mean a thing if something happens to you. I promised to keep you safe, and that's what I am doing but I need you to let me protect you."

And just like that, Talia decided not to tell him. It's better to ask for forgiveness than permission.

Damon didn't want to see her getting in danger here, and he would blow a fuse if she told him that she planned to attend the council of Alphas and enter that den of wolves (pun intended).

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"TALIA!", an excited shriek was heard from the training grounds, and Talia saw Lulu and Sandy running toward her full force.

"The soccer team is back!", Talia said excitedly.

Damon puffed his chest, happy to see that Talia approved. If not for the pack run, he wouldn't call them back, and Maya was the one to suggest ending their survival training early, but Damon had no problems with taking the credit for this one.

Talia stepped away from Damon and rushed to meet her friends. They didn't see each other from the Summer Solstice festival.

"How was your training in the mountains?", Talia asked as they exchanged hugs.

Lulu rolled her eyes. "It was to die for."

"But we survived!", another excited voice came from the side, and Talia saw Liam, Pierce, and Caleb. A few more soccer players approached Talia, surrounding her from all sides.

Damon wanted to interfere, but he saw that Talia was having a good time and the guys were only shaking hands with her, so he decided to observe from the side.

"When did you return?", Talia asked.

"Yesterday.", Lulu responded. "We thought we will have a longer break. I hear you are Alpha's assistant now. Do you know why we were summoned here?", Lulu asked while gesturing behind her where more than a hundred werewolf warriors were standing.

Talia confirmed. "There will be changes in patrols and Damon wants to announce it personally so you are not anxious about it."

Sandy rolled her eyes. "Whenever we see Alpha delivering news personally, we know it will be something stress-inducing."

Talia thought how that made sense, but... "These are good changes. You will see. Tell me, how was your training?"

Damon's attention was drawn toward a figure that was approaching Talia's group. It was Keith. Damon gritted his teeth. He knew very well that the wretched Coach got his eyes on Talia and as much as he wanted to punch Keith in the face, Damon was eager to see Keith's reaction when he realizes that Talia was marked, claimed, and NOT available.

Keith made his way between Liam and Caleb. He stopped when Talia noticed him, and their eyes met.

"Keith! It's good to see you!", Talia exclaimed happily, making Damon's fists itch when she jumped to give Keith a hug.

Damon chanted internally how that was only a friendly hug, without their bodies touching, Talia was clueless about Keith's feelings, and Damon shouldn't make a scene.

Keith wanted to pull Talia closer, but he saw Damon's murderous glare locked on him, so he quickly held Talia's shoulders and gave them a small squeeze before letting her go, and asking, "Did you stick to the training regime?"

Talia paused. She didn't, but... "You are welcome to test me." After Damon marked her, Talia's speed and strength increased, and she was eager to see by how much.

Keith smiled happily, interpreting Talia's response as an invitation for them to spend time together. Preferably without Damon around.

"How about we do a round of testing after this gathering is over?", Keith suggested.

Talia subconsciously glanced at Damon. She really wanted to get tested, but probably not today. "Schedule for today is crazy. How about the day after tomorrow?"

"What's wrong with tomorrow?", Keith asked.

Sandy rolled her eyes. "Did you forget that we have a pack run tomorrow? I'm sure that Talia will be busy with preparations."

"Wait a minute.", Pierce said while rubbing his chin. "Those are usually led by Alpha and Luna of the pack, but since Marcy backed out... will the pack run be canceled now?"

"No.", Damon said, and everyone turned to look at him. "The pack run will happen tomorrow. I will lead it with my mate."

Damon was looking at Talia, and she couldn't look away even though she was aware that her cheeks were impossibly hot and that people around her were connecting the dots.

As per command, everyone took one step away from Talia. Everyone except for Keith who stood there and stared stupidly at Talia.

Lulu lowered her head and put her right fist over her chest. "Luna Talia. It's an honor."

Talia blinked rapidly. "Please, don't."

But it was too late because everyone in the vicinity was now looking at them and one by one, heads went down in respect while fists on chests indicated that their greeting was coming from the heart.

Talia looked around helplessly and then at Damon who walked toward her with a big smile on his face.

"Our people are greeting you. Don't refuse them."

Chapter 537 Talia's personal guards

Talia was overwhelmed.

'Was it OK to tell them we are mates?', she asked Damon through their private mind-link.

'Why wouldn't it be?', he asked back.

'I don't know. Isn't it too soon?' She was thinking that the issue with Marcy was still fresh and the danger from Alpha Edward was too real and what if this announcement only made things worse?

'Now I know I made a big mistake, kitten', Damon said. 'I was supposed to do this on the day I brought you here. Now stop doubting and look at our people who are eagerly waiting for your response.'

Talia turned to see numerous heads bowed toward her.

That Talia's movement allowed Keith to see her neck. His eyes flashed with disbelief and grief when he saw a mark there and he quickly bowed his head. His fist was clenched so tightly that his knuckles turned white, and he hoped that no one noticed how shaken he was.



Katya told him that he shouldn't have his hopes up regarding Talia because Alpha Damon was sticking to her, but everyone was talking about Marcy being there and how she will be their Luna, so Keith assumed that Alpha Damon switched girls. It wouldn't be the first time, and Keith hoped that he will be able to comfort Talia, yet now it seemed that she didn't need comforting.

During that hellish survival training, Keith was thinking of ways how he can fix his blunder from the Summer Solstice festival, and how Talia will forgive him and they can start anew. However, Alpha Damon said how he will lead the pack run with his mate, with Talia, and that explained why Damon was so hostile when he found Keith sitting with Talia next to the lake and drinking beer, and why he put so much effort into replacing Keith as Talia's trainer. Talia was Damon's mate, from the beginning. Keith's heart ached.

"Thank you, everyone.", Talia didn't speak loudly, but everyone heard her. "I will do my best to be the Luna you deserve."

Damon touched her chin so that she looks at him. "Not Luna. You will be an Alpha, my equal."

People gasped and murmurs swelled through the warriors like an unstoppable wave.

Damon's arm wrapped around Talia's shoulders, holding her close to him as he spoke clearly to the people gathered, "Soon, we will announce the date when Talia officially steps out as the second Alpha of the Dark Howlers pack. You can expect a grand celebration, and everyone will be invited. Until then, I want you to know that Talia will be my equal and that's how I expect you to treat her from now on. Talia is my fated mate, and I'm confident that the pack will prosper with her leading us. Alpha Talia already has brilliant ideas on how to make our lives better and I hope you will all support her with sincerity."

Talia looked at Damon with newly found admiration. Can he be any sweeter? His every word tugged on her heart, and she hoped that she won't burst into tears in front of everyone to see.

"Long live Alpha Talia!", Maya shouted and then everyone raised their heads and the ground shook with the collective roar, "LONG LIVE ALPHA TALIA!"

Damon's joy hit Talia full force and her heart was full because she knew that her mate was proud to have her by his side.

That was all she ever wanted, a loving mate who would do anything for her, just how she would do anything for him, someone who won't be ashamed of her, and here was Damon, giving her everything she dreamed of and so much more.

Maya and Caden were silently praising Damon's choice to announce Talia's status here, before the pack run. Others might be swayed by the Elders, but warriors were loyal to Damon and now to Talia as well. They will return to Darkbourne and to their families, and they won't allow anyone to talk smack about Damon or Talia. With this, the success of the pack run was guaranteed.

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"Keith?", Talia called when she noticed that his head was still lowered, and he was not part of the enthusiastic clamor.

"Yes?"

"Are you alright?"

"Of course.", Keith responded quickly while trying to avoid eye contact with Damon or Talia. He didn't want any of them to see his emotional turmoil.

'I am sorry, kitten.', Damon's voice sounded in Talia's head. 'If I did this on the first day you arrived, many problems would be avoided. I was so focused on external dangers that I neglected the fact that our people would welcome my fated mate and they would help me keep you safe.'

'There is no point in thinking about what-ifs.', Talia responded.

Damon agreed. 'Let's live in the present and plan for the future.' He glanced toward the warriors and spoke in a normal voice, "You should select your guards."

Talia was surprised by this. "My guards?"

"When we are apart, I want you to have a few trustworthy people protecting you. I know that you can take care of yourself, but sometimes our enemies will attack sneakily or overwhelm you with numbers. Remember, I need you safe." Damon waited for Talia to nod in agreement before he continued, "I can assign you a few capable warriors right away, but it should be someone you are comfortable with."

Talia didn't need to think about it. Anyone from the soccer team would do. They were all top-tier warriors, but a few stood out.

"Keith!", Talia called and turned to see him staring at her with his eyes open wide, like he might collapse from shock if she says the wrong thing. "Will you..."

"It will be my honor.", Keith quickly said and bowed his head again. He couldn't believe that Talia picked him to be her personal guard!

Talia's lips lifted into a smile. "Sandy, Lulu, Pierce, Liam, Caleb? How about you guys?"

They all confirmed and bowed with their fists over their chest.

Talia turned to Damon. "That's six. Is that enough?"

Damon didn't like a few candidates (the male ones). Keith was having feelings for Talia, Liam was the one with tattoos, and Pierce and Caleb were not peachy either, but he told Talia to pick, and it wouldn't be right to set restrictions now, so he swallowed his complaints. "It's perfect. If they don't perform as expected, you can replace them later."

Damon spoke to the six people Talia named. "Your first job is tonight. I want you in the packhouse at eighteen hundred hours sharp. All of you will be in the packhouse for the night, and possibly tomorrow

morning also. At least two of you are to have a visual on Talia at any point in time until I dismiss you. Understood?"

Keith, Sandy, Lulu, Liam, Pierce, and Caleb confirmed.

Talia was excited. She had her personal guards! And they were her friends.

She was trying to imagine their reaction when she tells them that their first guarding job will be a failure because she needed to be somewhere else. Or maybe she shouldn't say anything and just give them a slip. They can't pick up her scent anyway, and she can say that she can't sleep when someone is in the room with her. As a precaution, Talia will tuck pillows under the comforter and make it look like she is sleeping in there. Perfect!

Chapter 538 Talia, the negotiator

Damon spoke to the warriors about the changes in the border patrols, and he worked with his generals to select squads who will flush out the rogues from the neutral territory so that they can temporarily merge the border with the Spring Leaf pack.

This was new, and everyone was excited.

Talia was impressed that no one had concerns about this as dangers would come from rogues and potentially from the Spring Leaf pack.

'They will just follow your order even if they might be harmed?', Talia asked Damon through their mind-link. She knew that these were strong and prideful warriors, and she was worried that they might do something on their own when Damon is not watching over them.

'This is not just my order.', Damon responded. 'They see that Caden and Maya are supporting this, and when the leadership is united, the rest will follow. That's why it's important that we stand together in front of our people. If you have any objections, voice them in private.' He turned to look at her seriously. 'I will never oppose you or question you in front of others.' And probably not in private either. 'If I do that, others will see it as a sign of discord and distrust. I want our people to trust you as much as they trust me.'

Talia really admired Damon. He was one of the youngest Alphas around, yet he was so knowledgeable and she fell for him more.

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Damon selected a group of warriors to stick around and spar with James and George inside the training center so that Calvin (the reporter for WW Magazine) can take photos.

Damon and Talia sat on the exercising mats, with Damon's arm around Talia's shoulders as they observed the training.

Keith, Sandy, Lulu, Liam, Pierce, and Caleb were sitting nearby and occasionally looking at Talia and Damon. Talia could guess that they were talking through the mind-link, and she wanted to invite them to sit closer to her and Damon, but Damon explained that her recently appointed personal guards won't be comfortable.

'You can be friendly with them in private, but now that they know your identity, they will show you respect in front of others.', Damon said to Talia through their private mind-link. 'Don't think of it as demeaning. They are warriors and you are their superior. A military's might is amplified by discipline. We have a chain of command and rules to follow.'

Talia was aware that she would need some time to get used to this. She remembered that Maya and Caden would walk behind Damon and address him by his title in front of others, and when it was just them, things would be informal. Will she be able to strike such a balance with her guards and be OK with it? Especially with Keith. She always looked at him as her trainer, someone who can guide her. Can she treat him as a subordinate?

Talia decided to leave those thoughts for later. She knew that Damon was not just sitting next to her, he was monitoring the progress of removing rogues from the neutral territory by mind-linking the generals who were assigned to that task, but he was still by her side and Talia wanted to bask in his presence.

She leaned on Damon completely while looking at the stars of this show, James and George.

Talia was amused when she noticed Cornelia's various expressions. Cornelia grimaced when James punched someone, and her whole body tensed like she was about to jump in there when James received a hit.

Dawn just gazed at George dreamily, and if this was a cartoon, Dawn would have hearts in her eyes.

"Luna Talia!", a call was heard from the side. "Pardon me, I meant, Alpha Talia! Can I have a word with you?"

Talia needed a moment to recognize the man, it was Calvin, the reporter. What did he want?

"About what?", Talia asked.

Calvin sat on the exercising mat while keeping a respectable distance from Talia, and he extended his hand that was holding a recorder toward Talia.

"Alpha Talia, everyone would like to know, where did you meet Alpha Damon? When? How did it all unfold? When did you..."

"Calvin", Damon called in a dangerously low voice. He was pissed that the reporter was coming here to disturb them and ask for more even though they gave him a chance to interview Marcy and to cover this training. Normally, this area was off-limits for reporters because they might accidentally leak secrets that should stay within the military.

"You are here to interview Maya and to cover our collaboration with the Red Moon pack.", Damon reminded him.

Calvin licked his lips nervously. "I am, but..."

"No buts, Calvin", Damon interrupted him. "Are you so greedy for more that you will risk losing your current privileges?"

Talia saw that Calvin was torn. He really wanted to interview Talia, but he didn't want to anger Damon.

Calvin lowered his head and started moving away when Talia stopped him.

"Calvin, I hope you can understand that these are sensitive times, and we want my position to be stable within the pack before outsiders find out about it. There is a reason why we didn't disclose we were mates so far.", Talia said with all the seriousness in the world.

Calvin's eyes widened in understanding. "Are you saying that someone is targeting you?"

"For your safety, I can't talk about it now." If you don't leave willingly, Damon will put you in a dungeon. "How about you join us in the packhouse for breakfast after the pack run?" Hopefully, by then, this mess will be cleared up. "At that time, I can give you an exclusive interview. Think about it. In this way, you will have front-page stories for two editions of WW Magazine. The first one is your coverage of Marcy's statement, with a side story of our collaboration with the Red Moon pack. Your next big scoop will be about me. Of course, Alpha Damon will also be able to answer your questions at that time because the main story is that the Alpha of the Dark Howlers pack found his mate."

Calvin smiled happily, feeling that he was part of this process and not just a side character. "Alright. Take care, Alpha Talia." He bowed a little. "Alpha Damon. We will see each other in two days."

Talia confirmed. "Until then..." She put her index finger over her lips.

Calvin gestured with his fingers like he was locking his mouth and throwing the key away, and then he turned and left.

Damon was impressed. He was ready to use his aura to punish Calvin, or maybe he would throw the nosy reporter in the dungeon or maybe send him for survival training, yet Talia effortlessly negotiated with him. Isn't she the best?

Chapter 539 Time to go [Bonus chapter]

Damon put his hand at the back of Talia's neck and pulled her closer to press his lips on her forehead.

"You really are everything I need in my life.", he spoke against her skin. "How I wish that we can leave all this behind and just... be."

Talia's heart expanded at the flood of emotions from Damon. The pure love and admiration were overwhelming, and there was some lust in there as well.

She wished that they had privacy because then she would kiss him thoroughly, and they would make love until they collapse. She craved for that skin-to-skin contact when his presence is all around her and inside as well because only when they were together, she felt complete and no matter how close they were, it was not close enough.

Talia's breathing picked up, reminding her that she was getting aroused and that she was surrounded by werewolves. Ah! What if they smell her? Talia was desperate to change the topic.

"Are we going to just sit and watch?"

Damon cocked an eyebrow at Talia. "Should we be doing more than sitting and watching?"

"Well, this is a training center. How about we spar?"

Damon's lips lifted into a mischievous half-smile. "You want to spar with me? In front of everyone?"

It took a few seconds for Talia to realize he was being naughty.

"I meant... sparing." She put an emphasis on the last word.

"I know you are eager to assess the changes after our marking but..." He leaned closer to speak in a low voice, "I'm not sure if we should engage in such activity here. Think about you charging at me, our bodies clashing, blood pumping, sweat dripping..." Damon chuckled when Talia's cheeks turned crimson as she knew very well that clashing, pumping, and dripping were beyond ambiguous.



"Our sparring sessions should be kept private. Don't you think so?", Damon asked in a singing voice.

Talia stared at the outrageous Alpha who was teasing her, but she couldn't deny that he was right, so she ended up nodding in response.

Damon smiled in approval and leaned to peck her lips. "You will get a good sparring session, kitten. As soon as I'm back from that meeting, I will make sure you sweat completely."

"People are watching.", Talia spoke in an urgent whisper, but she didn't move away.

"Let them watch.", Damon said. "I am done hiding. Aren't you?"

It was not the first time for Damon to kiss Talia in public. But this was in broad daylight, and people were sparring and wearing gym clothes and Damon still managed to make her forget everything and focus only on his presence like they were the only two people in the world.

Sandy nudged Lulu with her elbow to look at Damon and Talia who were lost in their lovey-dovey bubble.

"Aww, they are getting along well. It's obvious that our Alpha is smitten.", Lulu gushed.

"Of course, they will get along well. They are mates.", Sandy responded.

"Do you think they will have pups soon?", Lulu asked with sparkles in her eyes and Sandy was eager to start chatter about guessing when it will happen and how many babies they will have.

"Now that we are Talia's personal guards, we will spend a lot of time with the Alpha couple.", Caleb chimed in. "If their pup is a boy, maybe he will be named after me. Future Alpha Caleb. I like it."

Liam snorted. "Pleeeeeease... He will be named after me and I will be godfather Liam. It has a nice ring to it!"

"I will be Uncle Pierce!"

Keith balled his hands into fists as the chatter around him grew.

He was still recovering from the shock of Talia being Damon's mate.

Since Keith met Talia and realized that Damon was possessive of her, Keith consoled himself that if he was patient, Damon will get bored of Talia, just as he did of numerous previous women, and then Keith will get his chance, but now he was out of chances. Mates are forever.

Looking at Talia being happy with another man was painful, but at least she was happy and that should count for something.

Keith listened to Lulu, Sandy, Pierce, Caleb, and Liam chatting about mates and babies, and he wondered if that was truly so magical as they described it. If only being with a mate can invoke deep emotions that would stir his wolf, what was this suffocating longing that was gripping his heart?

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The day passed quickly, and before Talia noticed, a glorious sunset marked the time for Damon to leave.

"Be careful", Talia told him as they walked out of the packhouse to see Caden with Maya and four warriors already standing there next to Damon's black armored Lexus SUV.

Damon was going with Caden and four warriors, but the warriors will stay with the plane because only Alpha and Beta can actually enter the location where the Council of Alphas was held.

Damon didn't want to part from Talia, but she couldn't come with him, and she wouldn't be safe staying with the plane, so in addition to Talia having her personal guards, Damon doubled the patrols around the packhouse, fearing that Alpha Edward will try something sinister in Damon's absence. The news about Talia being Damon's mate was not publicized outside the Dark Howlers pack, but Damon knew that Alpha Edward had his sources and with Marcy out of the picture, the old man was furious, and Damon was confident that this ploy with the Council of Alphas was not the only thing Alpha Edward planned as part of his retaliation.

Damon tightened his hold on Talia and gave her a long lingering kiss. "Stay safe, kitten", he murmured against her lips. "Don't worry about me. I will take care of things. I always do."

"Don't do anything rashly.", Talia warned him. "And don't forget that you are not alone. There are people supporting you."

Damon appreciated the pep talk, but what touched him was Talia's sincerity and conviction he could feel. She really meant it.

He hummed in agreement before pecking her lips a few more times and stepping away from her with difficulty.

Damon looked behind Talia to see Keith, Lulu, Sandy, Pierce, Caleb, and Liam standing in attention, and they all understood the silent threat that if anything happens to Talia in his absence, it will be their heads rolling. The six of them got rooms to use while on duty in the packhouse.

Talia didn't notice Damon glaring at her guards because she was looking at Caden with concern. He was the one with the potion.

Like he could feel Talia's gaze, Caden turned to look at her and he gave her a reassuring nod when their eyes met.

Liseli had a theory that the mate bond was amplifying the effect of the potion, or maybe lessening the effect of the black runes, and that was why Damon's memories were intact even though he took the potion nearly twenty-four hours ago. Talia feared that with the distance between them increasing, the black runes might take over again, and then... she didn't want to think about it. Even if he forgets about her again, she will make him remember, because he would do the same for her if the roles were reversed.

"Be a good girl", Damon said to Talia seriously. "I will come back to you tomorrow."

"Not if I find you first.", Talia responded, making Damon's lips lift into a smile as he walked toward the car.

Talia could feel that Damon was suppressing a heap of worries behind that smile, and he was doing it so that she was not troubled. He was worried about the possibility of forgetting about Talia again and acting like an ass who didn't want a mate, and he was worried about what will happen at the Council of Alphas, but he hated the most that they will spend the night apart.

'After this, we won't be apart anymore.', Talia's voice sounded in Damon's mind. 'No meeting will keep me away from you.'

'You have a deal, Mrs. Blake.', Damon responded, and Talia could feel the joy sparking inside him.

The car disappeared behind trees after a turn on the driveway, and Talia called, "Maya! There is something we need to talk about."

Chapter 540 Talia's determination (1)

Talia was in the study with Maya, James, and Cornelia.

"You are a what?", Maya asked Talia in disbelief.

The lack of response from James and Cornelia told Maya that the couple knew about it already!

"I am the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack.", Talia repeated.

"How? When did that happen? Aren't you Damon's mate? Can you lead two packs? Or will you merge them into one?..."

Talia lifted her hands, to stop Maya's flood of questions. She didn't have answers to those anyway.

"It's a long story, but Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia are relieved from their positions. I am the Alpha, and Axel is my proxy with his mate, Luna Yasmin. Yasmin is a witch, from the same Coven as Cornelia. I don't have much time, and I need your help."

"What's the rush?", Maya asked.

"As the Alpha, I want to attend the Council of Alphas.", Talia said.

"If you want to attend it, why didn't you go with...", Maya's voice trailed when she realized, "Damon doesn't know."

Talia spread her arms helplessly in front of Maya's accusatory look. "I tried to tell him, but he was busy with other stuff and there was no right time. Besides, didn't you see how worried he was about my safety? He wouldn't let me go."

Maya couldn't believe this. "And what do you think, how will he react when you waltz into that meeting?"

That might be a problem, but... "Damon told me that he would never oppose me in front of outsiders. No matter what he thinks, once I'm in there, he will know that's my way of helping him, and if he causes trouble it will only hurt him and me. He might be angry, but he would never put me in danger. It will be alright."

Maya pinched the roof of her nose. "Great. Just great. You plan to get into trouble, and you just made me an accomplice." She released a long breath. "Tell me what do you plan to do?"

Talia glanced at Cornelia. "Cornelia will teleport me to the Lightclaw pack. Kalina is expecting me, and I will meet up with Axel there. It's the closest one to the location of the meeting."

"You already figured all that out.", Maya grumbled. "Why do you need me?" She thought of something. "Do you want me to go there as your Beta?"

"No.", Talia rejected Maya. "People know you are Beta of the Dark Howlers pack, and if you appear there, they might question my presence also. I need you to ensure no one knows I'm out at least until the Council meeting starts. Cornelia will return soon, but I will stay overnight. If Damon or Caden call to ask about me, I need you to tell them that everything is fine."

Maya pursed her lips. "Did you forget that two guys are standing in front of the study right now and they will have a shift change every four hours?"

How could Talia forget that Liam and Pierce had the first shift of guarding Talia? "That's where you come in."

"Why don't you just tell them that you will be away?"

"They are warriors.", Talia said matter-of-factly. "They have orders from Damon to keep an eye on me, and if I tell them otherwise it will be opposing Damon's order and forcing them to pick between the two of us. I can't do that to them, or to Damon. I already argued with them to wait outside."

Maya made a face. "In order to spare the feelings of your guards and Damon, you are throwing me into the fire?"

Talia looked at Maya guiltily. "When you put it that way, it sounds bad."

"Do you know what else sounds bad?", Maya asked grumpily. "You going there, and something happens to you. Damon will cause a bloodbath until he finds you and none of us will survive until the pack run. Did you think about that? Who knows you will be going there?"

Talia hesitated. "Axel, James, Cornelia, and you." She spoke to Kalina and told her that she will come to visit, but without any details.

Maya was outraged and she looked at James and Cornelia, her furious expression was asking them why they didn't talk some sense in Talia, but the duo in question was just sitting in silence. They didn't want to meddle. Talia told them that Cornelia only needed to take Talia to the Lightclaw pack, and their involvement with this flaky plan was over. James talked to Talia about the Council, and he believed that she will know what to do.

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Maya exhaled in frustration. "So, no one relevant knows. Talia, what are you thinking? This is not about you sneaking to eat ice cream when it's not allowed, this is about you going into the enemy territory, without a plan and without alerting your allies. It's suicide."

Talia was touched, and she knew that Maya means well, but she was running out of time, and she needed to show that she can handle this. She must do this for herself, for Damon, and for the Dark Howlers pack. What's the point of her being Luna or Alpha, and what's the point of her powers if she will hide while her mate is fighting for them?

Talia stood up and spoke with confidence.

"Alphas are gathering with an intention to band against Damon because they are greedy. If things don't end well, the Dark Howlers pack will suffer. Damon needs all the help he could get. Would you be able to sit it out if Caden is in trouble and you believe you can help him?"

Talia's eyes started glowing in silvery light.

"Did you forget who I am? I am the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack." The silvery glow pulsated all around Talia's body. "There is a reason why Axel is not the Alpha. Do I need to tell you which one is it?"

Maya gaped at Talia who was now completely shrouded in silvery light. Maya saw Talia glowing like that when she was saving Damon from the black mist the previous evening, but now that Talia was standing in front of her, it looked much more impressive.

Maya wondered, did Talia ask her something? Yes, it was about the rules of how Alpha was being determined and Maya knew that only power matters because in their world, the strongest ones stand at the top, and right now Talia looked like her position was not on the top, but way above everything on Earth.

The silvery light splashed on Maya, making her feel like a pleasant breeze enveloped her, bringing peace and happiness with it. Maya never felt anything like it.

Without thinking, Maya lowered her head. "I understand, Alpha Talia. I will do my best to assist you."

"Thank you, Maya.", Talia said with relief obvious in her voice. She really didn't want to argue or use force. After all, Maya was her friend and Talia didn't want to remind her of Damon's instructions that said how Talia is an Alpha, Damon's equal, and that members of the Dark Howlers pack should treat her as such. Maya included.

Chapter 541 Talia's determination (2)

Maya lifted her head to see that Talia was not glowing anymore.

"What's the plan? How will you get out of here without your guards noticing?", Maya asked. "I can distract them for some time, but not for the whole night."

Talia was pleased to see that Maya was onboard. "Cornelia prepared a teleporting diagram in the groove beyond the garden. We will sneak through the back exit using the blind spots of security cameras, and Cornelia will return the same way." Actually, if someone sees Cornelia returning, no one will care.

"I will also go with you.", James said. "Cora is still new in this realm, and I don't want anyone to take advantage of her." James had no intention to separate from Cornelia.

Talia didn't mind if James comes but she found it super cute that they were holding hands and there was that adorable nickname also. Cora.



Talia spoke to Maya, "The idea is that we will tell my guards how we are doing a sleepover in my room, or yours. The fact that I'm with you, the Beta, should make my guards relax a bit and they won't dare to come and disturb us."

Maya saw so many problems with this, but even if the crazy idea works, there was still one issue. "You sneaking out like that will be perceived as their incompetence. Damon will either punish them or relieve them of their duty. But even if a miracle happens and they come out of this scot-free, it will be a smear in their record as warriors."

"Not if I tell Damon that I used my power on them."

Maya's interest was piqued. "What power?"

"For them not to notice me leaving."

"Do you have such power?", Maya asked.

"No. But they don't know that.", Talia responded with a grin.

Maya looked at Talia helplessly.

"Maya, I know you are worried, and I am worried as well, but for other reasons. I took the herbs to suppress my scent so they can't track me and they won't care if Cornelia's or your scents are here or not. As for pacifying Damon, leave him to me. I gave him a slip several times and he won't have any right to call others incompetent because they lost me."

Maya agreed with this point. She remembered when Talia went into the forest and Damon summoned all warriors to search for her, and then he went to fetch Talia personally. Talia was skilled in moving without being noticed, it was like her super-power.

Maya had another question. "When are you going?"

Talia glanced at the time. "In fifteen minutes."

Maya was not happy with this. "If you can teleport there, why are you going this early? Why not at dawn?" Then Maya won't need to lie to Talia's guards for a long time, and with any luck, they will think that Talia is sleeping.

"There are things I need to settle in the Lightclaw pack before Alpha Magnus goes to attend the meeting.", Talia said.

Maya's eyes darted randomly as she connected the dots. "You want to persuade Alpha Magnus to support Damon."

"I hope I can do that.", Talia responded.

"You will need much more than hope, Lia.", Maya said. "Alpha Magnus is not an easy man to sway."

"All this is happening because Alpha Edward wants Marcy to be Damon's Luna. Alpha Magnus and Luna Alicia are fated mates and I believe that he will understand how pushing into Damon's arms Marcy or any other when he has a fated mate is not the right thing to do. It goes against the will of the Moon Goddess." Or something like that.

Maya puffed her cheeks. "You are forgetting that Alpha Magnus is a misogynist. Damon pampers you because of his feelings, because of the mate bond, because he doesn't want you for benefits, and because he sees women and men as equals. Luna Alicia is not so lucky as Alpha Magnus appreciates her in the bedroom and how she manages the packhouse, but when it comes to the pack business and important stuff, she is being pushed aside. No matter what your arguments are, you will be lucky if he doesn't kick you out of his study. Types like Alpha Magnus think of women as decorative vases."

Talia knew that Maya was saying that because she came from a pack where patriarchy ruled, and females were treated as baby machines that needed to clean and please their mates. And maybe the situation there was still the same. Talia wondered if she could persuade Damon to go there and see if they can make some changes, but she couldn't get distracted by those issues now.

"I don't expect it will be easy.", Talia said. "But I won't know unless I try. As for benefits, won't it be enough to think that we will be allies? Just by being on good terms with Damon and me, the Lightclaw pack will prosper."

Maya snorted. "Good luck with that." She looked at Talia seriously. "Alpha Magnus won't be easy to talk to. No matter what happens, don't lose your temper. If you use your power on him, it's a declaration of war."

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Maya, Cornelia, and Talia went to Maya's room. It was on the second floor, and Cornelia and Talia decided to come out of the window, and then use the cover of bushes to meet with James who will be waiting for them in the garden.

"Keith and Caleb will want to see you on our shift change.", Liam told Talia as she was about to close the door of Maya's room.

"That won't be necessary.", Talia said. "We will be wearing nightgowns and if Alpha or Beta find out that you saw us like that, you will be in trouble."

Liam and Pierce exchanged concerned gazes. Damon told them that at any moment at least two guards should be looking at Talia, and she already spent half an hour in the study without them!

"Don't tell me that you want to join us in bed.", Maya said while standing behind Talia. "I will be with her. What can go wrong?" So many things, but Maya didn't dare say that aloud.

Talia wanted to talk with her guards and explain the whole sleepover thing, but Maya said how that won't be necessary.

"The more you talk about it, the more suspicious it will get. This is their first night in the packhouse and let them think that these sleepovers are normal.", Maya advised.

With all that settled, and guards accepting to stay in the hallway without intruding unless there is a cry for help, Talia moved toward the open window and looked down.

"How do we get out? Jump?" It didn't look safe.

"With this.", Maya said, and Talia's eyes widened at the sight of a long rope.

"Why do you have such a thing in your room?"

Maya smiled mischievously. "You don't need to know. I didn't think it will come in handy outside of bed."

Talia gaped at Maya. She knew that Maya and Caden were playful, but... ropes? The most she did with Damon was when he covered her eyes but then, maybe in a few years, they will be adventurous to try other things as well.

Chapter 542 Talia's determination (2)

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Chapter 543 Seeking audience with the Alpha of the Lightclaw pack [Bonus chapter]

At the Lightclaw pack, Tony and Kalina were expecting Talia in their suite that included a small living area.

Cornelia and James decided to stick around because Axel will come with Yasmin to give the token to Talia, and Cornelia wanted to see Yasmin before heading back to the Dark Howlers pack.



"To what do we owe this pleasure, Lia?", Kalina asked after the introductions were done. Both Kalina and Tony were surprised to see James (aka a teen from a hostile pack) and Cornelia (aka the new face).

"How come you are here without Damon?" Kalina glanced at Talia's neck and smiled at the sight of a pinkish mark forming there. "We saw each other only a few days ago, yet you seem so different."

"A lot of things happened, but before we start catching up, we need to take care of some business.", Talia said and turned to Tony. "I need to talk to your father."

"He is in his study, discussing things with his Beta. It seems there is something going on, and he will leave in the middle of the night. When do you want to see him?"

"Now.", Talia responded.

Tony's expression told her that it won't be easy. "I can tell him you are here, but there is no guarantee he will see you now."

"I need to talk to him, Tony.", Talia pleaded. "It's important."

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

Talia didn't want to waste time, but she knew that Tony won't be supportive without knowing at least a part of the story.

"You all probably heard about Marcy leaving this morning.", Talia said and when Kalina and Tony nodded, Talia gave them a short version of how Alpha Edward was not pleased that he lost a pawn that could give him access to resources of the Dark Howlers pack, so he summoned the Council of Alphas. "They will meet at dawn. Alpha Magnus is preparing for that meeting. I don't know what Alpha Edward is up to, but he is definitely plotting against Damon." Talia turned to Tony. "I need your father to understand the situation and I hope that he won't side with the bad guys. If they get the majority of votes to suppress Damon and the Dark Howlers pack, Damon won't allow it to happen without retaliation."

Tony's face was arranged in a deep frown. He heard all kinds of stories about Alpha Edward, but was it OK to talk like that in front of James, aka Alpha Edward's son? And why was James more focused on the dark-skinned beauty by his side than on the verbal smackdown of the Red Moon? One should look at a woman like that only if they were mates, and James was definitely too young for such things.

Tony dispelled his thoughts about James and Cornelia because there were more important things to think about.

Tony realized that they might be on the verge of a massive war among werewolves, yet his father was keeping him in the dark. Tony felt useless.

He was the future Alpha with his mate by his side, and a pack, and Talia was just a not-acknowledged mate of an Alpha, yet she spoke with conviction that stirred other people to support her.

But no matter how strong Talia's heart was, Tony knew his father was, and he was aware that she was about to attempt the impossible. However, he didn't want to discourage Talia before she even tried.

"I will talk to him and do my best to secure you a meeting."

"Thank you, Tony.", Talia said with sincerity. "It needs to happen before he leaves. That's all I'm asking from you."

Tony glanced toward James and Cornelia. "Who else will be attending?"

"Just me.", Talia said. "If you can skip telling your father that James is here, that would be for the best."

Tony looked at James in confusion. Why would they conceal James' presence?

"My father doesn't know I'm here and I would like to keep it that way.", James said without further explanations.

Tony didn't comment on this. He went to talk to his father, and Talia checked her phone before turning to Kalina. "Axel will be here with his mate soon. No matter what you hear, I hope it can stay between us and please, don't panic."

Kalina's eyebrows shoot up. "I am already panicking. Tell me, how bad is it?"

"Alpha Edward feels that Damon is a threat, and he was using Marcy to get his hands on Damon's resources. Now that it failed, we believe he will turn hostile."

"Hostile? Like a war?", Kalina asked grimly. A war between the two largest packs will drag in everyone else.

Talia didn't deny it. "That's why I need to talk to Alpha Magnus. If Alpha Edward doesn't have the support of the majority of Alphas, they won't be able to start anything openly. In order to be more effective, tell me something about Alpha Magnus."

Kalina grimaced. "He is prideful and thinks that he knows everything. To be honest, I don't think you should talk to him on your own. At least go with Tony."

Talia didn't want to implicate Tony, especially if she fails. Tony might be punished. But then, Kalina wouldn't suggest for Tony to accompany her just because of moral support. "What will Tony do?"

"Alpha Magnus won't bully you with Tony around."

Talia needed a minute to understand Kalina's words. "Did he bully you?"

"I don't know if I would call it bullying but..." Kalina paused while contemplating how much she should say. "You see, Tony believes that women should get roles other than Omegas in this pack, and the pack members support him, yet Alpha Magnus thinks that's one of the radical ideas I planted in Tony's mind. Alpha Magnus didn't hit me or anything like that, but he made a point that I'm disturbing the pack and the order he is painstakingly maintaining, and that as the future Luna, I should know better. When we returned from your pack, Tony said how he is considering between Nate and Greg who will be his Beta, and Alpha Magnus lost it. The old guy is pushing for Paul to be Tony's Beta because Paul's father is the

current Beta, and somehow, I was blamed for this as well because it seems that before meeting me, Tony was much more obedient, so... you get the picture."

Talia nodded stiffly. She got the picture alright. It was a picture of a grumpy old man in power who was suppressing anyone who might jeopardize him or his so-called order. But was it really hopeless?

Talia remembered one person. "What about Luna Alicia? How does she fit into this picture?"

Kalina shrugged. "Luna Alicia is a good person, and she is encouraging Tony to do what he believes it's right, but that's only in private. Whenever Alpha Magnus is in the room, she turns quiet."

Talia interpreted this as: Tony's mother is supportive but useless.

The more Talia thought about her upcoming chat with Alpha Magnus, the less confidence she had.

She imagined grumpy Elders, and how she would deal with them without Damon around. Even in her head, it seemed to be impossible.

How was she supposed to reason with him?

Talia's mind worked a million thoughts a second. 'Liseli, what do you think?'

'We can always suppress the bastard and force him to do what we want.'

Talia rejected that idea. 'What happens when suppression is over, and he retaliates? I can't go into that meeting while mind-controlling Alpha Magnus.' Assuming that's even possible.

'I can try to put pressure on his mind and brainwash him.', Liseli suggested. 'But that's risky. If I use too less, it won't work, and if it's too much, he might become a vegetable.'

'Can your ideas be less violent?', Talia asked.

Liseli snorted. 'Your less violent won't produce any results. You either want results or not. We are running out of time.'

Talia couldn't believe this. Talking with Alpha Magnus had close to zero chances of success, and violence was not an option. Now what?

Chapter 544 Audience with the Alpha of the Lightclaw pack (1)

Axel, Yasmin, and Meg arrived, and Talia asked the newcomers to drop the formalities before introducing Yasmin to James and Kalina.

"Did you say, she is a witch?", Kalina asked with sparkles in her eyes, reminding Talia that Kalina and Maya are magic-obsessed buddies.

So far, no one said the w-word, so Kalina didn't suspect anything, thinking that Cornelia is just a human female who caught James' attention. However, when introducing Yasmin, Talia said how Yasmin is Axel's mate and a witch. A witch!

"I told you that you will hear things and not to panic." Talia reminded Kalina. "I am actually from the Midnight Guardians pack. From there, you can reach a place where witches live, and that's from where Yasmin and Cornelia came."

Kalina gaped at Talia, unsure which one of these to process first, and then she looked at Yasmin and Cornelia who were talking in whispers. "When you say, witches, you mean spells and potions and stuff, right?"

Talia shook her head helplessly. "You can ask them."

"You found your mate!", Yasmin exclaimed, making Talia and Kalina look that way.

Kalina's brows came together when she realized that Yasmin was talking about James whose chest was puffed, resembling a peacock.

"Isn't James underage?", Kalina asked in a whisper.

"Yes. He doesn't feel the bond fully, but Cornelia can feel it."

Kalina needed a moment. This was just one bomb after another. But she knew by now that James had Talia's trust which meant that he was not really a bad kid, but... he was a kid, the future Alpha of the greediest pack in existence, and Kalina could imagine that James will have many challenges if he wants to take Cornelia home with him, yet the possibility of them separating them was equally difficult. Once werewolves become aware of their mates, their whole world shifts with the center of gravity set on the mate and Kalina felt sorry for the couple.

Sure, life in the Lightclaw pack restricted many freedoms Kalina had so far, but at least she got to be with her mate, and Tony was working hard with a promise that things will be better once he takes over as the Alpha. Kalina could see a better tomorrow coming in a foreseeable future, but with James being only sixteen years-old, he won't be an adult for another two years, and who knows how long Alpha Edward will delay giving James the Alpha position?

Before Kalina could ask more questions, the door opened, and Tony appeared.

Tony greeted the newcomers and looked at Meg with a complex expression. He didn't know she will be there. Meg was supposed to be his Beta, his second in command, but she found her mate in another pack, and the only thing Tony could say was, "It's good to see you, Meg. Is the Midnight Guardians pack treating you well?"

Meg knew not to talk about changes in the leadership in the Midnight Guardians pack until Axel and Talia make it official. "Things are great. How are things here?"

"You probably know that a storm is brewing.", Tony responded and turned to Talia who was looking at him anxiously. "My father will see you now. He told me that you get five minutes."

Talia nodded in understanding. She was grateful that she got that much. "Let's go."

Axel grabbed Talia's arm. "Where are you going?"

"To speak with Alpha Magnus. I didn't tell you everything over the phone, but the situation is not good, and we need Alpha Magnus on our side."

"I will join you.", Axel said with finality and Talia knew that he won't let her go without him.

"OK.", Talia agreed. "But please, let me handle it."

Axel agreed. "Unless he tries to bully you, I will stand on the side."

"Kalina, Meg", Talia called. "I trust that you will keep Yasmin, Cornelia, and James safe until we return."

"Just go.", Kalina said with a big smile on her face. Why was Talia so official? This was Kalina's and Tony's oasis, and no one will disturb them. But, why was Meg bowing to Talia? More questions.

Seeing that Yasmin was chattering with Cornelia and that James was listening to two witches talking, Kalina pulled Meg to the side with, "Tell me about the Midnight Guardians pack. How is life with Kai? Why didn't he come? Did you come here to visit your parents? How long are you staying? ..."

Meg looked at Kalina helplessly, unsure from where to start. But Meg was equally interested to hear what was going on in the Lightclaw pack, so she was asking questions of her own.

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Alpha Magnus was alone in the study, sitting behind his executive desk when Tony arrived with Talia and Axel.

"Future Alpha Axel", Alpha Magnus greeted first without getting up. "I was not aware that you are here."

Actually, until Tony came to tell him that Talia wants an audience, Alpha Magnus didn't know Talia was there either, and he thought of giving a good scolding to his security. How can they have outsiders in the packhouse without him knowing about it?

"This is not an official visit.", Axel said.

There were two chairs in front of the desk, and Axel gestured for Talia to take a seat before he stood behind her, making him look like a guard. Tony was also standing on the side, so only Talia was sitting out of the three, leaving an empty chair next to her.

"Thank you for agreeing to see me, Alpha Magnus", Talia started with pleasantries even though the old guy technically ignored her so far. "I know you are a busy man."

"Since you know I'm busy, why don't you get to the point? I hope it's worth my time."

Talia noticed the unpleasant attitude Alpha Magnus didn't show last time. Was it because Damon was not present now? Maya and Kalina warned her that Alpha Magnus was not easy to talk to, but Talia didn't think he will be outright rude. How bad would it be if Axel was not with her? Talia pushed those questions to the side.

"This is about the upcoming Council of the Alphas. Alpha Edward requested this meeting because he is displeased that his daughter failed in becoming the Luna of the Dark Howlers pack. Alpha Edward is set on increasing his power and he wants to use the Council of Alphas to suppress Damon."

Seeing Alpha Magnus' amused expression, Talia realized that he knew all this already and he was looking at her like a child who was complaining about some petty squabble on the playground.

Talia decided to change her tactic.



"Will you stand up against Alpha Edward? Or will you allow him to use you so that he gets stronger?"

Alpha Magnus' face darkened. "No one uses me."

"I was not talking only about you, Alpha Magnus. I was talking about all Alphas that are going there without an intention to do the right thing."

"Oh? And what's the right thing to do?"

"This is an obvious case of Alpha Edward trying to use numbers in order to bully Damon. Unless you oppose it openly, your silence will support it."

Chapter 545 Audience with the Alpha of the Lightclaw pack (2)

"Miss Talia", Alpha Magnus called. "Are you expecting me to interfere with the issue of an Alpha refusing to make a she-wolf his chosen mate?"

"That's not what I'm expecting from you. That's what Alpha Edward is expecting.", Talia responded matter-of-factly. "He will twist this into an issue of Damon abusing his power and being incompetent, but the reality is that this meeting is called because Marcy didn't achieve her goal. Everyone knows that. However, what you don't know is that Damon found his fated mate. I hear that Luna Alicia is your fated mate. What would you do if someone tries to match you with another woman? Damon wouldn't accept Marcy or any other no matter how much pressure is put on him."

Alpha Magnus listened to Talia with a stiff expression.

Did he get her point? Sure. Based on the information he got, Damon's fated mate was right there in his office, trying to convince him to support Damon, however... "That's a touching story, miss Talia, but I don't understand why you are telling it now, here, to me. I thought I was clear that I don't have much time, yet you came here to waste it."

Talia suppressed her rage that flared at his condescending tone. "Waste it?"

"Are you really expecting me to meddle in Alpha Damon's choice of his Luna? Or in the efforts of Alpha Edward to create a bond through marriage with the Dark Howlers pack? You mentioned how Alicia is my

fated mate. Three decades ago, I chose Alicia to be my Luna. And if at that time I decided to reject her and pick another woman to be my Luna, I wouldn't be kind to people standing in my way. Do you understand that?"

Talia's brows came together as she processed his words. Of course, she understood that, but... "This is about Alpha Edward trying..."

"Yeah, yeah...", Alpha Magnus interrupted Talia. "Alpha Edward wants to get more powerful. What's new about that? A better question would be, what's wrong with that? Alphas want to grow so they can protect their people, it's normal. Let's stop pretending how this is about mates, doing the right thing, and other sentimental crap because that's not how things work. If Alpha Damon was here, asking for my assistance, he would offer me something in return. He would offer me something that would make me happy so that I can make him happy. That's how things work, Miss Talia. There is no such thing as a free lunch. So let me rephrase my question. Are you here to offer me something, or just to waste my time?"

Talia couldn't believe this. Weren't Alpha Magnus and Damon on friendly terms? James told her that Alpha Magnus was selfish and thinking only about benefits, but she hoped that when facing her, he won't be so shameless.

Talia didn't need to look to her left to know that Tony's head was down and his hands were balled into fists. Tony didn't like this, but he didn't dare say anything against his father. This was wrong, so wrong.

"Damon is your ally. Will you turn your back to him now when he needs you because there are no direct benefits? What about the friendly relationship between your packs? What about Damon training and mentoring Tony? They are friends, good friends. Doesn't that count for something?"

Alpha Magnus looked at Talia mockingly. "You talk about friendship and Tony, but how does that relate to me?"

Talia couldn't believe this. "Isn't Tony your son? Isn't he the future Alpha of this pack? By helping Damon now, you will set a good stage for a good collaboration between Tony and Damon for years to come. Don't tell me you don't see it." Talia shook her head. "Of course, you see it, but you don't care because the only thing that concerns you are your benefits."

Alpha Magnus didn't like the way Talia spoke, but Axel was right there, glaring at him, so he controlled his temper and responded, "This is not about MY benefits. I am thinking about my pack. That's what Alphas do."

"Bullshit!", Talia squeezed through her teeth. "How about you drop the act and admit that this is only about you? If you are thinking about the Lightclaw pack, you would invest more in your son. He is the future of this pack, not you. But instead of training him, you encouraged Tony to travel and have fun. Tony trusted that you have his interests at heart, yet you denied him years of proper education and now people are talking about him as a failure. Damon is the one trying to fix your wrongs. Tony has good ideas, yet you are ignoring..."

"How dare you!", Alpha Magnus snapped. "Who do you think you are?"

"She is...", Axel stopped talking when Talia raised her hand.

"He doesn't need to know who I am, Axel.", Talia said while standing up slowly, unable to sit still as anger swelled within her.

'Shameless goat!', Liseli shouted in Talia's mind. 'Let me give him some pain.'

Talia ignored her bloodthirsty wolf and spoke to Axel while looking at Alpha Magnus.

"He doesn't deserve to know who I am. He is just a greedy Alpha who will ruin the lives of thousands so that he can enjoy a few years pretending to be important."

"Did you just...?"

"Insult you?", Talia interrupted Alpha Magnus as Liseli's rage amplified Talia's. "That's the least you should..."

'Kitten?', Damon's voice sounded in Talia's mind. 'What's going on?'

Talia paused. Why was Damon in her head? And he sounded concerned.

Damon was in a plane and Caden was telling him about the things that happened recently, in case the black runes flare again and Damon forgets about Talia. Caden's update was focused on the Dark Howlers pack and the dangers they were facing, without mentioning Talia. In that way, Damon's memory related to the pack business and dealing with Alpha Edward will be intact even with Talia gone.

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Talia didn't think that their mind-link will work across such a distance, and she definitely forgot that he can feel her emotions.

Damon wanted to know what was going on, and Talia had no intention of telling him where she was.

'Nothing, Damon', Talia responded. 'It's just me thinking about what awaits for you at that meeting and backstabbing Alphas and... I got upset.'

'It will be fine, kitten.', Damon coaxed her, his deep voice healed the cracks her anger created. 'I will do everything I can to keep you safe. No one will jeopardize what we have as long as there is a fight in me.'

'I know.'

Talia knew that Damon would do everything he could, but what about her? Was she really giving it her all, or was she tiptoeing while trying not to offend anyone? Was there a scenario where everyone will be happy? Or was she supposed to look only after her interests, like Alpha Magnus and other greedy people?

Regardless of what the answers were, she didn't want to worry Damon.

'Focus on your thing, Damon, and I will do my part.', Talia said.

'Alright. I miss you.'

Talia smiled at this cheesy line, but the truth was that she missed him as well. 'I miss you too, Damon. Stay safe and... see you soon.'

Chapter 546 Audience with the Alpha of the Lightclaw pack (2)

"Miss Talia", Alpha Magnus called. "Are you expecting me to interfere with the issue of an Alpha refusing to make a she-wolf his chosen mate?"

"That's not what I'm expecting from you. That's what Alpha Edward is expecting.", Talia responded matter-of-factly. "He will twist this into an issue of Damon abusing his power and being incompetent, but the reality is that this meeting is called because Marcy didn't achieve her goal. Everyone knows that. However, what you don't know is that Damon found his fated mate. I hear that Luna Alicia is your fated mate. What would you do if someone tries to match you with another woman? Damon wouldn't accept Marcy or any other no matter how much pressure is put on him."

Alpha Magnus listened to Talia with a stiff expression.

Did he get her point? Sure. Based on the information he got, Damon's fated mate was right there in his office, trying to convince him to support Damon, however... "That's a touching story, miss Talia, but I don't understand why you are telling it now, here, to me. I thought I was clear that I don't have much time, yet you came here to waste it."

Talia suppressed her rage that flared at his condescending tone. "Waste it?"

"Are you really expecting me to meddle in Alpha Damon's choice of his Luna? Or in the efforts of Alpha Edward to create a bond through marriage with the Dark Howlers pack? You mentioned how Alicia is my fated mate. Three decades ago, I chose Alicia to be my Luna. And if at that time I decided to reject her and pick another woman to be my Luna, I wouldn't be kind to people standing in my way. Do you understand that?"

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Chapter 547 Audience with the Alpha of the Lightclaw pack (3) [Bonus chapter]

Talia's smile froze as she realized that Alpha Magnus was looking at her with a smug expression.

He assumed that she stopped talking because she was out of arguments, unaware of her exchange with Damon that just transpired.

Another wave of anger simmered in Talia, this time with a dose of determination, and she asked Liseli to block those turbulent emotions from reaching Damon. He had a lot on his plate already, and Talia wanted to deal with this herself. If she can't handle one Alpha, how can she stand by Damon's side and challenge many?

Talia couldn't believe that Alpha Magnus would be so aloof to the consequences of his selfish actions. It's not that he didn't care about his pack, but he didn't care about anyone other than himself.

Talia knew that she could suppress Alpha Magnus with a thought and force him to obey her, but was violence the only solution? Was this the time to be picky about methods to achieve goals and prevent an incoming calamity?

She needed to calm down and think this through because if she acted recklessly she will be the cause of a war, yet she came here to prevent one.

Talia could feel the will of the Midnight Guardians pack. They supported her with the hope that she will lead them into a better future, and Alpha Magnus was the prime example of a man who would sell them out to the highest bidder without blinking. Heck! He would probably enslave her people so that he can use their powers for his benefit!

Alpha Magnus was looking down at Talia and she hated it. Behind that desk was not an Alpha of a pack. That was another bully, a person who wouldn't hold back from harming others in order to get what he wants, but... was she any better?

Talia was never so conflicted.

Wasn't she considering doing whatever it takes in order to get her way? Didn't that make her a bully in someone's eyes? Just as she believed that her cause was right, Alpha Magnus believed that there was nothing wrong with his actions. On the other hand, they were werewolves, where power rules. What's the use of her powers if she won't use them for herself? She consoled herself that it was not only for herself.

Everyone in the Lightclaw pack suffered because Alpha Magnus was selfish and narrow-minded, and that pack was not the only one. Talia knew about the situation in the Red Moon pack, and after her experience in the Dark Howlers pack, she understood why people were seeking refuge under Damon's protection.

Normal people didn't want to live in a place where they will be oppressed and forced to bow their heads while a handful of people enjoys a lavish lifestyle.

Damon showed Talia how an Alpha works hard for his pack, and that he will fight when needed. Damon didn't kiss anyone's ass, he didn't host parties, and their packhouse was not encased in gold and silk. Because of his efforts and sacrifices, everyone in the Dark Howlers pack could live with dignity, regardless of their status or job. It was not perfect, far from it, but Damon did the best he could, and people supported him. Talia admired him immensely.

As a stark contrast, Alpha Magnus was sitting behind that desk and mocking Talia because she came to him with a request to do the right thing without bringing gifts. Unacceptable!

With this, Talia's resolve firmed. She will do the right thing for herself, for Damon, and for everyone who wants to live freely.

'Liseli', Talia called. 'Open the mind-link with the Midnight Guardians pack. I want to talk to Axel and... hold down Alpha Magnus. I don't want him to move or to say a word.'

Liseli didn't respond, but Talia felt her approval and the surge of energy that froze Alpha Magnus in the spot.

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'Axel!'

Axel jolted when Talia's voice sounded in his head, and if they were not facing a serious situation of an uncooperative Alpha Magnus, Axel would jump with joy, and probably give her a hug. Her voice in his mind meant that she accepted the mind-link and their pack. THEIR pack. He finally got his sister back, and he was happy.

'Did you bring what I asked you to?', Talia asked.

Axel knew what she was talking about. 'Yes.'

Other than the token representing the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack, Axel also brought several doses of concoction that erases short-term memory.

Axel explained to Talia that the concoction was something that Cassandra came up with, as a way to deal with the accidental witnesses of powers that members of their pack possess. Whoever leaves the Midnight Guardians pack would carry at least one syringe with him in order to conceal the existence of their abilities. Also, there were cases when spies would follow them with the goal to find the entrance into the territory of the Midnight Guardians pack, and the memory-erasing potion came in handy more than once.

As for why Talia needed so many, those were part of Talia's backup plan, in case things go really wrong in the meeting of Alphas. She would make them forget what happened and use suggestions to convince them that Alpha Edward is the bad guy who shouldn't have their support.

Other than Cassandra and a few of her helpers, no one knew how to make those, so Talia thought that even if she uses it on Alphas in the Council, no one will suspect her because no one was aware of such a thing as a memory-erasing potion.

Talia had no intention of defeating Alpha Edward by cheating. However, she was determined to cut off the assistance he would get to pressure Damon. When she put it in the context of protecting what's dear to her, an act of erasing the short-term memory of a dozen Alphas was acceptable.

Unfortunately, the Council of the Alphas was only a few hours away, yet she had a mountain of tasks to complete, and if she was not careful it could all blow up in her face. Big time!

Talia already held Alpha Magnus in place, and she wanted to know who will support her.

'Axel', Talia called through the mind-link. 'How far will you go to get this settled?'

'Do you plan on killing Alpha Magnus?', Axel asked stiffly.

Talia was surprised that Axel went to that extreme. 'I hope it won't come to it.'

'I don't know what you are planning, but I've got your back, Talia.', Axel said with amusement in his voice as he added, 'Keep in mind that we can't erase the memory of the whole pack. I have only fifteen doses.'

Talia was touched by Axel's support. He really was a doting older brother. 'I don't want to erase the memory of everyone. Just one will do.'

Chapter 548 The new Alpha of the Lightclaw pack (1)

Tony was anxious about this development. He knew that his father will be difficult, but he didn't think he will be outright disrespectful. Tony was shocked to hear Talia talk back, but the biggest surprise was that Alpha Magnus didn't throw a fit, and Talia was not in the dungeon or missing a limb, or in the dungeon without limbs.

Since they came to the study, it was one surprise after another, and now his father was just sitting there without moving, and Tony had no idea what to expect.

"Anthony", Talia called his full name, making him jolt in place. "Are you alright with this?"

Tony had no idea what Talia was talking about. The last few minutes were a complete shit-show and Tony wondered if they will start a war now. Ah, if that happens, Kalina will blame him because Kalina really likes Talia and Maya and he will be sandwiched between his father's wishes and everything else, like many times before.

"Am I alright, with what?", Tony asked cautiously.

"Are you alright with letting your father hurt his people and his family?"

Tony glanced nervously at Alpha Magnus, confirming that his father didn't move a muscle at this provocation, even though his eyes were flaring with anger and... was that fear?

"What can I do?", Tony asked dejectedly. "He is the Alpha. His word is the law in this pack and unless we plan a mutiny, a murder, or a war, it will stay that way."

"What if that's not the case?", Talia continued probing. "What if you could fix it? What if you could take over without spilling blood or angering anyone? Would you do it?"

Tony's eyes widened in shock. What did she say? Did he hear her right? "How is that possible?"

"Anything is possible if you want it badly enough. So, let me ask you, do you want to take over as the Alpha of the Lightclaw pack and lead your people toward a future where females are not oppressed?"

Seeing that Tony was hesitating, Talia kept on talking.

"I know you can do it. You and Kalina are strong, and people will follow you. Damon and I will support you until you are confident enough to tackle things on your own."

"We will support you as well.", Axel chimed in, and Talia smiled in approval.

"You heard Axel.", Talia said. "The Midnight Guardians pack will be your ally as well, and I'm confident that Alpha Maddox also will join. You can rely on three Alphas for guidance and support. You spoke about a future where you and Kalina will make changes for the better. This is your opportunity to make the future into right now. Tell me, Tony, are you willing?"

Tony blinked once, twice, and after a few endless seconds, his gaze firmed as he decided, "Yes."

Talia was pleased that Tony agreed, otherwise she would need to issue an Alpha challenge and perform a hostile takeover. That was her backup plan.

With Tony's agreement, Talia spoke to Axel through the mind-link, 'You know what to do. The old guy can't move a muscle.'

Axel got from his inner pocket a syringe and went to Alpha Magnus.

"What...?"

Tony's question was cut short when Talia raised her arm. "This won't harm him."

Tony frowned when he saw Axel injecting Alpha Magnus with an unknown concoction, but he didn't stop it from happening.

When Axel nodded at Talia that it was done, Talia stood in front of Alpha Magnus, and said, "Alpha Magnus, you gave so much for the Lightclaw pack, and you decided to retire. You will go with Luna Alicia on a long journey and travel the world. But before that, you will hand over your Alpha position to Anthony. Tony was working hard, and he has good ideas that will bring prosperity to your pack. Call your Beta and the Shaman. The ceremony for the new Alpha will be conducted in one hour. Until then, you will tell Tony what he needs to know about the Council of the Alphas."

Talia stepped away from Alpha Magnus, and Tony's eyes darted from Talia to his father.

Tony expected that Talia will use a suppressive aura or a weapon or magic or something, anything. But she just spoke and... "Do you think it will be that easy?"

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The door of the study opened, and Beta Cage came in.

Beta Cage was a tall man with a head full of gray hair, and the sun-kissed skin of a man in his late forties. His impressive physique was not hidden under the well-fitted suit he wore. Just by looking at his prideful posture that demanded respect, one would know that Beta Cage was a high-ranking member of a pack.

"You called for me, Alpha?"

"Yes.", Alpha Magnus confirmed. "I decided to hand over my Alpha position to Tony. Shaman is on his way. Get things set up and summon our people, the ceremony will be done in one hour."

Tony gaped at his father, unable to believe that this was really happening.

Another person who stared blankly at Alpha Magnus was Beta Cage. Until just a few minutes ago they were discussing strategies to get as much as possible from Alpha Edward and now he was stepping down? Something didn't sound right. And what was with the rush?

"Did they blackmail you?"

Alpha Magnus shook his head. "The younger generation has good ideas and it's time for us to enjoy our retirement. There is no point in waiting until we are too old to appreciate life. I want to travel the world with my mate."

Beta Cage was still suspicious. Sure, it all sounded fine, but that was not how Alpha Magnus would talk. They would plan big parties for every occasion worth celebrating, using that as an opportunity to strengthen their connections, and something major as the new Alpha ceremony was done on such a short notice? Didn't he say that he will remain the Alpha until he can, with Tony being a powerless pawn to bridge the gap between him and the younger generation that was emerging? And another problem was that Beta's position was tied to the Alpha he served.

Alphas are made by bloodline, while Betas and Gammas are regular pack members who get a power boost after the ceremony where their Alpha and the pack accept them. Sure, some are born with more potential, but without getting the position that potential would remain unused.

What will happen to him after this unexpected retirement? With Beta Cage not being a Beta anymore, they will need to move into one of the regular dwellings, and that will be a downgrade.

Beta Cage remembered his son, Paul. They knew that Tony was not willing to make Paul his Beta. But if Paul becomes a Beta, they can keep their current villa. That would be good. How can he ensure that his son gets that position?

Seeing that Beta Cage was not responsive, Alpha Magnus asked sternly, "Are you disobeying your Alpha?"

Beta Cage was startled. This was Alpha Magnus he knew. He quickly bowed. "I wouldn't dare. I will get everything ready." Beta Cage gritted his teeth and then his eyes lost focus.

Tony couldn't wrap his head around the current situation.

Did Talia make him an Alpha? Just like that? What sorcery was that?

Chapter 549 The new Alpha of the Lightclaw pack (2)

After discussing a few key points with Alpha Magnus, Beta Cage, and the Shaman, Axel, Talia, and Tony returned to the suite where Kalina waited for them with James, Cornelia, Yasmin, and Meg.

Still in disbelief at what was happening, Tony told Kalina that she needs to prepare because she will be the Luna of the Lightclaw pack in less than an hour.



"Are you serious?", Kalina asked Tony who was shaking his head and gesturing toward Talia.

"Ask her.", Tony said. "One moment my father was his usual self, and in the next one he was summoning people to arrange for the Alpha ceremony." He looked at Kalina. "This is it. You will be my Luna. We are doing this. How are we going to do this?"

Both Kalina and Tony turned toward Talia, their eyes full of questions.

Talia realized that they were looking at her for guidance. Why her? She was not equipped for this! Everyone else in this room had more leadership experience compared to Talia! But she couldn't leave them hanging.

"Tony, talk to Axel about matters related to Alpha business. He took over Alpha duties recently, so he will be the best to give you advice."

With this, Talia was down to one person looking at her.

"Kalina, you will need to reach out to Luna Alicia and find out what she was doing so far. If she would share how she did it, that would be great. Maybe Tanya has some useful advice."

Kalina agreed. Her sister just became a Luna, but Tanya has years of managing the company, and what's most important, Kalina trusts Tanya. As for Luna Alicia... "Luna Alicia is managing the packhouse."

Talia felt she can share some tips related to that. "Find a few trustworthy Omegas and assign them duties." Kalina's concerned expression reminded Talia that things at the Lightclaw pack were vastly different compared to the Dark Howlers pack. Here, everyone was competing for a spot. "Do you have anyone you can trust?"

Kalina shook her head. "Omegas I interacted with are either keeping to themselves or are loyal to Luna Alicia."

"That's fine", Talia assured Kalina. "Things don't need to be perfect from the start. In time, you can tweak your approach and things will fall into place. I can recommend Ivy and Lily. They are hardworking

and discrete, as for anything else, they will learn. Ask Ivy and Lily to start by shadowing people who are currently working under Luna Alicia and increase their responsibilities as they gain confidence."

Kalina understood something. "Are you telling me to replace the staff in the packhouse?"

Talia shrugged. "It's up to you. Do you trust them to accomplish their tasks without backstabbing you? Luna Alicia and Alpha Magnus formed a network of people that helped them guide this pack. Some of them might be fine with you taking over, but there will be many looking down on you because you are inexperienced. Don't give them a chance to sabotage you and make you look bad. Ivy and Lily are working here for some time, and you should hear their opinions about the rest of the staff."

Kalina nodded robotically. She thought that she was ready for this, but now that it happened, she was utterly lost. But she couldn't admit to it. Tony needed her and she could only say, "I will talk to Ivy and Lily and take it from there."

"Do you have any advice for me?", Tony asked Talia because Axel was not very helpful. Sure, Axel told him that he should assemble generals to discuss the current situation, assess loyalty, and probably change patrolling shifts. But that was too much. Tony barely interacted with generals, and he feared that they will treat him like a child. An incompetent one.

Talia looked at Tony helplessly. "Didn't you talk to Axel?"

"There is a lot. Can you help me prioritize? What should I do first?"

"Yes, there is a lot.", Talia confirmed. "And that is why you need to pick your Beta. He will ease your load."

Axel frowned at this. He didn't mention picking a Beta because he didn't need to pick one. Now it turned out that he was not helpful and Talia will think less of him.

Tony made a troubled expression. "I was thinking between Nate and Greg which one to be my Beta, but my father is pushing Paul. He is a good guy, and his father is a Beta, but Paul is not a Beta material."

Talia didn't think that was a problem. "You shouldn't listen to your father. This is about your Beta, a man who will watch your back. You need to trust him that work will be done in your absence and that he won't abuse his position."

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Tony agreed with this. If it was about the trust, that meant, Paul was out. Actually, Tony didn't dislike Paul. They were friends and Paul was a good guy, but the fact that Alpha Magnus and Beta Cage were pushing Paul like he was the only valid choice was rubbing Tony the wrong way.

"I might give Paul some other role, but I will think about it later. How do I decide on my Beta between Nate and Greg?"

"Do you need to decide?", Talia asked. "Make both Nate and Greg your Betas."

"Two Betas?", Tony asked. "Is that possible?" It was not unusual for a pack to have two Betas, but that was because one was the Beta and the other one was the Beta's mate.

"Why not? This is your pack. As the Alpha, your word is the law. If you say that there will be two Betas, there will be two Betas. Your biggest problem will be to decide on work division between Nate and Greg, but in terms of status, the two of them can be equals."

Tony looked at Talia like she said something fantastic. How was it possible that she easily solved a problem that was bothering him for months? "Will you be my Beta?"

Talia burst into a laugh that stopped when Axel stood in front of Tony and looked at him with hostility.

"You can be friends, but you can't disrespect her."

Tony was flabbergasted. "How did I disrespect her?"

"You are talking with the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack.", Axel said and both Tony and Kalina turned to stare at Talia.

Kalina looked around to confirm if Axel was talking nonsense, only to see that James, Cornelia, Yasmin, and Meg were not surprised by this revelation.

"How? When?", Tony asked Talia.

"It's a long story.", Talia responded. She wanted to scold Axel for dropping this bomb, but then she decided against it because Tony was bound to find out in a few hours when Talia asks him to hitch a ride with Tony to the Council of Alphas.

"Explanations will come later because you need to prepare for your ceremony, Alpha Anthony, and then pick one of your Betas to accompany you because I will be joining you to the Council of Alphas with my Beta."

Kalina finally connected the dots and she looked at Meg. "You are Beta?"

"I am Talia's Beta.", Meg confirmed. "Kai is Axel's."

"Axel's Beta?", Tony asked.

Axel confirmed. "I am Talia's proxy."

"I like to think of us as equals.", Talia corrected Axel and turned to Tony. "Remember, your pack and your rules. We decided to lead the Midnight Guardians pack as two Alphas."

Actually, Talia wanted to leave that pack to Axel with Yasmin to manage, but the more Talia felt the connection with the Midnight Guardians pack, the idea of her giving up on her position as the Alpha was becoming more difficult. Why did it feel like she would abandon her children?

"Wow!", Tony exclaimed. "No wonder you said how we will have support from both packs. Thank you."

Talia waved her hand, indicating that it was not a big deal. "Prepare for the ceremony. We will watch it from the side." And to make sure Alpha Magnus or his minions don't try to ruin things. Talia took a mental note to keep an eye on Beta Cage because he was one of the volatile suspects that might throw a fit when he realizes that his son didn't make the cut to be a Beta, while two other guys did.

Chapter 550 Babies! [Bonus chapter]

Tony and Kalina went to meet with Greg, Nate, Ivy, and Lily in order to share the news about their new roles and to figure out what that actually means. They didn't have much time and everything was done in rush, but both Tony and Kalina were running high on adrenalin.

With Alpha and Luna to-be out of their suite, the atmosphere calmed down.

Axel and Yasmin were eager to head back to the Midnight Guardians pack.

"We would love to stay for the ceremony. Unfortunately, a few days passed at home, and with only Kai and Tyler there, we feel we shouldn't delay our return unless it's necessary.", Axel said. He didn't think that Tony and Kalina will miss them with everything else going on.

"I understand. Thank you for coming.", Talia responded. "Meg will return after the meeting." Talia turned to look at the person in question. "Unless she wants to meet with her family."

Meg was aching to see her family, they were so close now. She feared that if she sees them, they will ask her to stay longer which might be too much for Kai.

"I will visit them another time with Kai.", Meg said, determined to stay in this suite so she doesn't risk bumping into them.

Axel wanted to remind Talia that their people were eager to leave the realm in search of their mates, but he knew that she had a lot on her mind, so he didn't want to bring it up.

'Come home after this is over.', Axel's voice sounded in Talia's head through the mind-link.

Talia was still not sure how to deal with the two-home situation she found herself in. 'Once Damon's condition is stable, we will visit.'

'Until then, I will see to finalize our conditions for using the portal with the realm of witches.'

This reminded Talia. 'Be careful. I believe there is a reason why the portal was closed. If you go there, be careful of Evanora and everyone else. Don't trust them easily.'

Axel was alerted. 'There must be a reason you are saying that.'

'We found a clue that points to the possibility of witches being used for breeding with werewolves in an attempt to create offspring with a wolf and with magic. I just found out about that this morning, and I will investigate it, but I have a feeling that's related to the portal being closed, and why Alpha Isaac and Alpha Sophia were so adamant about keeping the existence of our powers a secret. They knew something and...' Talia paused.

'And?', Axel urged her to continue.

'I think that's why I ended up in the Red Moon pack as a child. The evidence points at Alpha Edward's father. He knew about witches being used for breeding and I believe that he was the one who brought me to the Red Moon pack.'

Axel's jaw twitched as he listened to Talia. 'I will talk with...'

'No.', Talia interrupted him. 'Don't give anyone a clue that you know something. You can investigate discretely but leave talking for when we have more information. I really hope that previous Alphas were not involved, but if they were, we shouldn't risk alerting them and giving them a chance to destroy the evidence.'

'Thank you for trusting me with this information.' Axel was really touched. This was something that possibly incriminated their parents who were obviously closer to Axel as he grew up with them, yet she believed that he would do the right thing.

As they were ready to leave, Yasmin gave hugs to Cornelia, Meg, and then Talia.

'She is with a child', Liseli spoke in Talia's mind.

Talia didn't get it. 'What?'

'I didn't sense it when she arrived because the contact was brief, but now I'm certain. You will be an aunt.'

Talia gawked at Yasmin's perfectly flat abdomen. A baby!

'Are you sure?', Talia asked.

'Why don't you use your ability to scan the surroundings? You will be able to pick up the heartbeat. If you touch her, you can sense it better.'

Talia took Yasmin's hand into hers and closed her eyes. Talia's perception shifted to see the outlines, and then she focused on Yasmin's abdomen. She needed a moment to hear two distinct rhythmical beats.

Talia looked at Axel who observed them with curiosity.

"Congratulations, Axel. You will be a father. Twice."

Axel stared at Talia for a second, and then his mouth hung open so widely that a whole fist could fit in there.

"What did you say?", Yasmin asked breathily while touching her stomach.

"You are pregnant.", Talia said. "Twins. Congratulations."

Cornelia was also shocked. "How is that possible? We saw each other only two days ago!"

Yasmin shook her head. "You forgot about changes in time. For you, it was two days, for us, it was two months."

"Oh...", Cornelia felt silly. How did she forget that?

Meg was bouncing from excitement. She-wolves have heat that starts shortly after marking and happens every six months. "I had my first heat after arriving at the Midnight Guardians pack. I was under the effect of medications and supervision of healers, so Kai and I couldn't..." She didn't finish, but everyone knew what they couldn't do. "We hope for better luck next time. However, Yasmin is a witch, and her cycles are more like human's. We will have Alpha pups!"

"Are you sure?", Axel asked Talia while staring at Yasmin's stomach like he wished to see through it.

"Axel?", Yasmin called in a small voice. "Aren't you happy?"

"Shocked is a better term.", Axel responded.

Yasmin hugged her stomach. "Don't you want us to have babies?"

Axel realized that Yasmin was upset, and he was quick to pull her into his embrace.

"Of course, I do. Even if we have hundreds of children, I would want more if that's what you want. My shock is not because I'm not happy, but because it's not possible. At least I didn't think it was possible. We didn't have a child born in our pack for two decades. The Oracle said that we were punished by the Moon Goddess..." Axel's voice trailed as he turned to look at Talia. "The Moon Goddess punished us



because we lost you." He didn't want to say that their parents gave up on Talia. "Now that you are back, as an Alpha, the curse was lifted. You really are a blessing for our pack."

Talia was not superstitious. Curses? Blessings? Wasn't that just mumbo-jumbo to control the masses? But the truth was that she could feel every member of the Midnight Guardians pack, and there were no children present. Axel was right that they didn't have any births in the last two decades.

"Then, your babies are much more than just a new life.", Talia said. "They carry the hope for our pack that things are changing for the better. Take care of each other."

After another round of hugs and congratulations, Axel and Yasmin headed back.

Cornelia was happy about Yasmin having a baby. And it's two of them!

Witches also didn't have children in ages, but that was because they didn't have males to produce offspring. She wished to be there when Evanora finds out about Yasmin's pregnancy. How will the high priestess take it?