

Alphas Bride 651

Chapter 651 Connecting two packs [Bonus chapter]

Talia couldn't believe that so much time had passed since Sophia and Isaac became Alphas, yet they didn't find out what happened with their own family members. And it's not that they didn't have any results, but they didn't try at all.

Even if the chances of Valerian being alive were slim, and Sophia didn't care to look for him because she feared he would take over her spot, how come Sophia didn't look for her parents? Was Sophia afraid that her parents won't approve of her as the Alpha? Or was there another reason?

Talia couldn't understand the reasoning behind Sophia's decisions. As an Alpha, Sophia should know that ignoring problems won't make them go away.

Everyone talked about the Midnight Guardians pack as the most mysterious pack of all, yet they were mysterious because Sophia and Isaac closed them off. Talia had to admit how that was one smart thing to do, at least from the outsider's perspective. If people knew how incompetent Sophia and Isaac were, other packs would put all their efforts into finding that portal and conquering the Midnight Guardians pack.

Axel left shortly after Sophia and Isaac, giving Talia and Damon some privacy before Yasmin and Cornelia came for the next round of meetings.

Talia was spacing out while staring at the necklace that her father had left behind. It couldn't be just a random trinket. It had a meaning, or at least that's what Talia hoped for.

The flower with six petals reflected the light in rainbow colors, making it look magical. The tear-shaped white pearl was cold to the touch. Between the two were one silver hoop and another diamond.

Talia looked at the pendant from every possible angle, like there was a secret message she could unravel. A spell to trigger? A voice message? Will it open like a locket? Something... anything...

The necklace was shiny and delicate, and it didn't look like it was made for a strong male to wear. Did it belong to her mother?

Talia wished that the necklace could tell her about her parents. She wished to know what they looked like, to hear their voices and feel their touch. A hug, at least.

'Objects can't speak, but people can', Liseli spoke in Talia's mind.

'What do you mean?'

'Just how you and Damon can share mental images, we can look into Sophia's.'

Talia felt butterflies going wild in her stomach. The possibility of seeing her father made her nervous to the point of Talia needing to use the restroom, but before she got her hopes up, Talia had to ask, 'Will Sophia allow it?'

Liseli snorted. 'We don't need her permission. I can force my way in.'

'Force?' Talia asked. Forcing access into someone's mind didn't sound pleasant. 'Will that harm her or me?'

'Depending on her resistance, she might turn more stupid than she already is, but isn't that worth seeing your father as he held you in his arms? You can hear his voice. Don't you want to hear exactly what he said? On top of that, you will be able to feel Sophia's emotions and experience what happened after your father left.'

Talia had to admit that she was interested. She thought that exchanging mental images was only between mates. Was this another power?

'That's how wolves of the same pack communicate. We can't talk so we send images to each other.', Liseli explained. 'However, you are an Alpha, and you have my power, so you can peer into anyone's mind, memories included.'

'How far into her memories can you see?'

'I can even look into her subconscious that's normally inaccessible.', Liseli responded smugly before adding, 'I will protect your mind; however, the further we go and the longer we stay inside, the possibility of her turning into an imbecile will increase.'

It was tempting, but Talia decided to think about it later. She had other immediate things to handle, and looking into Sophia's memories to soothe her longing for the father she didn't know about before that morning, didn't top her to-do list.

"I want your help.", Talia said to Damon.

"Anything.", Damon responded without missing a beat. He was sitting by Talia without making a peep for who knows how long.

Talia smiled at the Alpha, who was visibly pleased that she was giving him attention. "I want you to assess the combative power of the Midnight Guardians pack and get them the training as needed."

Damon had no objections, but he had to ask, "Why?"

"Sophia and Isaac relied on the unapproachable portal to keep them safe, but if the bad guys find out about its secrets, the Midnight Guardians pack will be slaughtered and enslaved."

"Their power is much more than speed and muscles. Your pack members have abilities.", Damon reminded her.

"MATED pack members have abilities.", Talia corrected him. "I estimate that less than half of the pack members are mated, and most of those abilities are not suitable for attacking or defending. The truth is that the fake security the portal provides made them believe they are safe as long as they don't leave."

"Got it.", Damon said. He thought for a moment before continuing, "While we are here, Keith and Liam can get a general idea of the situation. Kai can help them gather everyone and do an assessment of able bodies. Even non-warriors should know how to defend themselves. When we return home, I will talk to Caden to pick a few of our high-ranking warriors to come here. After the initial round of training, they can select a batch of the most promising individuals and bring them to the Dark Howlers pack, and later those will be able to train others here...."

Talia was pleased that Damon came up with a plan so quickly and he even considered that only a limited number of people should come to the Midnight Guardians pack in order to preserve the secrecy of the portal. But no matter how many people come, increased traffic will draw attention. Once the news breaks out how Talia, the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack, and Talia, the Luna of the Dark Howlers pack, are the same person, people will naturally assume that the collaboration between the two packs will tighten. Because of that, members of the Dark Howlers pack will be followed when they travel out of their territory, as others will try to spy on the location of the portal. But how can they collaborate closely if they don't interact personally?

Talia's expression lit up when she got an idea.

"What are you thinking about?" Damon had to ask. The change in Talia's mood was obvious.

"Evanora owes me a favor.", Talia said. "I will ask her to create a way so that our two packs can travel without being noticed."

Damon tapped the tip of Talia's nose with his index finger. "YOUR two packs."

Talia scrunched her nose. "OUR two packs."

Damon chuckled. He liked that she became spirited enough to bicker. It was a good sign. "Do you plan to get her to create something for instant transportation?"

Talia nodded and then paused. "Yasmin told me how regular magic for instant travel won't work across realms because of the energies that are disturbing space and time, but maybe we could create a portal."

Damon's expression fell. "If it's so simple to create a portal, we would have many of them."

Talia had to admit he was right. If witches could create portals at will, they wouldn't be stuck in their realm for centuries. But... "They have the knowledge but no power to make it work, and that's where I come in.", Talia said smugly. She powered up one portal. Why not one more?

Damon thought how that might work. His kitten is awesome. "Portal from the Dark Howlers pack that leads directly to the Midnight Guardians pack would be fantastic. We can collaborate in the trading, military, and pretty much everything. Also, when your guys go to search for mates, they can come to the Dark Howlers pack with the portal and start from there."

Damon saw this as much more than just connecting two packs.

If they could have more portals, alliances would be strengthened with other packs, and they could quickly react when facing an emergency. But it also provided a liability in case their enemies use the portal. What if humans find out about them? There were many things to consider, but as long as they act with caution, it should be fine.

Chapter 652 Ideas for investigating phenomena

When Yasmin, Cornelia, Axel, and James entered the study, they found Talia and Damon talking in a good mood.

"Are we interrupting?", Yasmin asked.

"No, no", Talia said while waving at the newcomers to come in. "We were just discussing ideas to present to Evanora once we go to the Silver Flame Coven." There was the whole plan brewing about connecting two packs, but Talia didn't want to announce it, knowing that it might spark a debate for hours.

Talia observed Axel who was hovering around Yasmin. He was putting pillows behind her back and offering her beverages and snacks, and Talia felt sorry for him.

Talia knew that Axel had a happy childhood, and she could see the disappointment in his eyes when he looked at his parents. She thought how it was sad that they exposed their ugly faces. Instead of being a happy family, they were drifting away. Wasn't all that Talia's fault? If not for her, Axel would still think highly of his parents, and the three of them would be hovering around Yasmin who is carrying the next generation of Moonriders.

"Hey...", Damon called in a low voice, his breath splashing on Talia's ear. "What's going on?" He sensed that her good mood was dwindling by the second.

"I was just thinking how things changed because of us."

Damon had a good guess that Talia was talking about Sophia and Isaac. "We didn't force any of it, kitten. Those things happened in the past, they did it on their own, and we just exposed them."

Talia knew he was right, but it didn't prevent the feeling of being unwanted from swelling within her. Even after knowing that she was Valerian's daughter, Sophia and Isaac didn't show any desire to accept her as family. Was that too much to ask?

Talia glanced at the necklace in her hand. She already had Damon who made her feel at home. Why did she crave for her family to accept her? The experience of being a carefree child under the protection of grownups was forever gone, and the most she could do was to have a family of her own, a family she won't abandon no matter what.

'When my heat strikes, I want you to impregnate me.'

Damon jolted when Talia's words sounded in his mind, and he looked at her first with confusion, and then a sly smile appeared on his face as his pants in the crotch area tightened. Oh, boy! She wanted to carry his pups!

'I am ready, kitten.' He was born ready!

Talia giggled at his eager expression.

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Axel and Yasmin initiated the discussion about the phenomenon at the bottom of the lake.

"What do you think?", Yasmin asked Cornelia.

Cornelia shrugged. "It sounds like there is a disturbance in energies that's maintained artificially. Unless we go down to investigate, we can't be sure what it is."

Damon remembered that Axel suggested to Talia to dive down there, and he didn't like it. "Is there a way to investigate without going down?"

"We have instruments in the Coven that could help us gather data without getting too close to the source.", Cornelia said.

"How far away can one be for that instrument to work?", Damon asked.

Cornelia thought for a moment before responding, "Ten to fifteen meters."

Damon waved his hand dismissively. "Not enough."

"That's the best we have.", Cornelia said. "We have potions and chants that can reduce the effect of the magic, so it will minimize the effects."

Yasmin continued, "However, if that's a portal, the only way to know where it connects to, is to go through it."

"You can send a drone.", James said, making everyone look at him. "That's what humans do. Their bodies are fragile, so they use technology to investigate risky areas. A drone can get close to whatever is down there, and you will get your data."

"What is a drone, and how do we get it?" Cornelia asked, genuinely curious.

"It's a robot that can do some tasks, and you can get it online," James responded like it was a totally normal thing, and when he saw that he got Cornelia's full attention, he puffed his chest. "I will get you one."

"Great!" Yasmin exclaimed. "Now that the energies at the bottom of the lake are waiting for the drone let's look at the portals..."

Axel placed on the table a map that showed the territory of the Midnight Guardians pack with portals marked on it.

"We should investigate the state of each portal and also sweep our territory to check for any disturbances in energies.", Axel said and pointed at the map. "These are only known portals. Just as we have this portal-looking thing in the lake, there might be others. Yasmin can sense these energies." And it was not just Yasmin, but all witches.

Talia disagreed. "Are you suggesting that Yasmin should go through the territory in order to sense fluctuations in the energies?" It sounded like a huge task. Did Axel forget that Yasmin was pregnant? Talia could help because she had the ability to sense surroundings, but even that had limitations, and it could produce false positives while she might miss something important.

Yasmin didn't think about the difficulty of the task. She was happy that finally there was something only she could do. It made her feel useful.

Yasmin glanced at Cornelia. "Cornelia can join me."

"No." It was James who protested. "Do you really think the two of you walking around is the solution? Unless you sweep everything thoroughly, it will be useless; and if you take it seriously, it will last for years. Are you willing to spend so much time on this?"

"How else are we going to check if another anomaly exists?" Axel asked. "The thing in the lake might be on the verge of exploding and causing damage. Or what if it's a portal that someone else opened? What if there are more of those? Our full attention is now on two portals, and if enemies come from any other direction, we will be like sitting ducks."

James didn't share Axel's concern. "Instead of allowing yourself to be sitting ducks, why don't you organize patrols like every other pack?"

Axel realized that James had a point. But that required trained warriors, and they didn't have many. A few years back, Tyler suggested video surveillance, but the roaming animals triggered alarms so many times that they shut them down.

"Damon will help organize our warriors and train more.", Talia said.

Axel was grateful, but... "That will take time, and we have no idea if someone is activating portals and sneaking in without our knowledge. I think that Yasmin and Cornelia should check the nearby area and known portals."

James didn't care how they will do it, but Cornelia shouldn't be involved. Cornelia was supposed to stick to James and not spend her days hiking through who-knows-where.

Why don't they bother other witches with it? This thought gave James an idea. "Aren't we going to the Silver Flame Coven? Ask the high priestess to lend you a number of witches. They should feel safe here, considering that one of them is the Luna of the Midnight Guardians pack. It will be their chance to see this realm and practice sensing energies. As a bonus, they might find their mates."

Yasmin clapped excitedly. The idea that more of her sisters will join her sounded fantastic.

Talia nodded in approval. In addition to sensing energies, witches can also work on building a portal that will connect them to the Dark Howlers pack. It all added up.

Chapter 653 Doubting everyone except one

Damon and Talia spent most of the day in meetings where their discussion about portals and asking witches for help expanded into talk about current issues. Keith, Liam, Meg, and Kai joined them in the study to exchange ideas about training warriors.

It was later in the afternoon when one of Oracle's helpers came to ask about the ceremony that they were all reminded about the feast and the pack run, so they dispersed to get ready.

Talia was sitting in front of a massive dressing table and looking into the mirror to see her reflection with Damon standing behind her while tending to her hair with an intense focus like it was the most important thing in the world.

Damon and Talia were taking their time, and not rushing the therapeutic experience.

Talia loved the small smile at the corner of Damon's lips that was there whenever he combed her hair. It was a ritual they did in silence.

She enjoyed the soft tugs on her scalp as the comb ran through her hair, and Damon was lost in the memories of when he was doing the same for his mother.

Talia lowered her gaze to look at the necklace in her hand, the only thing she had from her parents. She didn't let go of it since Axel had given it to her earlier that day.

"Kitten", Damon called. "What's wrong?"

Talia looked up to meet Damon's eyes in the mirror, feeling silly that she forgot he could sense her emotions unless she shuts them down willingly.

She didn't want to keep things from him, but there was no point in talking about the lost childhood that was never hers to have. And there was no point in telling Damon how jealous she was because he had memories of his parents, and the only thing she remembered before he entered her life was loneliness... but it was not his fault.

Talia decided to address another thing that was on her mind.

"I feel that we are missing something important."

"Tell me about it.", Damon demanded.

"I think that Sophia and Isaac are too docile.", Talia said. "They are prideful people who wouldn't hold back on doing one horrible thing to hide another. I remember them stubbornly fighting even after I took away their abilities, yet today they were cooperating."

"Maybe being locked up for a long time made them reconsider their life choices. It was just a few days for you, but for them, it was months.", Damon reminded her.

Talia didn't think that was the case. They were hiding the fact that they gave Talia away, and based on what Axel said, Sophia didn't talk about Valerian like he never existed. Was it really because such a long time passed (centuries for them), or because she was still actively trying to conceal her misdeeds? Besides, "The truth serum will loosen up their tongue, but it won't change their personality."

"Do you think they lied?"

"Not lied, but there is a possibility of them telling us one truth to hide another. If we didn't ask them the right questions, it would be easy for them to work around exposing what they wanted to hide." Talia's brows came together. "Isaac immediately figured out that we used the truth serum, and I was surprised how calmly they took it."

Damon agreed with this. "It's almost like they expected it to happen. Do you think that Axel gave them a heads-up?"

"I don't think so.", Talia said, but she didn't sound convincing even to herself. "I really want to believe Axel is on our side." But... Talia remembered how Axel immediately asked about them giving away Talia, even though she told him that she didn't want to talk about it. What if he warned them that this would

happen, and they prepared their answers in advance? What if Axel didn't give Sophia and Isaac the truth serum at all, but it was all an elaborate play to deceive Talia and Damon?

Now Talia was questioning everything.

Was the necklace in her hand from her father? Sophia said that Valerian left a necklace, but even if that was true, Talia didn't know if she was holding the real one.

Damon released a long breath and squatted in front of Talia so they were on the same level. "Things are not always black or white, kitten. I can see that Axel respects you, and he is sorry for how his parents treated you. But that doesn't mean he doesn't have loyalty toward them. The fact that they are not in a dungeon proves that he didn't turn his back on them, no matter what their crimes are."

Talia realized that Damon was right. She didn't want to harm Sophia and Isaac in order not to alienate Axel, so she left them to Axel. Talia was not expecting him to chain his parents and serve flogging instead of meals, but their current lifestyle was definitely not something a person who committed crimes against the Alpha should have.

Talia was mentally rewinding their talk from that morning. How much did Sophia and Isaac hide during their talk?

Talia was heavily distracted by the necklace she was holding onto, and she didn't really pay attention to what Sophia and Isaac were saying when they were talking about portals and the Guardians. Actually, it was not about what they were saying; it was about what they were NOT saying. Maybe they were obviously lying, but Talia missed it completely.

What was the point in talking to Sophia and Isaac if she couldn't trust Axel? How many people were deceiving her? How can she verify loyalty? Were her choices to trust people blindly or not to trust anyone?

She looked helplessly at Damon, the only person she believed in. He chose not to trust anyone in order to preserve himself, and Talia was not sure if she could do the same. She craved company and acceptance too much.

"Now what?", Talia asked.

"I'm sure you don't want to rush things. Let's observe. Meg and Sandy are here, and you trust them, right?"

Talia nodded, and Damon continued, "We will add a few more of our people here, and they will have a task to see what's going on when we are not around. Considering your role, it won't be suspicious. It will confirm if Sophia and Isaac are up to something and to what extent Axel is involved with them."

"Do you have trustworthy people?", Talia asked.

"I have reliable ones.", Damon responded. "Other than you, I don't trust anyone completely. However, if we put several unrelated people to accomplish a task from different angles, and if their stories match, we can trust them to a certain degree."

Talia admired this strategy. Damon was the Alpha of the largest pack in North America for a reason.

Damon tapped Talia's nose with his index finger. "Better?"

She smiled. "Better."

"Good.", Damon said with relief obvious in his voice. "Don't stress about things that happened; instead, focus on learning from them. Even if we redo the morning, would you do anything differently? Unless you can crack her head open to see what's inside, it will be the same."

"Actually...", Talia drawled. "Liseli told me that I can force my way into Sophia's head and see her memories. As long as I know what I'm looking for, I can see it."

Damon's eyebrow rose in slow motion. "That sounds risky." And a handy skill to have.

"It's risky only for the other party.", Talia assured him. "If I poke around her mind too much, she might turn into an idiot."

Damon shook his head. "That's not what I meant. Who knows what Sophia did while clutching onto her Alpha position? She was the second-best, and so was Isaac. Those people tend to cross the line in order to prove they deserve to be at the top. I fear you will see things that will scar you."

"That only makes me want more to look into her mind."

Damon was genuinely worried. If it were him, he would go in there and wreak havoc, but Talia was a gentle soul, and if she really saw some despicable things, she wouldn't be able to shake it off. He knew her that much.

"Sophia and Isaac already did a lot of damage. Let's not allow them to do more. For now, we watch. OK?"

Talia nodded obediently.

Desperate to change the topic, Damon asked, "Do you want me to help you put it on?"

Talia needed a moment to realize he was talking about the necklace she was holding onto.

"Yes, please."

She gave him the necklace and collected her hair on the right side to expose her neck.

Talia's lips lifted into a smile when their eyes met in the mirror.

Damon was standing behind Talia, about to put a necklace on her, and he looked so handsome that she wished to take a photo so she can look at him forever, just like that, doing simple things.

The pearl cooled Talia's flesh between her collarbones, and she felt the chain touching her neck.

Talia was hyper-aware of Damon behind her and the clasp he was working on, and then she heard a soft click as the chain connected, and the bright light blinded her.

"TALIA!"

She heard Damon's panicked voice from a distance like he was many miles away.

Chapter 654 The magical necklace (1)

Talia heard Damon calling for her, his voice getting lost in the distance, and she wanted to respond, but she found herself paralyzed, unable to make a sound.

What the hell happened?

She felt weightless, without the ability to sense anything other than the coolness on her chest caused by the pendant that was resting there.

"There are no signs of trackers... What are you doing?", an unknown male voice was heard.

Talia tried to figure out where the voice was coming from, but she couldn't move or feel her body parts. As much as her sight covered, everything was white without a single ripple in space. Was the man talking to her?

"I recorded a message for Natalia.", a female voice responded.

Talia was alerted. Was the woman talking about her?

"Is it still recording?", the male spoke again.

"It will stop in a second. Take this with you and make sure Natalia gets it. Once she is of age, the message will play. It is for her ears only."

"Why does it sound like you are saying goodbye?", the male voice was cracking with concern.

"Not goodbye, Ian.", the female said softly. "Didn't you tell me about different passing of time? By the time we come to get her, she might be a big girl. I don't want her to think that we left her with relatives so that we can enjoy our honeymoon. I would never leave my angel if not for our current situation..."

Talia could hear the grief in the female's voice and her heart cracked.

The silence stretched, disturbed by indistinct rustling, and Talia tried to make sense of what she just heard.

The female mentioned a message for Natalia. Was that her?

The female addressed the male as Ian. Could that be her father, Valerian?

Didn't that mean the female voice belonged to Talia's mother?

Was it possible that these were the last moments Valerian spent with his mate before taking Natalia to the Midnight Guardians pack?

Before Talia could figure out more, she heard the male voice again.

"Look at her sleeping peacefully, unaware of the mess out there."

"Let's hope it stays like that.", the female said.

"I can't leave you behind."

"You must. Trackers didn't find us yet, but they know someone is in the area. You saw what was left of my home. They are vicious, and they won't stop until they get what they want."

"But they want you.", the male said.

"We talked about this. If both of us leave, they will follow us. In our state, we can't move quickly, and they will catch up in no time. Don't worry about me. I am not an easy target. I need you to take our precious one to safety and come back to get me. The two of us can't fight while protecting Natalia and if they get a whiff of her existence, they will want to get their hands on her also. They prefer children because they can be indoctrinated."

"But..."

"There is no time, Ian.", the female interrupted him. "You must hurry."

The man said something, but the words were fading in the white void and no matter how much Talia craved to hear more, there was nothing.

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The white light shimmered into shapes, and Talia saw herself back in the master suite in the main house of the Midnight Guardians pack. She was lying on the sofa.

It took her a moment to remember that she was in front of the dresser with Damon combing her hair and then he put a necklace on her and... Talia's vision was blurred from the tears that pooled there. Why was she crying? Was it because she got another glimpse of her parents? Her heart ached to the point of madness. No, this was madness. Why was she so desperate and angry?

Talia blinked to see two blobs moving. With every passing heartbeat, those two blobs started getting features and became two heads with eyes, nose, mouth, and everything a head should have.

"Alpha...", one of them called with a quivering voice. "Can you hear me? Are you in pain?"

"You bitch! If you don't tell me what you did, I will rip your head off!", Damon's ferocious growl filled the room.

"Talia is awake!", Axel shouted desperately, knowing that Damon was not kidding.

Talia turned to see the scene where Yasmin was hiding behind Axel. Keith and Liam were keeping an eye on the healers with fierce expressions like they will end their lives if the poor healers make a wrong move. Isaac was sprawled on the floor with his face bloodied and his arms and legs bent at an unusual angle. In the middle of the room, Damon was holding Sophia by her neck, her legs dangling above the floor. Meg and Kai were kneeling on the floor, both drenched in sweat and unable to move under Damon's pressure.

It was a mess.

Damon's head whipped to meet Talia's eyes, and he released Sophia who plopped on the floor like a ragdoll.

Damon pushed the healers to the side and got on his knees next to the sofa.

"Kitten. Kitten." He was touching her face with the tips of his fingers like he wanted to make sure that was her, and then he pulled her into his embrace.

Talia groaned because he squeezed the air out of her lungs.

She was still coming out of her daze from hearing two voices in the white void, and then she saw the mess in their suite, and now Damon was crushing her against him like he wanted them to become one.

"What happened?", Talia asked.

"Oh, kitten...", Damon's voice was shaky. "I thought I lost you."

When Damon put the necklace on Talia, she lost consciousness. Damon didn't connect Talia's condition with the necklace right away because Talia was holding onto it most of the day, so Damon assumed that it was a spell or some potion that had a delayed effect.

Of course, the first suspects were Sophia and Isaac, and then Axel.

Sapa was anxious as well because the mate bond was weak, so Damon sent Keith and Liam to get Axel and his parents. When they saw that Talia was unconscious, Axel called for healers, Meg, and Kai, and when Damon saw Sophia and Isaac, he gave in to his rage, ready to destroy everything and everyone until he got answers and Talia back.

They were all relieved that this ended without any lives lost.

Axel checked on Yasmin, and he didn't dare check on others, fearing that Damon might explode into a rage again. Axel was glad that Talia was back, and not a moment too soon. If she stayed unconscious any longer, Damon would probably demolish the whole pack.

Axel gestured to healers to take care of Sophia and Isaac.

Seeing Talia's questioning gaze directed at him over Damon's shoulder, Axel explained what happened.

"Damon called us here about an hour ago.", Axel focused on keeping his voice steady and not showing how shaken up he was. He never felt such a strong Alpha aura. Axel has a strong physique and he suspected that some of his bones were cracked. Damon was a beast! "When we came here, Damon started asking questions about the food you ate and if anyone drugged you and when Sophia and Isaac came, he lost it and... well... you see."

Chapter 655 The magical necklace (2)

"I thought they did something", Damon spoke into Talia's hair, the cracking voice reflected his unstable emotions. "Your body was here, but you weren't. I couldn't reach you. I couldn't reach you."

Talia hugged him with all her might. "I'm here. I'm back.", she assured him.

Talia was holding onto Damon, so she could feel his whole body shaking. Talia was not sure how to calm him down, so she stayed like that and patted his back.

'Liseli?', Talia called.

'I'm here.'

'What happened?'

'The necklace's power got activated when you put it on. It enveloped your consciousness, making you feel like you were somewhere else.'

'Can we make it happen again?', Talia asked. She wanted to replay what she heard and confirm she didn't miss anything. And there was also the point of a recorded message. What if there was more?

'I'm not sure.', Liseli responded. She could hear Talia's thoughts, so she had a good idea of what happened while Talia was in the white void. 'It reminds me of how we share mental images, but I never heard of such a thing being done with an object.'

Talia thought of asking witches about it. She wanted to ask Yasmin, but the poor girl looked petrified, so Talia decided to keep it for later.

Talia's eyes moved to see Sophia glaring at her. 'What's her problem?'

Liseli snorted. 'She probably guessed that the necklace was not ordinary, but she couldn't make it work. She is probably wondering what happened while you were unconscious, and she is jealous that she didn't get to experience it.'

"Where were you?"

Damon's voice pulled Talia from her conversation with Liseli.

Seeing that Sophia's attention was on her, Talia responded to Damon through their private mind-link.

'I'm not sure. I thought that only a few seconds passed, no more than a minute. Everything was white, and I heard voices. I believe I heard my parents talking.'

Damon inched away to see Talia's expression. 'What did they say?'

Talia was pleased that he didn't question what she believed was true. She touched the necklace. 'My mother recorded a message here. I didn't hear the message, but I heard her say how the message will play when I'm of age.'

'You are of age.', Damon stated the fact. But maybe that meant something else for Talia's parents.

'There must be some condition I am yet to fulfill. I need to figure out how to activate it.', Talia said. There was a chance that her mother mixed up the recording, and what Talia experienced WAS the message, but Talia hoped there will be more. If there could be clues where the message was recorded, Talia would definitely go there with the hope to find out what happened to her parents. Her mother was there, and her father said that he will go back to her.

Damon frowned at the necklace. The thought of this happening to Talia again was extremely unsettling. He couldn't reach her through the mind-link, and only faint traces of their mate bond were there. It was like he lost her all over again, knowing that she was somewhere, out of his reach, and he had no idea if she was safe or how to get to her.

"Take that off.", Damon said sternly while looking at the necklace.

"No. It's fine.", Talia said and continued through the mind-link. 'My mother left me a message. It must be important.' Even if it was just her mother telling her that she loves her, it was important.

'It's all I have, Damon. I can't let it go.'

Damon's fighting spirit dwindled in front of Talia's pleading expression, and he gave up on asking her to remove the necklace.

His face was back in her hair as he tightened his hold on her and took deep breaths. He needed her proximity to calm down.

Talia patted his back gently and she remembered an important detail. "Are we late for the feast?"

"Officially, you are a few minutes late. But people are waiting for much longer.", Axel responded. At the scene of Damon rampaging and threatening to kill them all, Axel completely forgot about the feast. He gestured toward Sophia and Isaac who were on the floor. "I will stay here until healers are done with treatment."

"Alpha Isaac needs to go to medical quarters.", one of the healers said.

Damon whipped his head toward the guy who paled when he saw Damon's murderous glare. What did he do?

"It's ex-Alpha Isaac or just Isaac.", Damon said in an ominously low voice. He looked at Axel. "I want you to announce that they lost their positions a long time ago and if anyone addresses Isaac or Sophia as Alphas, it will be considered treason against the new order. Be strict because people will see these small things as a sign of weakness. Even if you don't care about it, do it for Talia."

Axel didn't dare to object. He saw Damon serious, joking, relaxed, focused, and this was the first time to see Damon furious. Axel had no doubts that if Talia didn't wake up in time, he would be next in line to get a beating... or worse.

Sophia was rubbing her aching neck that had Damon's palmprint on it, and she pushed the healer away from her.

"Look at my mate! He is barely holding! You hurt us for no reason!" Sophia's voice was hoarse as she glared daggers at Damon.

"That makes us almost even.", Damon responded icily.

He knew she was exaggerating. Was Isaac in pain? Absolutely. However, as a werewolf, Isaac will heal in a few days (OK, maybe weeks). Even if he was human, those injuries wouldn't be life-threatening.

What they did to him could have crippled him forever. If Damon wanted to make it even, he should give them a few more rounds of beating... after they recuperate.

Axel relaxed when he confirmed that Damon didn't attack Sophia for her outburst, but he didn't know if Damon's temper will flare again, so Axel waved at the healers to take Sophia and Isaac away. Kai and Meg helped.

"We will join the feast once I make sure someone is keeping an eye on them.", Axel said while walking out with Yasmin.

Keith and Liam also made themselves scarce, leaving Talia and Damon in the suite.

"I heard my parents.", Talia said.

"And I nearly lost my mind when I thought I lost you."

Talia could feel the weight of his emotions, and she felt guilty for being happy when he suffered. "I'm sorry. I didn't know this will happen."

Damon shook his head. "So many things happened since we found each other, one might think I will be used to this rollercoaster ride."

Talia chuckled bitterly while pulling him into a hug and gripping his back firmly, his tension pouring into her and making her crave for an outlet. A run in their wolf form with some howling would help, but they didn't have time for it.

However, they couldn't go to the feast like this either as their anxiety was tangible.

On the other hand, people were already waiting for them, will they be bothered if they wait a bit longer?

Chapter 656 Their need for each other

Talia kissed Damon's jaw, and then she arranged kisses down his neck until she reached the spot where her mark was. She latched her lips there and licked him, and Damon groaned when she started sucking. It was such a sensitive spot.

"Kitten", Damon called breathily.

He was reminding her about the feast and people waiting for them but also pulling her closer and tugging on her blouse and skirt, and she knew that he didn't care about anyone other than her. Actually, that was why he still had clothes on, because this feast was for her as the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack. Her people waited for her, and that was why he was suppressing his urge to pin her down on that sofa and make love to her until they both collapse as a heap of flesh and bodily fluids.

"I need to feel you, Damon", Talia said while untucking his shirt. "I know there is a feast and people waiting. If we go like this, people will notice the tension, and who knows what they will think? We can make this quick. You are the only one who can make me feel better..."

Damon pushed Talia's skirt up until it bunched around her waist, and his eyes flashed at the sight of a delicate black fabric that covered her precious parts. He didn't understand why she was persistent in wearing underwear. He tore hundreds of them already, and this one will end the same. His fingers hooked around the edge of her panties, and with one swift tug, he flung those taters to the floor.

Talia dug her nails into his shoulders. The impatience with which he tore her panties always turned her on.

Damon's nostrils flared at the scent of Talia's arousal, and he didn't need to touch her down there to know that she was dripping wet. For him. Only for him.

He grabbed her thighs and pulled her to sit on the edge of the sofa. With him on his knees between her legs, they were perfectly aligned.

It took him less than a second to undo the buckle and push his pants down. The absence of underwear saved him another second before he could dwell into her hot wetness that gripped him perfectly.

Talia's moan mixed with his groan when he entered her in one rough thrust, and they didn't waste time on foreplay and being gentle as both chased their release in vigorous movements that robbed them of their breaths.

Talia fisted his raven black hair while kissing him sloppily with an open mouth all over his face.

Damon was pounding himself inside her, every thrust releasing a bit of his anxiousness that was being replaced by another type of pressure; one that overflowed his mind with Talia and the desire to never separate, the one that can only be compared with Heaven, because if there was such a thing as Heaven, Damon was confident that it included him being inside Talia, his mate.

Talia's hand gripped his hair and yanked his head back, exposing his neck completely. Damon would never expose his neck to anyone, but Talia was the exception. He was at her mercy, and he was fine with whatever she wanted to do to him.

Talia's lips latched onto her mark at the base of his neck, shaking his insides and making his cock lurch in the rhythm of her tongue. Seductress!

"Mmm... ahh... ohh..." Lewd sounds formed in Damon's throat and freely escaped his open mouth as his jaw was slack open.

Any sounds that Damon made during pleasures of the flesh were normally groans or growls, but when Talia worked on his mark, the cataclysmic shakes made him moan like a maiden who was being touched for the first time. Everything with Talia was like the first time.

'Mine! You are mine!', Talia's voice sounded in Damon's mind, and his heart swelled from the love and adoration he felt for her. She was claiming him as hers while pulling him closer, her heels dug into his firm ass, urging him to move faster and go deeper, and he was delighted to answer her every need and want. He was made for this.

They held onto each other tightly, and the sparks of their bond confirmed they were right there, together, merged into one. How it should be.

If any of them had a wish, it would be that they could always stay together. Just like that.

Talia's insides coiled around his cock, and Damon groaned as he continued rocking into her while blissful heat traveled through his shaft to deliver an ample amount of his seed into Talia's depths. Soon, she will go into heat, and then his seed will impregnate her. He was looking forward to it.

He thought it was done, just a few more thrusts to make sure he was empty, and then...

"UGGGH!" Damon groaned when he felt a sharp pain in his neck that radiated to amplify his pleasure.

Throbbing heat burned him alive and changed him with every heartbeat, and he knew: his kitten marked him again.

His arms tightened around Talia as he sat on his knees without pulling out. Talia was on his thighs now, and both of their hips moved in small jerky movements as she was injecting him with her venom that

changed him in ways he couldn't describe. It was like Talia became part of his every cell, his heart beat in the rhythm of her name: Natalia. It was a name he heard as hers only today, yet he knew that it belonged to his kitten. It suited her.

Everything they heard matched her identity.

Her father was Valerian Moonrider, a powerful werewolf Alpha, the heir of the Midnight Guardians pack. Her mother was a mystery, but they were confident that she was not a pushover. Talia told him what she heard in the white void, so he knew that Talia's mother stayed to fight, and she had the ability to transform a necklace into a recording device. She was definitely not a simple person.

It was a sad story to hear because her parents were probably dead, and Talia had a tough time growing up because her aunt was selfish. But the good thing was that Talia's parents loved her, and she finally got an identity. She was not a nobody from the attic anymore. She was Natalia Moonrider, the rightful heir of the Midnight Guardians pack, and her coming here and becoming the Alpha was just a strange twist of faith for Talia to take what was always hers.

Damon hoped that all this will have a positive effect on Talia's confidence. She was amazing, but her low self-esteem caused Talia to undersell herself and succumb to doubts.

Damon continued rocking into Talia because, more than her identity and powers, he was addicted to her scent and her touch which came with those addictive sparks. No matter how awesome she was, Damon loved the most that she was his mate, his other half, and he wouldn't want it any other way.

"Ahhh...", Damon exhaled loudly when Talia licked his neck to help him heal. She was doing it so diligently, releasing soft groans that spoke of possessiveness, and Damon couldn't let her take all the credit.

'RIIP!'

Damon tore her shirt and removed his in one swift tug, both of them enjoying this additional skin contact as her breasts pressed against his chest.

Damon's head dipped to kiss his mark on her neck, and the shaky moan that escaped her lips spurred his urge to take her again.

Talia yelped when he flipped her, and she ended up on her knees, with her upper body resting on the coffee table. The cold surface pinched her heated skin, and she gripped the edge of the table because she knew what was coming when Damon's chest pressed on her back.

Damon spread her legs and positioned himself behind her.

"That's it, kitten", he praised her when she perked up her ass to give him easier access.

She was full of his seed which provided additional lubrication that didn't diminish the sparks which ignited her insides as he rammed himself into her from behind.

"Harder, Damon", Talia demanded. She wanted him to plunder her insides until she could feel him for hours after they were done.

Damon straightened his posture, and she felt the loss of his heat on her back. She wondered what he was up to when...

'SLAP!'

A sharp sting radiated from her right butt cheek, and she moaned while her back arched in pleasure.

"Again."

Damon grinned and spanked her again.

There was the feast and people were waiting, but both Damon and Talia needed this break where they would get lost in each other and not care about anything else.

Chapter 657 The feast at the MG pack (1)

Damon and Talia joined the feast to find a lot of people gathered behind the main house.

One long table was set up on the terrace to be higher than any other. There were two empty seats in the middle, obviously for Talia and Damon.

Axel, Yasmin, Meg, Kai, James, Cornelia, Keith, and Liam were sitting at the same table with a number of older-looking people that Talia identified as Elders of the Midnight Guardians pack.

In the garden below the terrace, Talia saw hundreds of heads looking at her. Those were members of the Midnight Guardians pack, seated at the tables that were arranged in lines giving it an appearance of a massive picnic, but in the evening and with no children present.

'Right, children...', Talia thought and glanced at Yasmin's still flat belly. The Midnight Guardians pack didn't have children in about two decades (when measured by the time of the human realm, and that was much longer for people here). Axel said that the long infertility was the punishment from the Moon Goddess because Sophia and Isaac didn't take care of Talia.

Axel believed that there will be more pregnancies and that the pack will be revived now that Talia was back.

Talia didn't dare to think of such things. Other than her girlfriends believing that she had an ability to bring mates together (aka Malia), now Axel was saying how Talia could bring babies. Did he think of her as a stork or some love-fertility deity? She shook those thoughts away as she felt numerous eyes trained on her.

"Thank you for your patience.", Talia's voice was not loud, but everyone could hear her. "I apologize for the delay. Alpha Damon and I had some urgent matters to handle."

Talia hoped they will believe her because she couldn't erase the goofy smile from her face, and Damon refused to loosen his grip on her hip that would allow a fraction of space between them.

"I know you are waiting for a while, and you are probably hungry. Let's start with food and any formalities will be postponed for before the pack run.", Talia said and people cheered as Omegas spilled between the tables, each carrying heaping plates that smelled of roasted and grilled meat that the pack members captured earlier that day. There was plenty for everyone.

Damon held a chair for Talia to sit on next to Meg, and she glanced over all faces at the table while lowering herself, taking a mental note of the story faces of Elders and their questioning gazes. Did they know that Damon beat up their ex-Alphas? That was a possibility. Talia wanted to explain how he did it only because he feared she was in danger and Sophia and Isaac did it, but she kept that to herself because she was the Alpha, and Alphas don't explain their actions as that can be seen as a sign of weakness.

Damon told her more than once that there is a difference between private and public, as well as between friends and everyone else. In this setting, she needed to show that she was above others because only like that people will have faith they are following the right person, the strongest one, the Alpha. And that was Talia. It was complicated.

Talia noticed four empty chairs at the long table. Those were for Sophia, Isaac, Tyler, and Sandy.

Tyler and Sandy said that they will join for the feast, but it seemed they got caught up in something else and that something must be carnal pleasures as they were enjoying their fresh mate bond.

Meg told Talia that healers checked on Sandy earlier that day and that Sandy's powers were awakening as expected. As soon as the healers confirmed that everything was fine, Tyler kicked them out of his room, and Talia could only imagine for what reason. Privacy.

Talia looked at Axel who was feeding Yasmin already. She wondered if they were able to enjoy this feast, or if the events in the main suite spoiled their mood. Talia didn't know what all happened while she was unconscious, but she remembered the unpleasant scene when she came around. It didn't seem right to act as if nothing had happened.

'How are your parents?' Talia's voice sounded in Axel's head through their pack mind-link.

'Mom has a hurt pride, and dad will be fine in about one week.'

Talia was glad that he didn't brush it off by saying how things were fine. She swallowed the apology that was bubbling to burst out of her. They were werewolves, who are rowdy in general, so even if this was the first time for Sophia and Isaac to get a beating in their own home, it shouldn't be the first time they had injuries.

'If I knew that the necklace will cause me to pass out for an hour, I would pick a better timing. Or at least tell Damon not to worry.', Talia explained.

Axel glanced at Talia. 'Are you OK? Did the necklace harm you?'

'No, no. It had a message from my mother.', Talia said. 'The side-effect was that I needed to be unconscious in order to hear it.' She added this last part because it didn't sound right to admit that the necklace knocked her out.

Axel's eyebrows shot up. 'Your mother? What did the message say?'

Talia paused to open her mouth because there was a forkful of grilled rabbit meat coming her way. She smiled at Damon while chewing. It was sweet and tender and cooked just right. Damon always made sure she got the best pieces, and he paced the feeding just right so that her mouth didn't go empty.

Talia touched the necklace, and then she responded to Axel's question.

'What I heard was more like a preview that confirmed there is a message only I could unlock when the time is right. But I didn't hear what those conditions are, so I will wear it and hope to trigger it accidentally.' She turned to look at Axel. 'Did Sophia ever talk about this necklace?'

'No.', Axel responded with finality. Sophia got that necklace from her jewelry box, where numerous other necklaces and bracelets were arranged above rings and below earrings. It didn't have any prominent position or anything special about it. 'I believe that my mother held it as something her brother left behind, a memento of some sort. And before you ask, I never heard of the ability to record messages into metal or precious stones, but your father found his mate, which means that both of them got an ability. Anything was possible.'

'Thank you, Axel.' Talia really meant it. 'I am aware that your position is not the best one.'

Talia knew the feeling of wanting to do anything for her parents, and she couldn't imagine how hard it was for Axel to help her if it meant going against Sophia and Isaac. In addition to that, he was raised to believe that he will be the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack, but now it was Talia's. Was it possible that he was not bitter about it? She couldn't do anything about the Alpha position, but she could ease his life when it came to dealing with his parents.

'As long as you ensure that Sophia and Isaac stick to their retirement and not cause trouble, I will stay away from them.'

'You don't need to do that.', Axel said.

'I don't want to put you in a position where you need to choose between us, Axel. I can't accept what they did to me or to Damon, but they didn't harm you and you shouldn't hate them. I know they don't like Damon and me, but if they don't act against us, we won't touch them.'

'That is kind of you.'

'Don't speak to me like we are strangers, Axel. No matter who our parents are, I think of you as my brother.'

Axel's lips lifted into a smile. Even after everything that happened, Talia thought of him as her brother. He liked that.

Chapter 658 The feast at the MG pack (2)

The rising moon announced the end of the feast.

Talia noticed that people slowed down with food and were throwing glances her way.

'Kitten?' Damon's voice sounded in her mind through their private mind-link. 'Is something wrong?'

He could feel her anxiety rising, and he feared that the necklace was acting out again. Or what if remnants of the dark magic stirred?

'Nothing is wrong.', Talia responded.

'Then?', he persisted.

'Everyone is expecting me to speak before the pack run, and I'm not sure what to say.', Talia admitted.

'Are you worried that you won't be able to top the speech you gave when you became the Alpha?'

Talia blinked at Damon. How did he know about the speech? It took her a moment to remember that she had shared those memories with him.

'I'm not worried about making a better speech. I fear that I have nothing to say.', Talia admitted. 'At that time, I promised to find their mates. For them, months passed. When I tell them that no progress was made, they will be disappointed. How can I be a good Alpha if I don't deliver on promises made?'

Damon took a napkin and wiped the corners of Talia's lips that were glistening from the grease. He fed her well. Damon would lick that tasty mess away, but here she was the Alpha, and licking her face might be inappropriate.

'Nothing is finalized, but that doesn't mean there is no progress.', Damon said. 'Aren't we planning a mixer with several packs? We will visit witches and come up with rules that will work for everyone when moving between realms. You want to create a portal that will make it easy for them to come to the Dark Howlers pack without risking exposure, and it's not just the Dark Howlers pack because we opened borders to two other packs.'

'That won't reduce the possibility of them being hunted', Talia responded. 'It will take a long time to educate our people how individuals with abilities are not freaks.'

'That can come later.', Damon said smugly. 'Unmated pack members don't have any abilities, and unless they find their mate, they can pretend to be from the Dark Howlers pack, or from the Blue River pack, or from a small pack in North no one heard about. Like that, they will be able to move freely like any other werewolf. Isn't that what you promised them? For the ones who find their mates, until we figure out safety protocols, they will live in the Midnight Guardians pack, just as they did so far. We are not far from making it happen, kitten.'

Talia looked at Damon with sparkles in her eyes. He was right. She totally forgot how many things were in motion. There was a possibility that some of those won't come true (like opening the portal that will connect the Midnight Guardians pack with the Dark Howlers pack), but if they hit a wall, they will keep on trying until they find something that works.

The biggest challenges were to hide the location of the portal and to provide different identities to members who ventured to the human realm so that no one knew from where they came, and those were not difficult to accomplish. Talia was not sure how they will do it, but she was confident that with Damon's help, it will be done flawlessly because he was amazing like that.

Talia cupped Damon's cheeks and gave him a smacking kiss on the lips.

"Thank you, Damon. You are the best."

Damon chuckled. "I only reminded you how amazing you are, but I will take the compliment." Talia praising him will never get old.

Talia turned to Axel. "When will the ceremony start?" Now she knew what to say, and she was excited about the pack run. Liseli was stirring inside Talia, eager for some frolicking in the forest with Sapa.

"Whenever you want.", Axel responded. "Healers are ready. You only need to say the word, and we will start the ceremony, after which the pack run can start. Everyone is here."

"I see", Talia said while looking at people who were obviously eager to move on to the next part of tonight's program. But, was everyone present? "What about Sandy and Tyler?" Tyler mind-linked them how they would attend the feast, yet they didn't make an appearance.

Axel's eyes lost focus for a moment, and then he said, "They are coming."

"I'm sure they are.", Damon said under his breath, and he winced when Talia pinched his thigh under the table.

"Kitten", his hot breath splashed on her ear. "Do that again, and I will drag you inside, and people will be waiting for us to come."

Talia's eyes widened at his outrageous words, but even more outrageous was that it turned her on. What was wrong with her? But then she saw mental images of Damon pinning her against the wall just behind those doors that lead to the garden... her sitting on the sink in the powder room with Damon's head between her legs...

'Stop it!', she exclaimed to Damon through their private mind-link. This was NOT the time to get aroused.

Damon chuckled lowly when he picked up the scent of her arousal. He corrupted her in naughty ways, and he loved it.

Desperate to think about anything other than racy images of her and Damon, Talia cleared her throat and asked Axel, "Do you have special clothes for the ceremony and the pack run?"

She remembered elaborate preparations at the Dark Howlers pack that included skimpy leather clothes, hairstyles, necklaces, and black markings on the bodies of warriors, and here no one mentioned anything.

Axel paused. Special clothes? "The run is in wolf form, so there is no need for clothes."

Damon craned his neck to see Axel around Talia. "But you are wearing something during the ceremony. Right?"

"Uhm... Not really. I mean, you can wear what you have on now, or just remove it. Naked is fine."

Yasmin nodded earnestly. "Remove obstructions so that nature can touch you. Tall, short, skinny, chubby, or anything in-between, there is no need to be ashamed of your body. This is about celebrating our connection with mother nature, and she loves us in every shape and form."

Talia remembered scarcely dressed witches, so she was not surprised to hear this from Yasmin. But how come Axel was fine with others looking at Yasmin's bare body?

'Do you think they will get naked in advance?' Talia asked Damon through their private mind-link.

'Regardless of what they will be doing, our clothes are staying on until we shift.', Damon said with finality before adding, 'If they start undressing, I want your eyes on me. Got it?'

Talia stifled a giggle. 'Do you think I want to look at my brothers' trouser snake?'

Damon's brows came together in obvious disapproval. 'He is not your brother. And you can look only at my snake.'

Talia wanted to tease him, but she held back because she knew it could backfire. Just like Damon didn't want Talia to look at naked men (Axel included), she didn't want him to look at naked women either.

With every next marking, their bond was getting stronger, and so was their possessiveness. Talia had no doubts that Damon would murder any guy who dared to get close to Talia naked, regardless of the blood relations.

Chapter 659 The new Gamma of the MG pack

Seeing that Damon's mood was worsening as he imagined who-knows-what about the upcoming ceremony and ample amount of bare flesh, Talia hugged Damon's arm and spoke through their mind-link, 'My snake.'

Damon didn't get it. 'What?'

His mind was churning with ideas related to murdering everyone who dared to look at Talia in ways they shouldn't, and about shielding her while she shifts into her wolf form so that no one can get a glimpse of her private parts, and he forgot the details of their conversation from a minute ago.

'You are mine, so everything yours is mine, and that anaconda is MY snake.' Talia ended with a glance at his crotch area.

Damon stared at Talia, and it took him a moment to understand the words which made him swell with pride. She said that his cock is anaconda, and those are huge. Damon approved. 'Yours, kitten. Every inch of me is yours.'

Talia was pleased that she got to pacify her handsome devil.

But naked people were a problem. How many females will undress, and he will get to see them? Talia was confident that Damon's heart was hers, but what about his eyes?

She heard about Alphas who were sleeping around. What if Damon turns into one of them given enough stimulation?

Her insecurities swelled when she remembered the rumors about Damon preferring curvy mature women. She couldn't do anything about her age, and realistically speaking, Talia was not the prettiest nor the curviest. What if Damon ended up seeing a female body he liked better compared to Talia's? Should she send a message to the pack that undressing was not allowed until the end of the ceremony?

Talia's head moved when Damon pinched her chin, and then he gave her a kiss that robbed her of her breath. She groaned when he bit her lip, the sharp pain told her that drew blood, and that was exactly the wake-up call she needed to stay in the present instead of stressing about things that won't happen.

Talia's arms moved around Damon's neck and she returned his kisses with equal fervor. She was not an insecure girl from the attic anymore. She was Alpha Natalia Moonrider, the Alpha of the Midnight

Guardians pack, and her mate was Alpha Damon Blake, the handsome devil who kissed her like there was no tomorrow, and he was hers only.

Talia was aware they had a huge audience, but she didn't care and she knew that Damon didn't care either.

Their previous Alphas probably never gave such a public display of affection, but Talia wanted everyone to know that the bond between her and Damon was unbreakable.

She opened up her emotions for Damon to feel all the love and possessiveness she had for him and he groaned into the kiss, gathering her against him firmly.

This was about her and Damon and others could watch or look away, but no one, NO ONE had the right to interrupt them.

Damon broke the kiss and leaned his forehead on Talia's. They rested like that while inhaling each other's breaths and their matching smiles confirmed that neither of them was overthinking anymore. Damon and Talia were together, immersed in what was happening right then and there, and that was all it mattered.

Meg's and Kai's excited greetings got Talia's attention and she turned to see Tyler and Sandy emerging from the main house.

Other than big smiles on their faces, Talia also noticed that Sandy's eyes were flickering with silvery light, an obvious sign of the powers that were awakening in her.

The crowd in the garden also stirred at the sight of two newcomers. Everyone knew Tyler, and they already heard that he found his mate, so many were craning their necks to get a better view of the blonde by Tyler's side, their second Gamma.

"Sorry we are late.", Sandy said, mostly to Talia. "We wanted to come earlier, but..."

"It's fine.", Talia interrupted Sandy who would either tell the truth about how they were having sex or she would come up with an excuse no one would believe.

"We are nearly done with food. Sit and eat something while you can. We can talk later.", Talia said.

"Thank you, Alpha", Tyler responded and ushered Sandy toward two empty chairs with haste.

Sandy greeted Keith and Liam while passing by and waved at others as she held onto Tyler. Her grin was an obvious sign that she was showing off her mate.

Talia watched with amusement as usually quiet and composed Tyler was fussing around Sandy while piling food on her plate. The scene brought a big smile to Talia's face; she loved seeing the newly mated couple interact.

Sandy and Tyler were happy to be together, learning about each other, and Talia knew that feeling of being at home while soaking in unconditional acceptance. It was fantastic.

Talia leaned on Damon and observed as Axel was focused on Yasmin, Kai on Meg, and James was refilling Cornelia's glass with lemonade.

Keith and Liam were two single guys at the table, and for the first time, Talia wished to really have the power to match mates so that Keith and Liam can be happy as well.

...

It took them less than a minute to rearrange tables for the ceremony.

Healers were busy around the altar, and Talia noticed two of them standing out as they were telling others what to do.

'Axel', Talia called through the mind link. 'I see that Calla and Remi command authority among healers who are obeying them.'

'Are you thinking of making one of them the next Oracle?', Axel guessed.

'Yes. But I can't decide between the two. What do you think?'

Axel shook his head. 'You are the Alpha. If you think that both of them are good candidates, both of them can get the title of Oracle and they can organize work amongst themselves.'

Talia liked this idea. If they have two, then in case one was busy or otherwise not available, the other one can do the work.

'Before we make it official, I want Yasmin to evaluate their competency.', Talia said.

'It will be done, Alpha.', Axel responded in his official tone, and he even bowed a little. Whoever saw this silent interaction, understood that Axel just accepted an order and it was important.

The healers signaled that they were ready to start the ceremony, and Talia stepped forward to give her speech which was supposed to happen before the feast.

Just as Damon suggested, she told them about the ongoing efforts and the upcoming mixer. She ended with, "We are in the process of coming up with the best way for you to travel while staying safe. Expect good news soon. I thank you for your patience."

The crowd cheered and Tyler stepped forward with Sandy connected at his hip.

"Can I say a word before the ceremony?", Tyler asked Talia and she waved for him to go ahead.

Tyler raised his arm, indicating that he wanted to speak, and the noise simmered down.

"I'm confident you heard that I found my mate.", Tyler said while puffing his chest. "I was fortunate to find my other half and I want to tell every unmated member of our pack not to lose hope. Alpha Talia is here, changing our lives for the better and I can't wait to see what tomorrow will bring." He turned to look at Sandy. "My wonderful mate will become a member of our pack in a minute, but I want to be the one to introduce her first."

Tyler looked at the crowd. "Please, welcome to our pack my mate and soon-to-be your Gamma: SASA!"

Chapter 660 The new Gamma of the MG pack (cont.) [Bonus chapter]

At the introduction of Gamma Sasa, the crowd erupted in cheers, claps, and whistles, but what got Tyler's attention were unexpected reactions from people around him.

Sandy regretted not clarifying the mix-up about her name. She thought how Sasa was cute and didn't care how Tyler called her as long as it was with love. If she knew that he would announce it to everyone, she would find a chance between their lovemaking to tell him that crucial piece of information.

'PFFFFT!', a boisterous laugh burst from Liam, who couldn't hold himself back at the sight of Tyler's innocent confusion and Sandy's awkwardness.

Liam remembered how, on the previous day, Sandy and Tyler met, both overdressed and dazed at the sight of each other, and they were cool while going upstairs without care that everyone knew what they were about to do. And now they had this big blooper that Liam will remember for many years to come. Sandy got burned, and he didn't need to lift a finger!

Liam's only regret: not recording it.

Axel, Yasmin, Meg, and Kai were snickering. Keith was shaking with suppressed laughter while Talia, Damon, Cornelia, and James had funny expressions.

Tyler understood that something was off. But what was it?

Under that calm facade, Tyler could sense that Sandy was upset. Was it because all these guys here were laughing?

Due to the hierarchy, Tyler couldn't publicly challenge Axel, Talia, or Damon, so his attention fell on Kai.

"What kind of behavior is that? Did I laugh when you introduced your mate?" Tyler asked Kai, his voice full of indignation.

"No...", Kai responded while wiping the corners of his eyes from tears that gathered there. "But I introduced my mate by her proper name."

Tyler was perplexed. The crowd was cheering for his mate and their new Gamma Sasa, and his so-called friends were laughing like they had heard a joke. And what did Kai mean by introducing his mate by proper name?

"What?" Tyler snapped as irritation rolled through him. His hands balled into fists. He was about to jump on Kai and teach him a lesson, no matter who was watching.

"Sorry, Ty..." Sandy said in a small voice while tugging on his shirt. "My name is Sandy."

"You said it was Sasa.", Tyler reminded her, and her guilty expression told him that something was off. "I called you Sasa many times, and you never corrected me." Did she do it on purpose? Did she enjoy making fun of him?

Sandy pressed her lips into a line regretfully. She could feel Tyler's emotions through their mate bond. He was embarrassed, and there was some anger also with a hint of betrayal, and it was killing her on the inside.

"When we met, I was so smitten that my stutter from childhood returned, and you assumed that Sasa was my name. After that, I thought it was cute. No one ever called me like that; it was special. Something between the two of us."

"And the rest of the pack.", Meg added cheekily.

"Meg!" Sandy hissed at her. This was not the time for teasing. Sandy was in the middle of her first argument with her mate, and it was in front of Alphas and the whole pack to see.

"I'm sorry, Ty. I didn't mean to deceive you."

Tyler exhaled helplessly. How can he be angry at her when he could feel that she was genuinely sorry. The insecurity she projected was making his stomach churn painfully.

Tyler cupped Sandy's cheeks and kissed her on the lips. "I forgive you." And then he kissed her again.

"Everyone!" Tyler shouted at the crowd that was still cheering for Sandy (aka Gamma Sasa).

Tyler waited for everyone to quiet down before he spoke, "I need to correct myself. The love I have for my mate muddled with my mind, and I told you her name is Sasa. Her name is Sandy, that is Gamma Sandy for you. Sasa is a nickname that I gave her, and that is only for me to use. If I hear any of you call her Sasa, you will earn yourself time in the dungeon."

People erupted in laughter and cheers, and Tyler turned to see Sandy's blue-green eyes smiling at him.

Sandy knew that Tyler forgave her, for real. And more than that, he took the blame for this blunder, not caring about his image. For Sandy, at that moment, Tyler was the coolest person alive. And he was hers.

"Thank you, Ty."

"Anytime, Sasa.", he responded, and then he kissed her deeply right there for everyone to see.

Sandy's arms wrapped around Tyler, and they clung to each other while completely ignoring whistling and teasing from the crowd.

Talia could feel the emotions of the Midnight Guardians pack flowing into her, and she was overwhelmed by the positivity. They were excited that Talia was there and enthusiastic about the feast and the upcoming pack run, and they were happy for Tyler, but the biggest was their hope that soon they would find their mates.

For the members of the Midnight Guardians pack, Sandy was more than second Gamma, more than Tyler's mate. She was another proof that things were changing under Talia's leadership, and the flame of hope to find their other half was reignited for every unmated member of the pack.

Talia gasped at the energy that became tangible, and somehow, it all became hers, charging her to the point of her body buzzing, and she needed an outlet because it felt like she might explode.

'To all pack members!' Talia's voice boomed through the pack mind-link for every pack member to hear. 'I present you Tyler and Sandy, your Gammas! Let's give Sandy an appropriate welcome and wish the newly mated couple all the best!'

Talia glanced at Damon, and then she took a deep breath while raising her head to look at the night sky.

"AWOOOOO!"

Talia howled loudly, and Damon was quick to join her. A second later, the whole area shook from howls that merged into one loud thunder that scared many animals away.

Axel ended howling only when his lungs were completely devoid of air, and he looked at Yasmin, who observed everything with her eyes open wide.

"Was this too loud?" Axel asked Yasmin.

Yasmin shook her head and smiled widely. "I never saw anything like this. I can feel the energies converging around Talia, and I wonder if the upcoming ceremony can top this."

Axel realized that Yasmin was right. His parents led many pack runs, but they never had this charged-up atmosphere before the ceremony. Indeed, Talia was here to change things.

Talia was observing her surroundings with astonishment. It was beyond feeling the energies. She could see faint white strings from every pack member going into her. It was like all of them were connected to her, and she was connected to each and every pack member.

'Do you see this?' Talia asked Liseli.

Liseli confirmed with a hum. 'It reminds me of lights and colors we saw on the sphere that Guardians gave you when they tested your power.'

Talia had to agree with this. It was fantastic. She could also see faint dark lines from Liam, Keith, and Sandy going to Damon, and she wondered if the other ones were not visible because of the obstruction caused by the portal.

But... 'Is it normal to see these?'

Liseli's laughter sounded more like growling. 'You are the one defining normal, girl. Enjoy it.'