

Alphas Bride 671

### **Chapter 671 Back in the witches' realm (1)**

Talia led the way through the portal with Damon. Keith and Liam were right behind them, followed by Axel, Yasmin, James, and Cornelia. At the end of this portal-traveling party were four healers, one of them was Calla, the candidate to be Oracle's successor.

Yasmin suggested that healers come with them because she noticed many similarities between the practices of healers from the Midnight Guardians pack and witches of the Silver Flame Coven. She was confident that they could learn from each other. In order to avoid awkward situations, they decided that the healers accompanying them this time will be females only.

As one of the two next Oracles, Calla wanted to meet with Cassandra and see if the old Oracle could impart her some wisdom. Remi, the second Oracle, stayed back to deal with any matters in the pack that might require her services.

In the realm of witches, two witches (aka guards) were idling next to the portal, and they were visibly surprised to see new faces. Talia didn't recognize them, but Yasmin and Cornelia did.

Two guards bowed to Cornelia submissively, and then they jumped on Yasmin to hug her.

James took a mental note of this difference in status and attitude.

Yasmin was like a schoolgirl reuniting with her classmates, while Cornelia's presence demanded respect. His Cora was awesome!

James did his best to maintain eye contact with two scarcely dressed witches when looking at them. He feared that if his gaze wanders to their exposed bouncy parts, Cornelia might misunderstand.

Talia was sticking close to Damon and looking sternly at two witches, silently warning them that Damon was off-limits. Ah! And soon, they will be surrounded by many almost-naked females! Talia cursed internally. How did she manage to forget that witches wore only two flimsy pieces of cloth to cover their behind and crotch area?

Talia was pleased to feel Damon's unwavering hold around her waist, which confirmed that he had eyes only for Talia. She hoped it will stay that way, and she fought against the negativity that was swelling within her. Should she blindfold him? Or maybe she should kill any witch that dares to ogle at Damon... that would send a message to the others. Or maybe she should just send him back through the portal. That will prevent any uncontrolled violence when Talia's possessiveness hits.

'Kitten?' Damon's voice sounded in Talia's head through their mind-link.

Talia cursed internally. She forgot that he could feel her emotions!

'I will be alright', she responded. 'I was just thinking about committing a massacre if any of these women tries something funny with you.'

Damon chuckled. 'I love when you claim me as yours, kitten. But I assure you, there is no need for murder. I am yours and yours only.'

Talia nodded weakly and leaned on him. She knew she was being unreasonable.

Keith and Liam used their mind link to remind each other to keep looking away from the bare breasts. They were representing the Dark Howlers pack and Alpha Talia, and they needed to behave.

"We will notify the high priestess of your presence", one of the two guards said, and at the wave of her hand, a nearly see-through owl appeared in the air and flew in the direction of the witches' settlement.

The guards told them that they should wait for a delegation of witches to come because outsiders shouldn't wander alone, and they could get lost, to what Yasmin and Cornelia protested.

"Are you seeing US as outsiders?" Cornelia asked angrily, and two guards shrunk.

"It's the orders from the high priestess.", one of them squeaked weakly.

Yasmin waved her hand and said playfully, "I will deal with mother. We are going."

And with that, Yasmin and Cornelia started walking, and others followed gingerly.

Axel and Talia exchanged concerned glances. The duo knew where they were going, but they didn't want to risk offending Evanora. They came here with good intentions and possibly to gain some benefits. Evanora might forgive Yasmin, who grew up defying the high priestess, but what if Evanora decides to vent her anger on them?

...

Twelve newcomers were escorted into a big receiving room that looked like someone had put a dining table in the middle of a living area that had benches, chairs, and sofas all arranged to face the center of the space. Evanora met with them there.

The appearance of males (Axel, Damon, James, Keith, and Liam) invoked the curiosity of witches who ended up peering into the room through doors and windows.

Keith and Liam saw plenty of breasts in their lives, but they feared how long they could hold on before they cracked under the pressure of all that bare flesh because witches had an appearance of young alluring women. The guard duo regretted that Sandy stayed behind with Tyler. In this situation, she would keep them grounded. Well, at least they had each other.

Evanora took minimal time on introductions with newcomers. She immediately arranged for Calla and three healers to go to the quarters where Cassandra was staying, and then she asked Yasmin and Cornelia to join her in the study for some witch-only updates.

Axel and James stood up as well. They had no intention of separating from their mates.

Evanora was aware of Axel, but the youngster sticking close to Cornelia was new. It took her a few long moments to accept the possibility of... "Is he your soulmate?"

Cornelia responded with a nod.

Evanora stifled a laugh. "Aren't you blessed with a young one? Good. He will last longer."

James stood behind Cornelia and held onto her hips. To anyone looking from the side, it appeared like James was hiding behind Cornelia, and in a way, he was.

James didn't approve of Evanora's tone. Why did she talk like he was some item to be used and discarded when it breaks?

"How long I will last, is between me and Cora.", James said.

Evanora's eyebrows shot up. "Interesting. As long as you don't interrupt us, you can join, James, priestess Cornelia's soulmate." Evanora spoke arrogantly with a hint of amusement in her voice.

The truth was that she was happy to see Yasmin and Cornelia back, and she was curious to hear what all the two witches went through. They were away for months! Everything else can wait.

Of course, Axel and James followed after the three witches, leaving Talia, Damon, Keith, and Liam in the receiving room.

"I will send someone to entertain you...", Evanora's voice drifted into the room as she walked down the hallway.

Witches that were peeking in stayed there, curiously observing the newcomer. It was obvious that Evanora instructed them to stay away, and Talia guessed that whoever comes to entertain them will be someone high-ranking.

"They left us on their own.", Keith said while looking around with a small frown on his handsome face. All those women looking at him from the outside made his skin crawl.

"Don't worry about it.", Talia responded. "Someone is coming, and Evanora was eager to reunite with her daughter."

Talia guessed that Evanora was now hugging Yasmin and asking about her wellbeing, but she didn't want to transform into a concerned mother in front of a big audience because she needed to maintain her stern image of a High Priestess.

### **Chapter 672 Malia strikes again! (A&L)**

Talia noticed Damon's displeasure. "What's wrong?" she asked.

Damon shook his head, indicating that it was nothing. He didn't want to tell her that he was disappointed because Keith and Liam didn't find their mates among all those scarcely dressed women that gathered there. Did the women need to come closer, or was Talia's mate-finding ability off?

'Tell me', Talia persisted, this time through their private mind-link. Was he upset because of what Keith said? Or because Evanora left them on their own? Or...

"I'm sorry for being late", a breathy voice came from the side, and Talia, Damon, Keith, and Liam turned to the door to see a slender female who appeared to be in her mid-twenties. Her shoulder-length chestnut-colored hair framed her petite face, and her bare ample bosom rose and fell as she was breathing heavily.

"I am Amelia", she said while her gaze traveled over four faces. "The High Priestess instructed..."

Amelia's voice trailed, and her big brown eyes widened at the sight of a muscular young man who stared at her as possessed.

Talia blinked while wondering what made Amelia freeze. The witch looked like she had seen a ghost.

Liam was now walking toward Amelia, his intense gaze never leaving her form. His movements were fluid, making him resemble a hunter who was stalking his prey.

Talia placed her palm over her chest and held it there firmly because this was fantastic. Mates!

Part of Talia feared that this will spark more nonsense about her nonexistent matchmaking ability, but she was happy for Liam.

The scene of mates recognizing each other was familiar, always different, and absolutely breathtaking. It was such a special moment when two halves come together as one, and Talia felt tears pooling at the corners of her eyes. Happy tears.

Liam stopped when he was half a step away from Amelia, and he took a deep breath, his eyelids falling heavy under euphoria that was triggered by her grassy scent, which reminded him of vetiver. It was dry, earthy, woody, leathery, and smoky at the same time, stirring his memories of childhood when he was idling in the unkempt grass on a warm summer day.

Amelia's scent invoked in Liam emotions of being carefree and mischievous, and just how he cherished those long-forgotten memories, he knew that from this moment onward, he will cherish the woman in front of him. She was his home.

"I am Liam", he said.

"Amelia", she said while blinking rapidly, her cheeks growing increasingly red as his proximity flustered her. She never felt anything like it, but she was confident that the man in front of her was her soulmate. And he was smoking hot.

Liam raised his hand and brushed Amelia's cheek with the back of his curled fingers; the electric current generated at the point of contact sent shivers through his body, and he wanted to touch her more, much more than what he just did. He wanted all of her.

"Mine", Liam growled. Tangible possessiveness radiated from him in waves, a powerful display that a werewolf would exhibit only toward his mate.

Amelia's smile reflected in her eyes as she reached to hold his hand, and then she turned and walked away with Liam right behind her.

In the receiving room... crickets.

Only a few days back, Keith saw Sandy and Tyler recognizing each other as mates; there was kissing and talking and congratulations, and then the couple went to seek solitude, yet Liam left without a word. Actually, he said his name and declared her as his, and that was it. And now he was on his way to have sex. Keith never saw anything so... quick.

Keith was the first one to make noise by clearing his throat. "Should we ask the high priestess to send someone else to accompany us?"

"Definitely", Damon said. Another unmated female so that Keith can get his mate also, and then Damon won't worry about the measly coach getting any funny ideas about Talia.

"Woah!" Talia exclaimed when she gathered her wits. "Liam found his mate!" She looked at Damon with excitement sparkling in her eyes. "Do you know what this means?"

Yes! It means that Liam was on his way to having sex, and lots of it! But Damon guessed that Talia's question was not related to sex, so he asked, "What does it mean?"

"The Dark Howlers pack just got a witch.", Talia said meaningfully.

Damon realized that she was right. As an added bonus, considering that Evanora entrusted Amelia to entertain them without other witches, it pointed to the possibility that Amelia had a high rank, which meant more power, more knowledge, and more benefits for the Dark Howlers pack.

Keith's insides tightened when he saw Damon looking at him sternly. Now what?

"Why don't you go and walk around? Maybe your mate is here.", Damon said.

Keith couldn't believe this. Was Damon sending him away to find a woman? It's not that Keith had anything against women. All witches he saw so far were easy on the eyes, but... Talia was right there! No matter what, Keith didn't want Talia to think badly of him.

Keith shifted uncomfortably in his seat before responding to Damon, "Respectfully, I need to refuse. I came here to guard Alpha Talia and to represent our pack. It's my first time here. Wandering on my own can be seen as inappropriate and disrespectful."

Before Damon could force Keith out to chase women, Talia interjected. "I agree with Keith on this one."

Damon frowned at Talia. Did she talk against him in front of others?

Talia took Damon's hand into hers and gave him a squeeze while trying to pacify her grumpy Alpha, "Witches are friendly but unpredictable. This is their realm, and we need to practice caution. If we act out of line, I am confident that they won't miss the opportunity to take advantage of the situation."

Talia remembered the whole mate-for-a-mate deal, and her discomfort swelled. What if the witches wanted to take Damon away from her? How would she survive if that happened?

Damon could see Talia's mood dropping, and he was quick to wrap his arms around her.

"Fine, fine", Damon said with urgency while patting her back and wondering what's got into her. He wanted to reprimand her, but how could he do that when she was pitiful to the point of showing her weakness in front of the measly coach?

Damon exhaled helplessly and kissed the top of Talia's head. His lips rested there as he spoke into her hair, "You were here before, and you know witches the best, so we will follow what you say. We will stick together unless they make other arrangements."

Talia fisted Damon's shirt. "No matter what, don't leave my side."

"I have no intention of leaving you.", Damon assured her.

Talia turned her head to look at Keith. "And you, be careful. Witches are full of tricks. Don't let them swindle you into becoming their breeding stud."

Keith had no idea how to respond to this other than, "I will be careful." Did Talia say, breeding stud? What the hell was this place?

Keith looked around to meet numerous eyes of witches trained on him, and he saw curiosity and hunger, which made his hair stand on ends. Suddenly, Keith wanted to go home.

### **Chapter 673 Back in the witches' realm (2)**

Talia told Keith that in this realm, they will meet witches who were scarcely dressed females. She also warned him that he shouldn't underestimate them because they have powers and magic, but there was no mention of them exploiting men.

Actually, Keith had nothing against sex. He was gifted below the waist, had enviable stamina with a libido to match it, and witches were attractive females, so it's not like they needed to force him into intimacy.

But the words 'breeding stud' made him uncomfortable as he imagined himself being tied up spreadeagled on the bed as females took turns on him until they sucked him dry.

He didn't want Talia to think that he would enjoy such a thing because he was not aroused at the thought of women waiting in line in order to ride him. Nope. Nope. He was not aroused... OK. Maybe a little bit.

Keith exhaled a sharp breath while trying to stabilize his emotions, and he wished that Sandy was there. Sandy's spunk and no-nonsense attitude would distract him and keep those witches at bay. Lulu would be useful also, but he left her behind when she refused to take the blood oath. Actually, Keith had a grudge against Lulu since she made a move on him in the hospital and spoke venomous words when he rejected her.

The reality was that any thoughts about Sandy or Lulu were useless because neither of the two was in this realm.

Keith was on his own, feeling numerous heated gazes on him, and he wished that there was a safe word or an exit strategy because he couldn't allow himself to succumb under that suffocating pressure that a throng of sexually curious witches was creating.

And Damon wanted to send Keith out there on his own! Was Damon set on getting rid of Keith? Was that why Damon allowed Keith to be Talia's guard and to tag along?

A sense of insecurity crept into Keith's bones, and he wanted a hug. But Talia and Damon were there, already hugging each other. Joining them was not an option; Keith had no intention of hugging Damon, and if he asked Talia for a hug, Damon would grant him a painful death without a grave.

...

After some time, Evanora returned to the receiving room with Yasmin, Axel, Cornelia, and James.

Evanora looked around to see their backpacks.

"Didn't you go to your rooms?", Evanora asked, and before anyone could answer, she asked her next question, "Where is Amelia?" The witch had a task to show them to their rooms and help them settle. Sure, Amelia was in the middle of an important experiment, but it shouldn't take this long. Or did Amelia forget?

After Cornelia left the Coven, Amelia became the next high-ranking witch after Evanora, and Evanora entrusted her with the task of keeping the newcomers busy.

Talia responded with a knowing smile, "Amelia was here, and then she left. Liam is missing as well."

Yasmin was the first one to understand, "They are mates!" Yasmin clapped excitedly. "I'm sure that Amy already took him to her room." And everyone knew why Amelia would take Liam to her room.

James made a face. Liam just met Amelia, and they were already going at it, and here was James, sticking to Cornelia for days with little to no progress.

Sure, Cornelia was not pushing him away, and James loved her proximity, but he wanted to introduce Cornelia to all the joys his joystick could provide, and then he would mark her, and that's that. She would be his, forever.

For that, James needed a new plan because he felt that she will slip through his unless he did something drastic. But what other tactic can he try? He needed help.

Talking to guys about winning over a woman was a dead end.

Talia was the next best candidate as the most reliable and least malicious female around. Unfortunately, it was obvious that Talia was clueless about courting, so James dismissed her as a person who should give him relationship advice.

There was also Evanora, but James had a feeling that the old witch will give him more problems than solutions. Something about her smelled of trickery, and James didn't want to get entangled with her.

James looked at Yasmin while firming his resolve to talk to her about figuring out how to win over Cornelia. He was willing to try using magic if needed. Anything goes in love and war.

Yasmin knew about witches and about Cornelia, and she looked genuinely interested in getting Cornelia mated. She was the perfect person to help him, but James questioned her maturity. Cornelia told him that Jasmin is more than three hundred years old (it was an estimate because witches don't really track time how humans do), but the young witch was bouncing around like an overexcited toddler most of the time.

"This is a great opportunity to arrange a feast!" Yasmin exclaimed and looked at Evanora expectantly. "Can we? Amelia and Cornelia both found their mates, and I have news to share..." She put her hands on her belly, and Axel was right behind her, and his hands landed over Yasmin's.

Evanora's eyes widened in slow motion as the information sank in. "You are... I will be..."

Yasmin smiled brightly. "You will be a grandmother. We are expecting twins."

Evanora swayed visibly, and Cornelia was quick to grab her hand and help the high priestess to sit.

"Aren't you happy?" Yasmin asked sadly. She expected various reactions, mostly squealing congratulations with plenty of hugs, but Evanora looked like she was about to collapse.

Evanora needed a few moments to compose herself. "Happy? Shocked is the expression. You just got mated..." Her voice trailed, and she glared at Axel. "You... you... beast! She is so young! Why did you tie her up in motherhood!? I should have known. I would keep your balls here so that you can't impregnate her..."

Axel put his hand over his crotch area protectively, and he gave it a little squeeze to ensure all his parts were still there. Surely, the old witch was joking. Right? RIGHT!?

His nugget sack will be staying right where it is, between his legs and not an inch further. His future children are in there!

Axel didn't know how to respond to Evanora's meltdown, and the only good thing was that Yasmin was not sad anymore.

Yasmin was smiling and leaning on him, like Evanora was wishing them an eternity of happiness.

"Mother, don't talk like he forced me", Yasmin said when Evanora paused her shouting in order to inhale.

"It's his fault", Evanora said. "Werewolves are selfish and inconsiderate, only thinking about their impulses." Her eyes fell on James. "Maybe we should castrate this one before he does any damage."

James' eyes nearly popped out of their sockets. If he knew that castration was included in his visit to the realm of witches, he would reconsider.

"No!"

James was startled at the sound of Cornelia's protest. She stood in front of him protectively while facing Evanora.

"I understand that you are shocked by all these sudden changes, but you can't act rashly.", Cornelia said. "James is my soulmate, and if anyone wants to harm him, they will need to go through me."

### **Chapter 674 Back in the witches' realm (3)**

At the extraordinary scene of Cornelia standing up for James in front of Evanora, James' chest swelled with pride.

The air sizzled with hostility as Evanora disapproved of Cornelia's insubordination while Cornelia defended James fiercely, and James could swear that his chocolate-colored Goddess became more enchanting.

James really wanted to scoop Cornelia into his arms, take her to a room, mark her, and make love to her until the end of time. But they didn't have a room, and the mood was not right, and they never did it, so James knew that the most he could do and stay within boundaries of what was acceptable, was to admire her silently.

It's not that Cornelia was only protecting him, but she was also claiming him as hers! The only thing that could make this better would be if he was the one doing the protecting, but Evanora was scary, and Cornelia was still talking.

"I'm sure that Yasmin feels the same about Axel. If you can't accept the reality without carnage, take as much time as you need to sort out your thoughts. But if you keep on threatening our soulmates, we will resist and you will force us to leave. Is that what you want?"

Evanora sneered. "Do you think you can leave just because you want to?"

Intense silence filled the room as everyone wondered if they heard Evanora right. Even witches observing the scene from outside didn't move a muscle.

'CLAP!'

Yasmin clapped loudly, getting everyone's attention.

"OK. OK. Let's not escalate this into something we will all regret.", Yasmin said, this time, she was serious. "Mother, I agree with Cornelia. Things are the way they are, we all know that you don't want to antagonize me or your next ranked witch, and if you need time to accept the reality, take it. In the meantime, we will plan for a feast. How about tomorrow evening?"

"What ceremony!?", Evanora hissed. "You are pregnant and you should rest."

Yasmin was having none of it. "I'm just fine. Actually, I believe that my babies are increasing my energy as I feel like I could move mountains and run for hours without breaking a sweat. What's a little party organizing compared to that?"

"Don't be reckless. We should check your body.", Evanora grumbled.

"Didn't you hear me? I. AM. FINE.", Yasmin said with finality of a Luna. "I just came here and you first bombard me with questions, and then you want me to stay put? This is not why I returned home, mother." Yasmin's tone softened. "Besides, my mate arranged for regular checkups with healers, and the pregnancy is progressing well. I'm not opposed to you confirming my condition, but we will do it later."

Talia listened to this banter, visibly relaxed at the thought that they won't end up imprisoned here. The last thing she wanted was a war with witches.

She admired Yasmin who managed to divert an upcoming calamity and go back to talking about a feast.

Talia remembered the feast when she visited the last time. She was helping in the kitchen, and the celebration was focused on Axel and Yasmin. At that time, Talia was on her own, but now Damon was here as well, and she wanted him to see the magic of silvery flames dancing, and who knows... maybe Evanora would conduct a ceremony for them as well.

Considering the messy situation that waited for them in the human realm, Talia had a feeling that she will need all blessings and magical powerups she can get.

...

In one of the rooms on the second floor...

Liam and Amelia stood in the middle of the room, facing each other, with only a few inches of space between them.

Neither of them spoke a word since they came here. There was no need to say anything.

They could clearly feel each other's emotions through the mate bond that was getting stronger by the second.

Passion. Curiosity. Love.

Liam found it fascinating that he felt so much love and craving for the woman who was standing in front of him, and he knew only her scent and her name, Amelia. He wondered if she had a nickname, but then... it didn't matter. Nothing mattered other than the fact that she was his mate, his other half. He was the one who will make him complete, settle down, and start a family. Family.

Damn! His crotch area was painfully tight as he was ready to pump his pups into the little woman who made his heart race in the beat of her name. Amelia.

Liam observed Amelia's delicate facial features, and no matter how much he stared into her adorable nose or sparkly brown eyes, he couldn't find a single flaw. She was perfect.

Liam's Adam's apple bobbed as his eyes traveled over her full breasts that were round and perky, and he knew that she held her breath as she could feel his gaze caressing her flesh. She had only a small fabric hanging from a string at her waist level, to cover her crotch area, and Liam thought how that fabric was too much, but at the same time, he wished that she wore more clothes because her almost-naked form was driving him to the point of madness, and he struggled not to jump on her like a sexually deprived savage.

What if she was not willing? No, no... he dispelled that thought. She was definitely willing, he could sense her emotions and he knew that she wanted him.

However, Talia told them how witches lived in this realm for centuries without any males, so Liam guessed that he should take this slow. How slow? He was not sure.

Amelia stared at the handsome specimen in front of her while anticipation bubbled inside her and making her a nervous wreck. She hoped that he didn't notice her emotional state because she wanted to appear confident.

Her gaze moved over his chiseled facial features several times, and she knew them by heart already.

Liam had broad shoulders, and even though his long-sleeved shirt covered his torso, Amelia knew that there was plenty of muscle under that fabric. But her attention gravitated toward the bulge in his crotch area. She knew what it was, but she wanted to see it without jeans covering it. Why did he wear so much clothes?

Amelia lifted her hand to her chest level, and then rotated her index finger.

Liam's eyebrows shoot up when he noticed streaks of silvery light forming there. The light moved around him, and he felt a slight breeze.

'POF!'

It was a soft sound, and Liam gaped at what used to be his clothes. Threads and tatters flew in every direction like a clothes-destroying bomb exploded with him at the center.

Liam definitely didn't expect anything like this. His little witch undressed him completely! Did this mean that he could forget about going slow? Or did she just want to remove his clothes and make them equal because she was technically naked?

Amelia observed his confusion as he looked around and at himself, and she panicked. Did she overdo it? Was that not allowed?

"Sorry if it was..."

"It's fine.", he interrupted her. He had spare clothes in his backpack and if they were about to do what mates normally do, he won't need clothes as long as he stays here.

### **Chapter 675 Liam's vetiver (1) [Bonus chapter]**

Liam licked his lips slowly, and he loved that Amelia's eyes were trained on that small movement.

Amelia was flustered. Witches practiced controlling the energies around them and embracing everything as nature provided, which included naked bodies also. Still, centuries of diligent training didn't prepare her for the way Liam impacted the air around him. He didn't do it on purpose. It was his presence that radiated power and danger, and Amelia's insides shook at the thought that the handsome naked male in front of her was her other half. Hers.

It was obvious that he was deadly and even though she knew he wouldn't harm her, she reminded herself to act with caution.

Liam tilted his head sideways, and somehow Amelia guessed that he had given her permission to check him out.

Her eyes moved slowly over his bare form, and her attention was inevitably drawn to the numerous tattoos that decorated his torso. She wondered what stories were hiding behind each picture etched into his delicious-looking flesh.

Liam puffed his chest and flexed his muscles to give her a better view.

Amelia's curiosity was obvious as she slowly circled around him to see the art on his back, but she ended up staring at his perfect ass. It looked firm, and she wondered if it would be OK to touch it. She decided to hold off on that, and her legs continued carrying her around Liam.

Her eyes widened at the sight of his impressive cock that stood in attention.

Her mouth became dry, and her lips as well, and now it was her turn to lick her lips.

Liam watched her tongue darting, the pink glistening temptation spreading its wetness, silently inviting him to kiss her there, and he couldn't hold back anymore.

Liam touched Amelia's chin, tipping her head up to look at him.

"Amelia", he called. "Do you accept me as your mate?"

Liam had to ask because he could sense his reasoning slipping. His wolf was going crazy, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to fight the urges to merge with her in every way possible.

The only thing he needed was to hear that she was willing.

"Yes.", she said, and in the next moment, his lips descended on hers.

Liam groaned when their lips connected, electric sparks shooting into his brain and then the rest of his body, making him alert and numb at the same time. It was surreal.

He had kissed many women before, and none of those came close to what he was experiencing right at that moment. Kissing his mate was beyond fantastic!

Amelia's eyes sprang open as far as they went, and it took her a few long seconds to relax.

As soon as he felt Amelia responding to his kiss, Liam's arms gathered her against him as he deepened the kiss, her breasts pressed on his chest, and it was the best feeling ever.

His hand shifted lower on her back for his fingers to trace the curve of her spine, and he loved the way she trembled in his embrace. She was responding to him beautifully.

Liam's brows came together when he touched the string that held the fabric which covered her private parts.

With a small tug, the string gave in, and they were both completely naked.

Amelia was lost in Liam's presence which enveloped her completely. It was masculine, soothing, and protective, and she wished to meld into him because his firm body pressing against her soft one was a perfect contrast and she really wanted more of it.

Amelia had no recollection of being carried to bed, but she remembered her whole body twitching as she gasped for air while Liam feasted on her breasts and his hot palms fervently caressed her body.

With every stroke of Liam's tongue against hers, Amelia relaxed more, her anxiousness dissipating to be replaced by devotion and arousal, and she became lightheaded.

Amelia wondered, was she always this sensitive? She was not a newbie to the pleasures of the flesh. Amelia was never with a man; however, females can engage in petting and stimulating in a group setting, and she touched herself many times before, but this... this was different.

It was like the tips of his fingers were charged with the power to set her body ablaze.

Was it because Liam was a man? Or was it because he was HER man? It didn't matter.

Liam handled her with confidence, and his every caress confirmed it was not his first time, which made Amelia wonder how many women experienced his intimate embrace. The desire to kill Liam's exes swelled within Amelia because she wanted to be Liam's only one. At the same time, she loved that he knew what he was doing.

"Liam?" She called; her voice came out breathy.

"Hmm?"

Amelia felt the vibration of his questionable hum on her flesh, just above her navel, where he was kissing, licking, and nibbling while moving lower slowly like he was examining every inch of her body with his lips.

"How many?" She asked.

He stopped moving and looked at her with confusion obvious on his face.

"How many women you had?" She clarified.

Liam's eyes narrowed when he realized that she was asking him about his exes. What the heck? How did that happen?

He crawled up her body until their noses touched, and her determined gaze told him that she won't back away from this easily.

"I don't know", he said.

Amelia was disappointed but mostly jealous of women she had never met. She heard how Yasmin was Axel's first, and even though books mention the licentious nature of werewolves, Amelia still hoped that Liam didn't indulge in carnal pleasures with others.

"That many?" She asked while looking away as her heart ached when she thought of another possibility.

"Do you have a woman waiting for you in your realm?" Will he leave her for that woman? Or will he want to keep them both? Soulmate or not, Amelia was not willing to share her soulmate.

She cursed internally for not clarifying these things in advance.

Amelia put her hands on his shoulders and tried to push him away, but Liam didn't budge.

He took her right hand into his and kissed the inside of her palm. That gentle press didn't match the awkward atmosphere between them, which also didn't go well with the fact that they were completely naked.

Liam continued holding her right wrist after keeping her arm above her head, and then he repeated the same with her left hand.

Amelia didn't try to pull her hands out, but she didn't look at him either.

Liam released a long breath that splashed on her cheek.

"I don't know how many because from the moment I saw you, everything disappeared.", he said, and his stomach dropped at the sight of Amelia, who pressed her lips into a line. She didn't believe him.

"Look at me.", Liam growled, annoyance seeping out of him. They were naked on the bed, and it went well, but then she got some funny ideas that shouldn't be there when they were only minutes away from coitus. Ah, if he knew this would happen, he wouldn't spend so much time on foreplay!

But Amelia's mood was off, and he needed to assure her of his sincerity because she was not some random hookup; she was his mate, and mates were forever unless a calamity happened.

## Chapter 676 Liam's vetiver (2)

Liam waited for Amelia's apprehensive gaze to meet his before saying, "I don't want to talk about my past, but I can promise that right now, it's only you, and it will be only you in the future. When we return to the Dark Howlers pack, you can ask my brothers and my friends to confirm that you are the first female I brought home."

"Your brothers?" She asked. Evanora told them that werewolves live in packs, but they don't call other pack members brothers and sisters unless they are blood-related.

"Three of them. We are close, and they know everything about me."

"Won't they lie for you?"

Well, Liam couldn't deny this. Liam and his brothers were tight, and if one of them was in trouble, the other ones would commit murder and hide the body without any questions asked. Lying was nothing compared to that. But he was confident that his brothers will dote on Amelia. After all, Liam was the last one of the four to find his mate, so his brothers (and their mates) will look at Amelia like a treasure. However, Liam had a feeling that if he told her that, she wouldn't believe him, so he decided to keep it short.

"When you meet them, you can make a decision about their character."

Liam placed a light kiss on her lips, and he frowned when she didn't kiss him back. "I am not playing, Amelia. The Moon Goddess made us mates for a reason." He pecked her lips again. "It's only you." His next kiss met her stiff lips, and he pushed down the irritation that mixed with helplessness. He found his mate, and they should be all over each other. Why did he need to grovel now? He didn't do anything bad!

"Amelia", Liam called while searching her eyes for an opening for him to get in and crumble those insecurities... and then it hit him: she was insecure. Silly witch.

Liam realized that this required a different approach.

As much as the timing for a conversation was off (and he was not much of a talker anyway), Liam reminded himself that Amelia was a witch, and she was sensing their bond differently. He heard about James' troubles. Based on that, Amelia could feel the attraction, but it was not to the point of a done-deal how Liam was experiencing it. He needed to assure her that she was THE one for him and that he won't betray their bond.

"I have no choice but to love you.", he said.

"Why?" She asked, and Liam felt that this was progress because her tone was less clipped.

"Because you are made for me. You are everything I ever wanted."

Amelia thought how that was a bunch of rubbish. He didn't know anything about her. "Really? Why don't you tell me about it?"

"I know that you are smart and hardworking. You love lilac and coffee, and this here..." Liam caressed the spot under her armpit, grazing the side of her breast, and she gasped. He smirked victoriously. "...that right there is a sensitive spot that turns you on."

Amelia was irritated by his confidence. Was he playing with her? "And what makes you think you are right about any of those?"

"You analyze the situation and ask for explanations, even in a situation like this one." He glanced down to make a point that they were both naked. "The scent lingering in your hair tells me that you were working on a potion before we met, and you would probably still be there if Evanora didn't tell you to accompany guests. There is a painting of lilacs on your wall and fresh lilac in the vase, as for the spot..." He chuckled when he caressed that sensitive area again, and she squirmed under his touch.

Amelia realized that Liam was not an airhead. He was observant and analytical, and it made sense except for one thing. How can he say that she loves coffee when... "I never drank coffee." Witches drink herbal teas.

"You will love it.", Liam said without missing a beat.

"What makes you think so?"

"Because we are mates, Amelia. We love the same things because we love each other, and I love coffee, and I love you. You can ask me for a thousand reasons why I love you, and I will give you a thousand and one, but none will explain this burning desire to be with you, to touch you, to make you happy. We feel the same, and once I mark you and the bond between us solidifies, you will be able to sense my emotions and my sincerity."

He nuzzled her nose with his and continued. "I can't wait to take you home. Everyone will be jealous because my mate is the most beautiful woman in the world. I will show you around proudly and beat up any guy who dares to look at you wrongly. Every night you will collapse to sleep after screaming my name, and I will wake you up in the morning with breakfast; it will be my special scrambled eggs with toast and coffee. I will spoil you, and you will allow me to do it."

Liam pecked her lips again, and he smiled because her lips moved in response. Yes! Liam scores!

He wanted to kiss her again, but Amelia tilted her head to avoid him. He wondered if he imagined that she kissed him back, but then he heard her speak.

"Promise me that I will be the only woman in your life, and you won't look at any other female."

Liam's brows came together. "That... I can't promise."

"What?" Amelia hissed and started wiggling under him. But his body pressed on hers, his legs were entangled with hers, his hold on her wrists was solid, and she couldn't budge. Amelia groaned in frustration. Should she buzz him with magic? But no matter how angry she was, she didn't want to hurt him. Not unless it was necessary.

"How dare you...?"

He swallowed the rest of her question with a kiss. It was supposed to be a gentle kiss, or maybe a passionate one, but she bit him, and the sharp pain which came with metallic taste told him that she drew blood, but he didn't pull back.

"Daughter", he spoke into her lips.

Amelia's eyes widened in shock, and she forgot how to breathe. She imagined women, mistresses, maybe even a wife or a harem, but... a child?

Amelia was not sure how to deal with that. Can she raise a child of her mate if she was not the mother?

"You have a daughter?"

Liam smiled bitterly. "I might. I mean, we will unless all our pups are boys. I come from a large family, and I always thought that when I find my mate, we would have a bunch of pups. I will love them all equally, boys and girls, so I can't promise you that I won't look at other females because I won't neglect our daughters."

Amelia frowned at him. "You were ambiguous on purpose."

Liam didn't deny it. "I love to see you jealous. It means you don't want to share me, and I feel the same about you."

Her eyes landed on his lips which were red because he was bleeding. The stream of red disappeared in his neatly trimmed beard that was making his sharp jawline more prominent. But the guilt she felt for hurting him spoiled the joy of his handsome visual.

### **Chapter 677 Liam's vetiver (3)**

"I hurt you.", Amelia said to Liam.

She bit him in anger, causing his lip to bleed, and she regretted it now.

Liam wanted to say how it was not a big deal, but then he changed his mind.

"It hurts", he said pitifully. "How are you going to make it up to me?"

"Uhm... I can administer first aid.", she said.

Liam refused. "Not necessary. My body heals quickly."

"How can I make it up to you then? How about I give you something?" Amelia glanced around the room. "I don't have much."

Liam looked at the silly woman under him. "You have the most precious thing in the world. Give me your heart and I will be a happy man."

Amelia blinked when she realized that he was talking about her love. But... didn't she love him already?

"This is new for both of us", he said. "Don't think that I have an advantage here because my insides are trembling at the thought that I won't be able to make you happy. Will our lives be perfect? I don't know. Will I disappoint you? I hope not, but it could happen. A lot of things are uncertain, but I am confident that I won't give up on us, and the only thing I will ever ask from you is that you don't give up on me."

Amelia's heart melted because she could sense his sincerity. And he was insecure. The outrageously handsome and powerful werewolf was naked on top of her (equally naked body), and he was afraid that she will reject him. Was she thinking of rejecting him? Absolutely not.

"I won't give up on us, Liam", she said. "Let's do this."

Liam felt like a big burden fell off his chest, but he still felt that she was reserved. He wanted to give her another push, one that would get her further from her safety zone and straight into his arms so that he could protect her. He wanted her body, mind, and soul. It was important.

"Are you sure?" He asked.

"Absolutely." She assured him.

"Mates are forever. You won't be able to back out."

"I won't."

"Prove it.", Liam challenged her.

Amelia was at a loss. How can she prove such a thing? Well, there was one move she could try. She lifted her head how much their position allowed (because he was still holding her hands above her head), and she pecked his lips, once, twice... and she was happy that he kissed her back, but he didn't lower himself to make kissing easier. Actually, she hoped that he will take the lead because she didn't really know what to do.

"Take me, Liam", she said. Her cheeks were crimson now from embarrassment and arousal. "Mark me as yours."

Liam's eyes flashed, and he dove for a fervent kiss full of need because his gorgeous mate asked him to mark her!

He had no intention of delaying the inevitable and allowing for another opportunity to complicate things. Just the thought of claiming Amelia as his made Liam hard to the point of aching.

He released her wrists so that he can caress her properly and her hands moved to hold onto his muscular back that was decorated with numerous tattoos. His body was a work of art, and Amelia was confident that she will get to appreciate Liam's magnificent visual for the years to come.

Liam growled when his hand ventured to the cradle of her thighs to feel how wet she was. For him.

He positioned himself between her legs and caressed her hip, and she gasped into the kiss when she felt the pressure increasing.

Liam didn't stop his flurry of kisses nor his steady advances into her depths. He was on a mission to claim her, and he had no intention of pausing until it was over.

A sharp pain told her that they crossed the point of no return, but the way he held her firmly while keeping his caresses gentle told her that it will be alright.

"FUCK!" Liam cursed loudly when he got in all the way. No pussy ever gripped his cock in such a way, and the sparks igniting his body made the whole experience mind-blowing.

This was it, merging with mate, and it was so much better than he imagined it would be.

The thought of him ever doing such a thing with another woman was unacceptable, and the thought of her doing this with another man was driving him insane.

"You are mine... mine..." Liam growled lowly while rocking into her.

Amelia's scent of vetiver mixed with the lilac that was in the vase, reminding him of carefree days, and the scent of her arousal added Amelia into the memory, changing it forever. Liam's mental image of a boy relaxing in the grass on a sunny day transformed into a grownup Liam with Amelia; they were in the grass, kissing and caressing while relishing each other's presence and creating their own definition of happiness.

Amelia held onto Liam with all her might because the whole room was spinning, but she was not afraid because Liam was there to anchor her.

He licked and kissed her everywhere his mouth reached, eventually moving to the base of her neck.

She wanted to kiss him and caress him in return, but her body was not responding to the commands of her brain. She was completely at his mercy while her body moved on an instinct to match the rhythm his set.

Amelia moaned when he squeezed her hip and increased the pace of his thrusts, and she bit her lower lip to suppress the embarrassing sounds.

There was a change of angle, and his cock pushed against the spot that made her see stars in front of her closed eyes.

"That's it..." He murmured between kisses. "Let it out... Let me hear you... Look at me..."

Amelia opened her eyes, and through her haze, she could see his disheveled appearance. When did her hands end up in his hair? She was not sure because the pressure in the pit of her stomach was increasing, and her jaw fell open slack in a silent cry when she felt the scorching pain in her neck.

The heat of his venom spread through her veins, and she tensed as an orgasm hit her full force.

Liam growled while pumping himself into her without releasing her neck, and Amelia was confident that she will pass out from the overload of senses, but she didn't.

Amelia was surprised by the clarity that enveloped her. It was like when the mist disperses under the morning sun, and everything becomes brighter and sharper.

She could clearly feel his cock throbbing inside her as he filled her up with his hot seed, how he held her waist firmly, the moment when his venom reached the tips of her toes that were curled to the point of hurting, her insides jolting in the aftershocks of her orgasm... she never felt anything like it, and it all came with the addictive scent of lilac. The sweet aroma was everywhere, and it took her a moment to realize that it was coming from Liam. Even his sweat carried a lilac scent. It was her favorite. How come she didn't pick that up before?

Liam retracted his fangs, and he licked the spot where he bit Amelia, to help her heal. He loved the way she twitched under him to the rhythm his tongue set.

He lifted his head to look at her flushed face that was glowing in the aftermath of their mind-blowing sex. She was the one. His mate. Claimed and marked and absolutely perfect.

The mark was still fresh, but Liam could feel the bond forming and allowing him to peek into her emotions. She was dazed, amazed, and mostly happy.

Liam captured her lips with his, and he inhaled her shaky sigh when he resumed rocking into her. Did she think that once will be enough?

Amelia didn't know much about Liam other than his name, that he had three brothers and many friends, and that no woman waited for him in his realm. He had no children, and he wanted many, with her. He said that he wanted to make her happy, with a promise of sex every night and breakfast in the morning. He loved drinking coffee and he said that she will love it too. He knew how to set her body ablaze, and there was a strange sense of belonging that increased with his every thrust and every kiss... actually, she knew quite a bit of things about him.

Liam was her soulmate, her other half, and that was more than enough to relax and enjoy the pleasures of flesh her smoking-hot mate was providing. And he said that it will last forever.

#### **Chapter 678 A divine message for Keith (1)**

Keith was sitting on a chair in the corner of a room that looked like a lab from a horror movie.

Numerous shelves filled the walls with jars and vials of different colors. He could swear that some of those jars had contents that moved, but he was warned not to touch anything if he wanted to stay there, so he sat there obediently.

In the middle of the room was a medium-sized table. Cassandra, Calla, and three other healers from the Midnight Guardians pack were sitting around that table and talking about some things Keith was not interested in.

He overheard Calla expressing her desire to be the next Oracle, together with a healer called Remi, but Cassandra denied that request immediately with, "I am the Oracle of the Midnight Guardians pack, and I have no intention of retiring. Unless Alpha Talia removes me from my position, it won't happen. Besides, how can you be an Oracle when you are not receiving divine messages?"

Calla was visibly flustered. "Divine messages?"

Cassandra snorted arrogantly. "I am the Oracle because I receive divine messages, not because someone gave me the title. Even if you call yourself the Oracle, you will never be one for real."

Calla nodded in understanding. "I didn't mean to take over your position as the Oracle, but in your absence, we need someone to conduct ceremonies and such. Alpha Talia approved for Remi and me to share those duties."

"That's a different thing, then", Cassandra said. "You can call yourself main healers, or shamans, or make up a name, but unless you are blessed to be an Oracle, you calling yourself as such will be just an empty title."

Calla had to agree with this. It was logical. Cassandra performed her duties for such a long time, they associated everything with the Oracle.

After that, the conversation became livelier, with them picking the right title and defining the duties of each role. Calla and the other three healers had many questions ready about the different ceremonies and things that Cassandra would normally do, and she answered their questions patiently.

Keith observed the old Oracle while suppressing his urge to snap her neck. He knew that Damon was under the influence of dark magic because of her, and Keith still clearly remembered how Damon manhandled Talia on the evening of the pack run. If Cassandra succeeded, Damon would forget about his mate, and he would probably be crippled, and that meant the whole Dark Howlers pack would be at the mercy of other Alphas who would want a piece of the Dark Howlers pack. How can Keith not wish to punish the Oracle for such a heinous act?

But she was alive, and that meant Talia and Damon had a reason not to kill her. What was that reason? Keith was not sure. Maybe it was something that only Alphas should know.

It was obvious that Keith hated Cassandra, so why was he in this room? Because no other place was safe.

Liam was busy with his newly found mate (aka Amelia), Axel and James were sticking to their witches, Talia didn't need Keith's protection when Damon was around, and Keith was finding it increasingly difficult to watch them being lovey-dovey.

Keith knew that he had no right to claim Talia in any way, and he had no right to be jealous either, but he couldn't help it. In order to prevent himself from making the obvious mistake of provoking Damon, Keith decided to find another place to idle.

Ah, he thought that this would be exploring the new realm while valiantly defending Talia, yet he ended up holding a candle to mated couples no matter where he looked.

With witches' burning gazes on him, Keith decided to go to his room with the intention to rest.

Unfortunately, witches would find a reason to disturb him every few minutes. They would knock on the door of his room, offering snacks and drinks, to show him the fountain and the library, and even massages.

Keith wondered what was wrong with him. If this was before, he would take advantage of all those witches, or at least of a few of them. But how could he indulge in pleasures when his mission included Talia? What if an emergency happened, and he was balls deep in a woman? He wouldn't be able to look Talia in the eyes ever again.

Desperate for a safe place, Keith remembered four healers who came with them. They were from the Midnight Guardians pack, fully clothed, and they wouldn't try anything funny because they were saving themselves for their mates.

And that's how Keith found himself in this lab, spacing out while contemplating his life choices.

Keith felt like he merged with the chair he was sitting on, and he became furniture. A sad ending for someone with a promising future. He remembered how he was excelling in academics, and he proved himself as a worthy warrior; he became a coach and started a lucrative business of protein shakes, and... now he was sitting in a room with five females and being ignored.

Keith was startled out of his depression when the door opened for a witch to peek in. He thought she was looking for him, but after glancing around the room, she left without a word. It wouldn't be strange if the same thing didn't happen four times already. Was she looking for something or someone? Keith thought that it made more sense to think that she was waiting for someone.

What he didn't know was that witches were keeping a close eye on Cassandra; it's not that they were monitoring Oracle's every move, but now that people from the Midnight Guardians pack were visiting, witches wanted to remind Cassandra why she was there.

Cassandra stayed behind after making an unclear deal that resulted in the potion to dispel dark magic temporarily.

Cassandra's life with witches was not an easy one. It all started with testing the potion that was intended for Damon. However, in order to check if the potion works, witches re-created the ceremony that Cassandra did to suppress Damon's power. The pain was excruciating. And the worst thing was that they did it more than once.

After Cassandra regained consciousness, they clarified the terms of the deal. Cassandra was hungry for knowledge. However, since she was not a part of the Coven, the witches refused to teach her directly, but they allowed Cassandra to observe and learn on her own. In exchange, they got to use her for testing non-lethal spells and potions. Non-lethal didn't mean that Cassandra didn't suffer, but the proud Oracle would never admit that she ended up with the short end of the stick.

Keith noticed that Cassandra would glance at him occasionally. Did she notice his hostility?

After an unknown measure of time, Cassandra left the table where four healers were engaged in a discussion, and she approached Keith.

"You are Alpha Talia's guard, right?" She asked.

Keith confirmed. "Her head guard."

"I hope we can have a word."

As much as Keith was withering away from boredom, he didn't like that Cassandra was gesturing toward the door, obviously asking him to step out. There were witches out there! On top of that, the woman in front of him was the one who dared to act against Alpha Damon. Who knew what she would do to Keith?

"Where do you want us to go?" Keith asked without getting up.

"To find privacy", Cassandra responded.

That's it!, Keith thought. She was definitely up to no good. Will she perform a ritual to harm his wolf? Or maybe to brainwash him? Anything was possible. He eyed her top-to-bottom in search of a weapon or a potion, but he couldn't find anything. Maybe she was luring him into another area where a bunch of witches was waiting. Is that why the other witch would peek in once in a while? Was she reminding Cassandra that Keith needs to be offered as a sacrifice?

He should snap her neck right now, just to be safe, and he can explain it to Talia later. But this was a different realm with many witches, and if he acted rashly, he might bring trouble for Talia.

"Is privacy necessary?", Keith asked warily. "Why don't you tell me what you want."

"I am Cassandra, the Oracle of the Midnight Guardians pack", she said with her chin lifted up. "I have a divine message for you from the Moon Goddess."

### **Chapter 679 A divine message for Keith (2)**

Keith was about to call out Cassandra's bluff. Did she really expect him to believe that the Moon Goddess sent a message to Keith? But then he saw that four healers were not on the chairs around the table anymore. They were on their knees, facing Cassandra, with their heads lowered. Were they part of this show?

Calla glanced at Keith nervously. "It's an honor to receive a divine message from the Oracle.", Calla said with an urgent whisper. "You should get on your knees and thank her, and not..."

"It's OK", Cassandra interrupted Calla, and then she turned to Keith. "Do you want to hear it or not? Your life will depend on it."

Keith was not used to this theatrical behavior. Wasn't the kneeling too much?

"A message from the Moon Goddess, for me?" Keith asked suspiciously. "Just a minute ago, you asked me if I'm Alpha Talia's guard. You don't even know my name."

"I don't need to know your name in order to know you are the one.", Cassandra said with confidence. "This is not only about your life but about Alpha Talia's as well."

Keith considered his options. He didn't care about insulting Oracle, but if he refused, it might appear that he was afraid. As Talia's guard, he shouldn't be afraid. The biggest thing was that she mentioned how this was related to Talia's safety, and he needed to hear her out even if it was a trap.

Keith stood up. "Lead the way."

...

Cassandra and Keith entered a room that was much smaller than the one he got as a guest. There was one bed, one table, a chair, and a dresser. The way Cassandra searched through the pile of papers told him that this was her bedroom.

"What is this about?" He asked.

"Take a seat", she responded without looking at him.

"I will rather stand."

"This might take a while."

Between the chair and the bed, Keith opted to sit on the chair.

"Here it is", Cassandra said victoriously while straightening one sheet of yellowish paper before giving it to Keith.

Keith took the paper, and his eyebrows shot up when he saw a rough sketch of a male. It was not perfect, but that was definitely Keith.

"What is this? Did you see me before?" Keith asked.

"That is the image I got in my vision.", Cassandra responded. "When I saw you enter the lab today, I thought you looked familiar, and then I remembered from where."

Keith shifted uncomfortably. This was getting weird. Was that why she was glancing at him while healers were asking her questions?

The Dark Howlers pack didn't have an Oracle, but Keith heard stories about Oracles, people blessed with Gods talking to them in riddles. Cassandra said that she had a message from the Moon Goddess for Keith. That might be nonsense to get him to walk into a trap, but how could he explain the sketch?

"Tell me about it.", Keith said while gesturing at the sketch.

Cassandra smirked victoriously, knowing that she got his attention. She sat on the bed and looked at him seriously.

"Your fortune is tied to Alpha Talia's.", Cassandra said. "By protecting her, you are protecting yourself."

Keith was not blinking nor breathing while waiting for more, but there was nothing.

"What else?" He asked.

"That's it.", Cassandra said. "I can convey to you the message meant for you. Anything beyond it is my interpretation, and it can impact your path negatively."

Keith couldn't believe this. Sure, by protecting Talia, Keith was protecting himself because if he failed, Damon would slice Keith into a million pieces and then glue him together only to slice him again. But what was that about tied fortunes?

"What does that mean?"

Cassandra shrugged. "It's not my job to interpret prophecies. I only tell them to the people involved."

Cassandra was about to stand up, but Keith lifted his arms, indicating to her not to move.

"There must be more.", Keith insisted. "You can't tell me this much and leave me hanging. Is she in danger?" It was a stupid question. He knew very well that Talia was in danger. "Who wants to harm her? When?"

Cassandra exhaled through her nose in annoyance. "I am not the person with answers to those questions."

"But you must know something."

"If you want to know more, ask your wolf."

Now Keith was confident that Cassandra was missing a few screws. "My wolf? Will he give me a letter or learn how to talk?"

"You are attracted to Alpha Talia.", Cassandra deadpanned, and Keith froze.

How the hell did she know that?

Cassandra smirked. "Your wolf knows that your fate is tied to Alpha Talia's. If anything happens to her, you will never be happy. Your wolf can't talk, but he is telling you things. You just need to listen."

Cassandra stood up and walked to the dresser, where she rummaged through the top drawer.

"Here..."

Keith turned to see that Cassandra was giving him a necklace. It had a pendant made out of white crystal.

"Wear this", she said. "It will come in handy in your time of need."

Keith accepted the necklace robotically, still in shock from Cassandra knowing about his crush on Talia. He would assume that Cassandra saw Keith gaping at Talia, but the thing was that Cassandra didn't see him before at all, so... how did she know?

"You can stay here as long as you want.", Cassandra said, and Keith saw that she was at the door, ready to leave, but then she turned to him with, "I will send someone to fetch you when it's mealtime. Until then, witches won't know you are here, so they won't harass you."

Keith wanted to thank her, but he was still skeptical. "This necklace is not my style. Why would I wear it?"

"Think of it as a charm. It will protect you from bad things."

"Like?" Keith persisted.

Cassandra released a long breath, obviously irritated by Keith's distrust. "It will repel magic attack directed at you. Once."

Keith cocked an eyebrow. "If this is so handy to have, as Alpha Talia's guard, I should give it to her."

"This one is for you. Trust me", Cassandra said with finality.

For a reason he couldn't explain, Keith believed her, but he still had to ask, "Why are you doing this?"

"Because my fate is tied to Alpha Talia's", Cassandra said. "I need you to protect her well."

Keith realized that Cassandra had some expectations of Talia. "Do you think that Alpha Talia will do anything for you after what you did to her mate?"

"What was done can't be fixed. I am paying for my decisions. Don't worry about me and focus on protecting your Alpha. And don't forget to wear..." She pointed at the necklace Keith was holding, and then she left the room.

Keith stared at the closed door while processing Cassandra's words.

He finally got a clue about why he was attracted to a woman that was not his mate. Their fortunes were tied together, and his wolf knew more about it.

But how was Keith supposed to communicate with his wolf?

Wolves are creatures driven by instincts. Did that mean Keith should allow his instincts to take over when he was with Talia? Even in his head, that sounded suicidal because he could see himself getting too close, only for Damon to give him a magnificent death.

Cassandra also said that Keith needed to protect Talia, and that was something he would do anyway.

As for the necklace... It can't hurt to carry it around, can it?

### **Chapter 680 Negotiating with Cornelia**

In Cornelia's room, Cornelia was tidying up her desk under James's watchful eyes that never left her.

Her room was spacious enough to allow for a queen-size bed, a work area with a desk and a chair, a sitting area with a sofa and a coffee table, a comfy-looking chaise under the window, and plenty of space between those to move about.

James observed that Cornelia's room had everything to make it cozy without being cluttered, but the best thing was that it carried the scent of wild berries that were sweet with just a pinch of tartness, James' favorite.

After a day with the witches, they had dinner, and James finally got his chance for some privacy with Cornelia.

Being in her room was like he got a peek into her past, something private; it was special.

The only thing that could make this better would be if she got within the touching distance, and they did the naughty, but James understood that her wearing a t-shirt and shorts when all witches were nearly naked (not that James really looked) was a sign that Cornelia was not ready for that final step.

It was like a knife in his heart. His own mate was not embracing him. Was this how the Moon Goddess punished him because he was a fraud?

Cornelia glanced at James, and her eyes flashed with excitement when their gazes met. Her chocolate-colored skin covered most of the blush that invaded her cheeks, but James was familiar with those subtle changes, which told him that his presence was impacting her, so he still had hope that they will make progress.

Cornelia kept the papers on the desk and moved to sit next to James on the sofa.

"What do you think about this place?" Cornelia asked.

"It smells like you. Sweet and seductive wild berries." He licked his lips and inched toward her. "And I want to eat them all."

James was delighted that Cornelia leaned into him to respond to his kisses, and the way she held onto him was the best thing ever. Too bad that was as far as it went.

James knew that he shouldn't be greedy. This should be good enough, and if he pushes too hard, it might backfire. But he couldn't stop himself from wanting more. Why would the Moon Goddess allow him to cross paths with his mate if he couldn't claim her as his?

He was aware that he didn't feel the bond fully, but that didn't mean his desire for her was not maddening.

"Cora," James called, his breath splashed on her lips. "I want you to do the ritual to boost my wolf."

Cornelia's eyebrows came together in obvious disapproval. "Did you talk to Yasmin?"

He wanted to deny it, but he didn't want to lie. How can he tell her that he had a chat with Yasmin, who already knew about that option and that Cornelia was against it? Yasmin quickly suggested knocking out Cornelia so she won't interfere with the ritual, and Yasmin would boost James' wolf, and then... he was not sure what would be next, but he knew that Yasmin was serious.

James couldn't admit to any of it without getting into trouble, so he dodged answering Cornelia's question by asking, "Will she do the ritual?"

"Not if you ask me."

James exhaled in frustration. He knew that Cornelia didn't approve. There were risks, and she didn't want to put him in danger, but he hated their current situation. "Cora, we are stuck in a stalemate. I don't want to part from you, and I know that you feel the same. Unfortunately, without me feeling the bond, you are reluctant to..."

"How will feeling the bond change things?" Cornelia asked him. "Will that help you deal with your father? Will that give you the strength to protect me? Or will that make you stay here? We could stay here. Your father will never find you."

James' conscience forced him to shake his head. "I would love to stay and forget everything in the human realm, but I can't. If I don't return, my father will use that as a reason to act against the Dark Howlers pack, and the consequences will be unimaginable." Actually, he could imagine the carnage and Alpha Edward not caring about the casualties as long as he could get the power and territory he craved for.

"So, why would you risk going through the ritual if it won't solve the practical problems we are facing?" Cornelia asked.

"It would give me the taste of how it is to feel the bond, and it will assure you that we are soulmates. With that, you won't doubt my sincerity and..."

"Enough, James.", Cornelia interrupted him, her tone more sad than angry. "This is not about me doubting you because I don't. I know that your feelings for me are true, but I also know that you are not ready. Would you ask me to go through the ritual if you knew that it could cripple me?"

She put her hand on his cheek, and he leaned into her palm.

"There are no benefits big enough to justify you getting hurt. I don't want you to get hurt. I won't allow it."

James knew she was right. He couldn't stay with witches forever, so he had to ask, "Will you consider coming with me to the Red Moon pack?"

"What about your father? I assume I won't be welcome as your mate. Do you expect me to hide in the closet, and you will sneak food for me so I don't starve? How long can we keep that going on until someone finds me? We both know that the most practical thing is that we separate. You want to be with me, I want to be with you, and our desires match. However, that doesn't rationalize a decision for any of us to get into serious trouble. What if your father imprisons me? Did you forget the story where witches are used for breeding? Will you be fine if my presence is exposed? How will you protect me?"

James' heart cracked. He hated that he didn't have an Alpha aura, a strong one like Alpha Damon. He would use it to fight off anyone who dared to endanger Cornelia, and he would protect her and keep her safe by his side. But he didn't have that damned aura, and he needed to work with what he had.

"Let's not think about this as all or nothing.", he said with all the seriousness in the world. "There must be a way for us to be together without risking our lives."

"How?" She asked.

James knew that she couldn't stay in the packhouse of the Red Moon pack. If they hide the fact she is his mate, Cornelia will be treated worse than Omega, and if Alpha Edward gets a whiff of Cornelia's identity, she will probably face even worse.

James remembered when Dawn and George offered for Cornelia to stay with them. Was that offer still valid? Maybe they could work with that.

James regretted that George and Dawn were not here with them because he wanted to discuss that option in more detail. Until then... "We will figure out something."