

Alphas Bride 691

### **Chapter 691 Three ceremonies (3) [Bonus chapter]**

Talia and Damon stood in the fountain and faced each other while holding hands.

The water reached their knees, and neither of them paid attention to the chill that enveloped the lower parts of their legs.

'Are you sure you want to do this?', Damon asked Talia through their private mind-link.

'Yes. You?'

'Absolutely.'

Talia was confused. 'Then... Why did you ask me if I'm sure?'

'Because you are nervous.'

Talia closed her eyes and took a deep breath before responding, 'I am fine now.' Actually, she just closed off her emotions so that Damon couldn't sense them.

Her nerves were acting out because Evanora's request for a break was strange, and then Yasmin sneaked in a spell for James and Cornelia when the ceremony was supposed to be just a blessing, and Talia and Damon had a history of things going wrong... so yes, she was nervous.

What was to say that the witches won't try something shady to control them or imprison them? What if they want to keep Damon as a sex slave? Before her temper flared, Talia pushed away those thoughts. Since when was she so suspicious and paranoid? Yasmin wouldn't allow for any foul play, but... can she trust them?

Talia glanced at Evanora who stood next to the fountain. Yasmin was there, on Evanora's left, and five more witches stood behind the mother-daughter duo, all of them getting ready to start the third ceremony for the evening.

Talia hoped that she didn't misinterpret Evanora's firm gaze and that it meant confidence and not stubbornness or resolve to do something bad.

Next to the seven witches who were assigned to guide this ceremony, Axel was standing with Keith and Cassandra, and many other witches who seemed eager to get close to Keith.

Damon gave Talia's hands a squeeze, reminding her that he was there.

"Eyes on me, kitten."

Talia smiled at the silly Alpha. Was he sulking because she looked at someone else?

Talia's eyes widened in anticipation when Evanora started chanting, and Talia saw the high-priestess making complex signs with her hands. A few seconds later, Yasmin joined in, and then the other witches.

It started!

Talia quickly turned her full attention to Damon because she didn't want to miss a single change in him.

The energies from the fountain will affect them, and Talia wondered if Damon's powers will manifest. Surely, he got an ability after Talia marked him (more than once!). Damon didn't mention his non-existing powers, but Talia saw him pouting while observing members of the Midnight Guardians pack.

With her peripheral vision, Talia could see the silver flames of the fountain dancing wildly, and the fact that Damon's right side was shining brighter told her that the flames increased. She wanted to see what was going on around them, but at the same time, she was unable to look away from her handsome mate.

Damon could disarm her with a look, a smile, a word, a gesture... and even if he stood completely still, his scent was intoxicating. Everything about him was made to get her attention.

Talia wondered if the chants from witches became background noise because something magical was happening, or because Damon overtook her senses (it wouldn't be the first time).

Damon looked at his adorable kitten whose big, honeyed eyes full of love were directed at him and the admiration he saw in there made him feel accomplished like he discovered a planet or conquered an army of immoral enemies. She had the power to stir his soul, and his wolf, and he was ready to follow her anywhere; across the seas, to the edge of the world, or into a fountain in the realm where witches rule.

The truth was that Damon was not eager to go through this ceremony where he would be exposed to magic. His previous experiences taught him that nothing good happens when someone casts a spell on him. But he couldn't deny anything to Talia, not when he was so excited about a thing they were about to do together. This ceremony was important to her, and he didn't want to be the sourpuss. However, he was eager to be done with this and confirm that both Talia and he will end this evening without any unpleasant effects.

The first thing Damon noticed was that Talia's eyes started shimmering in silver, and the golden tattoos on her skin started lighting up, giving Talia an appearance of a Goddess. His Goddess.

Talia inhaled deeply and smiled at the sensation of energy that tickled her toes and climbed up her calves, thighs... making her feel weightless like physical constraints were voided. It was ethereal.

Were the golden designs on her body lighting up? Probably.

She wished for a big mirror so that she can see this awe-inspiring spectacle. She regretted not getting her phone so that someone records this, and she would watch it later. It would be a wonderful memory of her and Damon glowing in the fountain while magic envelops them.

Talia's brows came together when she realized that Damon was not glowing. It was the opposite; his golden tattoos turned darker.

Based on the two previous ceremonies, the silvery light was supposed to envelop both of them, yet the only light she saw on Damon was the one reflecting from her.

Yasmin's voice grew weaker as she watched the unexpected scene that everyone else was seeing.

The flames of the fountain increased, and the light reflected on the surface of the water, and it started traveling toward Talia and Damon... and then things took a turn no one could predict.

As the silvery ripples reached the couple that stood in the water, they all converged toward Talia, and Damon stood in the dark water.

No, he didn't stand in the darkness, he was the darkness like the light refused to go to him. Yasmin knew a lot about blessing rituals and she never heard anything like this.

Yasmin felt a smack on her shoulder, and she looked there to see Evanora glaring at her. Evanora's hands didn't stop moving.

Yasmin snapped to her senses. She had no idea what was going on, but stopping the ceremony halfway was never good. She needed to finish this. Besides, all chants and hand symbols were for energies to bless the couple, and that can't be bad.

As the ceremony progressed, Talia's body started glowing.

So far, light from Amelia and Liam, and Cornelia and James, morphed to create a blinding sphere, yet with Talia and Damon, only Talia was glowing while Damon was like a manifestation of darkness that swallowed Talia's light, making them appear like he was holding hands with a half-sphere.

"What is going on?", Keith asked no one in particular. He was clueless about magic, but he could feel the witches stirring with anxiety and that told him that something was wrong.

Axel was also there, looking at Yasmin with concern obvious on his face, and Axel's muscles tensed like he was about to rush in there and stop the ceremony. But Evanora was pale again and Yasmin was serious and that told him how it was important to continue.

#### **Chapter 692 Three ceremonies (4)**

The chants from witches were intensifying as the ceremony proceeded and it lasted longer than the previous two, yet it showed no signs of stopping.

Keith's anxiety shoot through the roof when he saw Damon standing in front of a half-sphere of light; the light was cut off abruptly before it reached Damon like an invisible shield that didn't allow Damon to be affected by Talia's brilliance.

The scene reminded Keith of a transparent ball with a divider halfway; one half was filled with a shiny substance, while the other one was left empty.

What made this more unusual was that the light from Talia didn't spill on Damon at all, and it actually stopped in thin air, like there is an obstacle between them. Damon's golden markings were now completely black, a stark contrast to Talia who became the light.

Keith panicked. Was Talia alright? The silvery light was so much stronger than what Keith saw during the previous two ceremonies. What if Talia was suffering in there? Why was no one helping!?

Witches stirred with amazement as Talia's light output increased. It was blinding.

Witches spent a lot of time communicating with nature and researching spells, and they never saw anything like it!

How could Talia channel the energies of the fountain to such a degree? Wasn't she a she-wolf? Even if Talia was from the Midnight Guardians pack, what was happening right there transcended what was possible no matter how much in tune with nature Talia was.

Since the fountain regained its flames, the witches performed numerous rituals there, and Evanora led most of them, but the high-priestess couldn't stimulate forces of nature to perform such a magnificent display of might. Witches were confident that they were witnessing something monumental. Was Talia secretly a witch and their next high-priestess?

And what was going on with Damon? All creatures would embrace the energies of nature, and even if he couldn't use the excess, it would go through him, yet Damon stood there, untouched by the visible energy that was stirring around him. It made witches curious and wary because that was not normal.

The scene was strange and captivating, but Keith couldn't immerse himself in the view because he worried about how this will end.

With no one explaining what was going on, Keith's mind started producing various scenarios, one worse than the other.

This was beyond just Damon being hurt. What if Talia gets hurt also? What will happen to Keith if Talia gets harmed (again!) on his watch? What if both Damon and Talia end up harmed beyond fixing? How was Keith supposed to return to the Dark Howlers pack? And what will happen to the pack without its Alphas?

Keith saw Cassandra looking at the fountain with excitement and reality hit him.

For the last two days, Keith spent most of the time with Cassandra, Calla, and other healers from the Midnight Guardians pack. He was comfortable with them because they didn't look like they were thinking of eating him up, and Keith forgot that Cassandra was the one who nearly killed Damon. Also, because of Cassandra Damon couldn't feel his mate bond and Talia suffered humiliation. Did Cassandra do something again?

The more Keith thought about this, the more he realized that Cassandra's crimes were grave.

"This is because of you!", Keith shouted at the Oracle. "Your dark magic affected my Alpha and who knows what will happen next?"

Cassandra shook her head fervently. "No, no. The dark magic from his body is gone.", she was speaking desperately in front of Keith's fury, but even she was not convinced in her words. The truth was that the ritual which dispelled the dark magic was way beyond Cassandra's level, but she heard witches saying how Cornelia reported that the ritual was successful and that Damon's energies were clean.

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Talia was high on the energy that poured into her like it had no intention to stop.

She could feel every cell of her body and see every crack on the stones that formed the edge of the fountain, and then there were people, animals, heartbeats, and the tiniest movements... it was all like under a magnifying glass for her to see. The gentle sensation was calming, soothing, welcoming... like

the whole world was hers and she could end it with a thought, and mortal creatures would gladly accept any fate she chose for them.

The omnipotence was intoxicating and it stirred Talia to get lost in that power, but Talia had no intention of looking further than the man in front of her.

She focused on Damon, and she would think that he was gone if she was not holding onto his hands.

No matter how much she focused on the space in front of her, there was nothing. Like he was not there.

'Damon?', she called through their private mind link. 'Damon!?', this call came with more urgency when he didn't respond.

Talia wanted to move but her body refused to obey her command. It was like her consciousness spilled outside the confinement of her fleshy vessel, and it gave her the ability to be aware of everything in the universe, everything except for the one man she wanted to see.

Why was only a blob of impenetrable darkness where Damon was supposed to be?

'He is there', Liseli spoke in Talia's mind. 'I can feel the bond. Mate didn't leave.'

That didn't pacify Talia because she wanted to see him and confirm that things were fine. The fear of losing him, or him forgetting about her was real and... This was supposed to be a blessing ceremony, where did it go wrong?

Talia cursed internally. This was about Damon and her and she should have known that something will go wrong.

Talia groaned as she fought mightily to regain her senses. She was confident that she was holding his hands, so he was definitely there, but what if he was suffering? A horrid image flashed in her mind, what if only his hands were there!?

'Liseli, help me!', Talia shouted in her mind.

'First, you need to calm down', Liseli responded. Talia was a mess and it affected Liseli as well.

'OK. OK. I am calm.', Talia said.

'You are not. Take a moment or two. When you are ready, you need to push.'

Talia was confused. What the heck was that supposed to mean? 'What should I push?'

'The energy that seeped into you from the fountain. Keep what you need and push the rest away. Your current state is because of extra energy. Get rid of it and you will be back to normal.'

'How do I do that?', Talia asked, her voice much calmer now.

'Feel the energies around you, pull them inwardly, in the pit of your stomach, and then blast it away.', Liseli explained, and then she started guiding Talia, 'That's it. You are doing good. A bit more... more... almost...'

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The atmosphere around the fountain was tense.

Axel and Keith were close to snapping as their eyes darted from the chanting witches to the oddly half-glowing couple in the fountain.

Evanora was pale as a sheet of paper, and the five witches behind her were sweating as well. The only one looking fine was Yasmin, but her facial features were arranged in a frown of concern.

### **Chapter 693 Three ceremonies (5)**

Gasps and murmurs were heard among witches when the light around Talia flickered, dimmed, and then it exploded in all directions; all directions except for where Damon was standing. He was acting like a shield that prevented the light energy from advancing. That went beyond sorcery.

The light spilled over the witches like a tidal wave and their panicked expressions became elated when they felt the energy seeping into them. It was like a gentle caress of a mother, an embrace that came with safety and unconditional acceptance... euphoric, definitely much better than anything Evanora produced so far!

"Mom!", Yasmin shouted and reached to hold Evanora who was falling on the ground like a ragdoll.

With one thought from Yasmin, Evanora's falling trajectory changed, and the high priestess fell on Yasmin.

Yasmin immediately checked her mother's breathing, and then she turned toward the man who was right next to her. She gave Axel a reassuring smile. "Can you help me take mom to her room? She is exhausted and needs rest."

Axel nodded and his eyes roamed over five witches who were also not looking good and then he turned to the fountain to see what was going on with Talia and Damon. He had no intention of leaving before assuring that Talia and Damon were fine.

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"Da... Dam... Damon...", Talia's voice drifted toward Damon, her every call sounded clearer than the previous one.

Damon saw Talia's silvery eyes full of concern directed at him. Why did she look at him like something really bad happened?

"Yes, kitten?", Damon responded while looking around.

He saw Evanora's limp form in Axel's arms, and most of the audience was staring at Talia and him.

Damon tched in annoyance. Why did Evanora say that she was fine if she couldn't perform the ceremony?

"Woah!", Damon exclaimed when Talia threw herself at him.

Talia's hug was so tight that her fragile-looking arms were squeezing the air out of his lungs.

Damon wondered if Talia was so upset because the ceremony failed. Well, she was looking forward to it. Damon regretted agreeing to this nonsense. It would be better if he refused right away, then Talia wouldn't build up hopes and she wouldn't plunge into this disappointment. But he couldn't allow negativity to take over because his clingy mate needed comforting.

"Don't worry, kitten", Damon said. "We will do the ceremony some other time." Maybe never.

Talia lifted her head to look at him. "I was so worried. I thought I lost you."

Damon was utterly confused. "Lost me? What are you talking about? I am right here."

He would reprimand her for those ominous words, but he could sense that her anxiety was genuine, so he hugged her tightly. The lack of clothes allowed for a lot of skin-to-skin contact, and he used the sparks of their bond to assure Talia that everything was alright. One ceremony more or less won't change a thing between them.

Talia realized that something was off with Damon. How can he be so calm after this near-fiasco?

"Damon?", she called. "Is something wrong with you? Are you in pain? How much do you remember?"

The possibility of him losing memories was making her insides tighten, but he was holding her, and he addressed her by that cute nickname only he used so he knew who she was. Hopefully.

"What is there to remember? The ceremony started and I saw your eyes glowing", and they were still glowing, but the occasionally flickering told him that it was wearing off. "It barely started, and then I heard you call my name."

He turned to frown at the unconscious Evanora. "The old hag overestimated herself." And because of that Talia was sad now.

Talia put her hand on his cheek so that he turns his head to look at her. "Really? Nothing else?"

"What else is there?"

"Damon", Talia's voice was full of concern. "We had a ceremony. At least a few minutes long." She was not really sure how long it lasted, but her being unable to reach Damon felt like an eternity. "The ceremony started, and your golden designs turned black and..." Talia's voice trailed. The golden-then-black designs on his body were completely gone now. His skin was clean like he came out of a shower. Where did the designs go?

She looked at herself to see that golden designs were still there on her, so whatever happened it was on Damon only. Was he really OK?

"Minutes?", Damon asked while wondering if she got it wrongly, and then he asked his wolf. 'What do you think?'

'I agree with you, boy', Sapa responded. 'It was no more than a second.'

"It was maybe a second or two, not more.", Damon confirmed to Talia.

"The ceremony can mess with your perception of time", Yasmin said, making both Talia and Damon look at her. "But Talia is right about the duration. Are you two alright? Do you need our healers to check on you?"

Damon frowned. "Why wouldn't we be alright?" He didn't want any witch to get a chance of doing more mumbo-jumbo on him or on Talia.

Did Yasmin confirm that he lost a few minutes? Who knew what else he lost? All this sounded creepily strange and he wanted to talk with Talia and calm her down. The way her fingers dug into his back told him that she was needy to confirm they were together and fine, and he couldn't do much comforting in front of all this audience. He wanted to leave, or maybe it was easier to make all those witches scam.

Yasmin raised her hands, palms toward Damon, indicating to him to tone down his hostility. "If you feel fine, we can check on you tomorrow. I was asking because, during the ceremony, Talia was glowing like she was the source of magic, while you acted as a repellent for energies."

Damon's frown deepened. Did Yasmin call him a repellent? Why did that remind him of those smelly sticks against mosquitoes?

He turned to look at Talia. "Are you OK?"

Talia nodded in his chest, and she opened up completely to let him feel her emotions. He smiled helplessly when he sensed that her anxiety was replaced by relief with every heartbeat. She was finding comfort in his proximity and it warmed his heart.

'Can we go for a run?', Talia's voice sounded in Damon's head.

'Absolutely!', Damon responded enthusiastically. Letting go of negativity with a run sounded like an excellent idea. Of course, they could do it by indulging in carnal pleasures also, but he would rather initiate that activity when both were in a good mood.

Talia turned to see Axel, Yasmin, Keith, and other witches, all looking at them. "We will go for a run now."

Silvery light flickered with Talia in its center, enveloping both Damon and her, and a few seconds later, two wolves leaped from the fountain, leaving a few silvery fabrics to float on the surface of the water.

Witches screamed and moved away because two wolves were shaking their bodies vigorously, making the cold droplets fly in every direction.

Talia and Damon paused to look at each other and no one said a word when the black wolf rubbed his head on the neck of the light-gray wolf whose fur was nearly white, and it shone in silvery light under the moonlight.

Talia smiled at the affectionate Alpha, but she was in her wolf form and her smile looked more like exposing fangs threateningly, so the witches took another step away from them.

Yasmin watched as two majestic wolves dashed out of the garden and she pursed her lips.

"What are you thinking about?", Axel asked Yasmin.



"Nothing, nothing."

Yasmin needed time to think about the events before sharing her observations. But everyone saw that not a speck of light reached Damon during the ceremony, yet now Talia's light enveloped him intimately. Why didn't he repel Talia's energies? Ah, how could Yasmin get more information?

Yasmin realized that she will need to think about this some other time. Axel was still holding unconscious Evanora, but first, Yasmin turned to speak to the other witches. "We had three unique ceremonies tonight. Remember them all as they are proof that each of us is different and mother nature treats us as such. Continue the feast in a good mood as we have a lot to celebrate!"

After a second of stirring hesitantly, witches cheered, and the crowd moved back to the tables where food and drinks waited for them.

### **Chapter 694 After the ceremonies**

In Evanora's room...

Axel lowered Evanora on her bed and then he turned to Yasmin.

"Are you alright?", he asked while his anxious eyes roamed her face and she saw him glancing at her stomach also.

Yasmin smiled helplessly at her Alpha. He was holding it together in front of everyone, but now that it was only them, he allowed his insecurities to show.

"I am fine, and the babies are fine.", Yasmin assured him before looking at Evanora with a small frown. "Now that mom is like this, I don't think we can have the ceremony to bless our babies."

Axel didn't care much about that ceremony. As long as the babies were fine, they can have the ceremony later. But he knew that Yasmin was looking forward to THIS ceremony and if he says how it's not a big deal, her temper might flare. Pregnancy made her quite irritable, and he knew that she shouldn't be provoked.

Yasmin's expression turned solemn, and she placed her hands over her belly.

"Is there something wrong with our pups?", Axel asked breathily. Her expression didn't look good. Did she overdo with that ceremony nonsense? Ah, he told her to stay out of it, but Yasmin insisted on helping her mother.

Yasmin raised her gaze to meet Axel's honeyed eyes that looked at her anxiously.

"I think they've grown.", she said.

His eyes widened. "Grown? Are you sure?"

He moved to look at her from the side, and he was not sure if her stomach was showing now or if his imagination made him see a bump there.

Yasmin was trying to make sense of it. For weeks (in the Midnight Guardians pack) she worried because she couldn't feel the babies, yet healers there assured her that everything was fine. And now, she could definitely feel that something changed, as the energies in her abdomen were circulating in a more

spherical way than before. But how was that possible? Was it because of the ceremony? Did the energies from the fountain stimulate the development of her babies?

"I will get the healers to check in the morning.", Yasmin said. She was also planning to get Talia to channel more of those silvery energies into Yasmin so that she can confirm her theory.

"Let's check now."

Yasmin refused. "Everyone is at the feast, eating and drinking. Healers are probably drunk and can't do a reliable checkup." And Talia went on a run with Damon. They looked beautiful as two majestic wolves, and Yasmin regretted that she couldn't shapeshift.

Yasmin moved to stand in front of Axel and her arms snaked around his neck. "I sense that our babies are not in danger. I think they are eager to meet us."

Axel hugged her tightly, careful not to squeeze her too tightly. This was supposed to be a celebratory feast with ceremonies, yet it turned into one stress after another. But they were fine, and Yasmin sensed a positive development with their pups, and he was happy.

Axel took a deep breath, filling his system with her addictive scent of Jasmine which changed slightly due to the pregnancy. They say that the first sign of a she-wolf carrying pups was the change in her scent, and Axel was slightly disappointed in his sense of smell because Talia realized that Yasmin was pregnant before he did.

Yasmin and Axel held each other, and they could sense their bodies heating as the amount of skin-to-skin contact reminded them that they were both wearing only cloths below the waist to cover their private areas.

Axel enjoyed the feeling of her breasts pressing on his chest, and he couldn't believe how much the sensational sparks of their bond impacted him.

For years, Axel traveled with the hope to find his mate. He thought of a mate as a person who will allow him to awaken his powers so that he becomes eligible for the position of the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack. And here she was, right in front of him, nearly naked, soft, and beautiful. He was not the Alpha, but it didn't matter because his mate was a fantastic witch who completed him.

Axel's eyebrows shoot up when he saw in his mind an image of Yasmin on her knees with his cock in her mouth. Right there... on that carpet... next to Evanora's bed.

"Love?", Axel called, his voice was hoarse already because he knew that images in his mind were part of his ability to see the future. Was that Yasmin's future or his? It didn't matter.

"Do you have something on your mind?", he asked.

Yasmin looked up at him and he recognized that mischievous glint in her eyes. "I want to please my mate, but there is a problem..."

"A problem?" Whatever it was, he would take care of it in record time. Should he stuff Evanora in the closet? Or kick her out to the balcony?

Yasmin nodded. "I don't think I have enough patience for us to reach our room."

Axel's eyes darted toward unconscious Evanora and his attention was back on Yasmin when he picked up the scent of her arousal.

Yasmin cocked an eyebrow at Axel. "Why are you looking at my mother? She is unconscious. She can't see or hear us."

Yasmin's pregnancy came with a side-effect of increased sexual drive and Axel loved it!

Yasmin was never a timid witch, and Axel admired her daring attitude, especially when it came to picking a location for their carnal pleasures. His favorites so far were the restroom by the cafeteria, the storage closet on the second level of the healing center, and the rooftop terrace of the main house.

Axel licked his lips slowly as he realized that Yasmin didn't care about her mother who was unconscious only a few steps away. Did he care? Not really.

The danger of getting caught while doing the naughty turned them on.

"I can be quiet.", he said.

Yasmin smirked and got down on her knees in slow motion. She flicked the fabric that was covering his erection and Axel released a barely audible 'Ah' when she took him into her mouth. The future he saw was coming true and he knew that next they will move to the brown sofa that was five steps to his right, and it will be wonderful.

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Liseli and Sapa ran through the scarce forest in the witches' realm.

Talia tried to focus on the sensation of the wind running through her fur, and the dirt under her paws, but it was hard to enjoy this run considering what happened earlier that evening.

'You need to stop worrying', Liseli growled at Talia.

'Sorry. I can't help it', Talia responded.

Normally, when running in wolf form, Liseli would take the lead while Talia stayed awake to enjoy the feeling of freedom until Sapa and Liseli requested privacy. But now Talia was thinking about the odd things from the ceremony and her concern spilled on Liseli.

'Sapa is fine', Liseli said before adding, 'And Damon is fine as well. They are not aware of what happened, and we won't get any answers until we talk to Evanora. Maybe there is nothing wrong with mate. It could be related to me, or the fountain, or maybe their chants were not strong enough for an Alpha who has an ancient wolf like Sapa. So many things could be the cause of what happened and there is a chance we never get answers. Are you going to worry and spoil our whole night?'

Talia agreed with this. If anyone could give them some clues to what happened, it will be the high priestess. And they won't be able to talk with her until the next day, possibly longer, depending on Evanora's condition.

'Sorry for spoiling your fun. I will retreat now and...'

'I know, I know...' Liseli interrupted Talia. 'If anything suspicious happens with Sapa or Damon, I will let you know.'

'Thanks, Lis', Talia said before retracting at the back of Liseli's mind so that the two wolves can have privacy.

'Finally alone?', Sapa's voice sounded in Liseli's mind.

'How do you know?'

'The worry from you is gone.' He reminded her that he can sense her emotions.

Liseli snorted. Did he think she was not worried? Of course, she was! Just as Talia was afraid of losing Damon, Liseli was terrified of anything going wrong with Sapa. However, Sapa and Liseli lost too much time, and overthinking what-ifs was a waste of the perfect night that she could spend with her mate.

Liseli nipped Sapa's ear and he looked at her in confusion.

They were having a moment, and she bit him!

'Catch me if you can!', she exclaimed and ran like the wind.

It took Sapa a moment to realize that Liseli was playful.

"AWOOOOO!"

Sapa's howl shook the surroundings and then he ran after her. He loved a good chase!

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### **Chapter 695 Jay and Cora (5)**

Sun was rising to paint the sky with magnificent oranges and pinks, the increasing light seeped into Cornelia's room where two unmoving bodies laid on the bed.

James was on his side and observing his chocolate-colored Goddess. Cornelia. Cora. His mate. She was the definition of beauty.

The thin blanket covered them waist-down, and he could see her shoulders, breasts, and stomach. Every inch of her was perfect.

The golden designs smeared due to their repeated lovemaking, and they all blended into Cornelia's melanin-rich skin, giving her a golden hue that looked natural.

James didn't sleep last night. He was elated and excited, and now he was worried.

He had no regrets, but he was high after the ceremony, and he felt the bond and the pull, and his wolf was messing with his mind, and they did it. They made love, many times. And he marked her and she was his.

There shouldn't be problems, but James was aware that the craze from last night subsided.

He could feel the bond between them now, the delicious sparks prickled his skin wherever they touched, and he definitely wanted to have sex with Cornelia more. However, his mind was clear, and he feared that Cornelia will be clearheaded also and she might regret what they did last night.

James chided himself for not holding back at least a little bit. He was acting like a savage, going at it until Cornelia barely held her eyes open. James got a wet towel and wiped her body, and she barely moved. He really was a beast. What if she hates him now?

Cornelia stirred in her sleep and James' anxiety shoot through the roof. Will she wake up now? What if she tells him to scram? He didn't want to leave her, he couldn't. It would kill him.

He held his breath when he realized that her eyelids were shaking.

And there it was... she opened her eyes slowly and blinked a few times and then her deep brown eyes settled on him.

Mental images from last night flashed in Cornelia's mind, reminding her of what transpired in that room between James and her, explaining their naked bodies and the soreness in her midsection.

The effect of the last night's ceremony wore off, but Cornelia could feel that the connection between her and James solidified. She wondered if he somehow matured overnight, or if she was imagining it.

Cornelia forced herself not to look away. What was done was done and she couldn't take it back, and even if she could, she wouldn't. It was natural to be with a soulmate and she didn't want him to think that she felt bad about the sex, or about the marking, or about this intimacy that was new, because none of that was forced.

From the moment she felt the pull, Cornelia wanted to be with James, and now that he marked her, he confirmed that he wanted the same. It was not just empty words and promises, it was marking, and that was forever. The person she loved, loved her back, and she was happy. It was that simple, and she didn't want to complicate things.

James' insides jolted when her lips lifted into a smile. Was she smiling at him? Or maybe she just had a good dream and once she remembers what happened she will slap him?

"Good morning, Jay", she said lazily and moved closer to him.

James wanted to pinch himself. It's not that Cornelia came closer to snuggle, but she hugged him and buried her face in his chest!

Was he dreaming?

But if that was a dream, where did all that happiness come from? Was it possible that those were her emotions, and he could sense them through their strengthened mate bond?

James' arms wrapped around Cornelia, and he buried his face into her hair, taking deep breaths to fill his system with the sweet scent of berries; each inhale was a confirmation that this was real, it was happening, Cornelia was awake, and she was not cursing him or pushing him away!

"How are you feeling, Cora?", he asked cautiously.

"Are you asking about my neck?"

"I am asking about all of you. Are you in pain? Is there any discomfort? Do you want me to bring some food or...?"

"Just hold me, Jay", she interrupted whatever he was about to ask next.

"Cora?", he didn't want to bring up the topic which plagued his mind while she was sleeping, but he had to get it out there. "Are you blaming me for what I did last night?" He wanted to make sure that she won't hate him for marking her.

Cornelia lifted her head to look at him. "What YOU did? How much I remember, I was a willing participant." James went to the length of cutting his hand on a glass so that he snaps out of his lustful daze, and then he asked for her permission. "Why would I blame you?"

James' heart cracked as it was unable to contain all the emotions that swelled within him. Cornelia's eyes were full of understanding and love, and no one ever looked at him that way. The acceptance and approval were things he craved for as a child, and he labeled them as not important while he was growing up, but now that he was getting those from his mate, he had to admit that they were important. They were everything.

James swallowed the pinch that formed in the back of his throat. He won't cry. "Don't worry about it. I was just overthinking things."

"I love your mind, James", Cornelia said, and the fact that she used his full name meant that she was serious. "But please, don't overthink it in the direction where I think badly of you. You are my other half and whatever I feel toward you, I feel towards myself as well. And I love myself."

"Does that mean you love me?"

Cornelia's eyes shifted uncomfortably. She told him last night that she loved him, more than once, and that was in the throes of passion, and now it was embarrassing.

"I told you already", she said.

"Say it again, Cora", James insisted.

Cornelia puffed her cheeks in protest. "Why don't you say it?"

"I love you, Cora. You are my most important person now, and you always will be", James said without missing a beat.

"I... I...", she inhaled forcibly. "Feel the same."

James couldn't believe this. "Why are you not saying it? Are you shy now? After everything we did last night?"

Cornelia looked at him stubbornly. "It doesn't matter what we did last night. It was the first time for me to do such things, so please don't tease me or take it lightly."

She didn't say more than that, but James heard the rest of her words that were left unspoken. It was not the first time for him. He wanted to assure her that it was equally important to him, maybe more, but

going that way could backfire, and he needed to tread carefully. He didn't want to spoil this morning; not now when he confirmed that she didn't blame him for what happened last night. She accepted that he claimed her and marked her, and that meant she accepted him as her mate.

### **Chapter 696 Jay and Cora (6)**

James kissed Cornelia softly, and he loved that she responded not only with her lips but by the way her body leaned into his.

His cock lurched painfully to remind him that they were awake and waiting, but James wanted to say a few things before things turned heated.

"Last night was fantastic. I have no intention of taking it lightly. If there is Heaven, I was in it, and it was thanks to you. There are so many things I want to do with you, Cora, and we have our lifetimes to do it. Our journey together only started so there is no need to rush, but let's not drag things either because there are certain points we need to address before we can relax." James made a dramatic pause before continuing. "You are the best thing that happened to me, Cora. I am ecstatic that you accepted me as your mate. I promise to treat you well. You won't regret this."

He was thinking about them while she was sleeping, and he had to get it out of his system. He didn't want to allow for the possibility of Cornelia misunderstanding him and putting a distance between them.

Cornelia was looking at James with her eyes open wide. She didn't expect this confession, and James was not done talking.

"I can't stay here, not now. I hope you will come with me to the Red Moon pack because I can't imagine being away from you. I will do everything in my power to keep you safe and by the time we need to go there, I will have a plan for how I will accomplish that. The only thing I need to know is that you are willing to take this risk for me. For us."

Cornelia released a long breath. He was serious and the topic was serious, but she was having difficulty focusing because they were naked in bed, and she could feel his erection on her stomach.

How could he talk so steadily while he was aroused?

Cornelia wanted to assure him that they were on the same page. She could see his insecurity and it was killing her from the inside because she caused it.

"I don't want us to be apart either. However, putting ourselves in a dangerous situation because of our feelings is not justified. Let's assume we find a way for your people to not notice my presence or changes in your behavior when you start disappearing so that you can be with me. No matter how skilled we are or what tricks we use, eventually, someone will notice. Then what?"

He knew that Cornelia had a point. So far, James spent his time studying and training, and if he suddenly starts going somewhere, people will notice. However, his mentor (aka George) was there, and James already planned to use George for openings to spend time with Cornelia. And also... "This won't last longer than two years." His eighteenth birthday was a hard stop. "Before that, we will live somewhere else, wherever you want. I don't plan for us to stay in the Red Moon pack long, but bailing out now is not an option."

Cornelia nodded in understanding. James told her that if he doesn't return home soon, his father will use that against Damon and there was a big chance for a war to start.

"So, what's your plan?", Cornelia asked.

"I'm still thinking about it.", James admitted. Waiting for his eighteenth birthday in the Red Moon pack would be suicidal. He needed to make his exit before that. "As a last resort, I could stage my death in a way that won't implicate others. But I hope to find a more elegant solution."

There was also the scenario of George issuing an Alpha challenge to Alpha Edward, and James had confidence that would end with Alpha Edward's loss. However, that whole play was outside of James' control and even if it happens, no one could predict what members of the Red Moon pack would do without their Alpha, but one thing was certain: it would be chaotic.

"If you need my help, I'm available.", Cornelia said, surprising him with this offer. "How much I understood, your kind is not aware of witches and magic. Maybe I can do something to make your disappearance more believable."

James didn't want to implicate her into his messy life. It was his mess and he wanted to deal with it. "I will keep that in mind."

"I am serious", Cornelia said sternly. Did he think she wouldn't notice he was brushing her off? "We are mates, two halves of a whole, and that whole means good and bad things. Don't keep me out. If I'm facing a problem, would it be OK if I exclude you?"

James smiled at her foolishly. She was serious. Seriously hot and he wanted to devour her.

"I won't exclude you, Cora", James said while pushing her on her back with his body.

He hovered above her, his deep blue eyes staring into her brown ones as he spoke, "Going forward, you will always know exactly where I am and what I'm up to. I can't plan for your assistance because I'm not aware of the extent of what you can do, so I will rely on you to volunteer your services when applicable and I will be happy to accept your help as long as it doesn't put you in danger. Is that acceptable?"

"Yes", she responded happily.

James' eyes moved to the left side of her neck and he smiled at the sight of his mark that was forming there. It looked like a bruise, but he knew that in a few days, it will be a unique pattern to symbolize that Cornelia was his.

"You are wearing my mark now, Cora", he said. His voice was deeper by an octave and it made Cornelia feel butterflies in her stomach that went crazy when his eyes locked on hers with an intensity that left her breathless.

"You are mine", he growled.

"Yours", she confirmed.

James smirked in approval and moved to kiss the spot where his mark was forming. He enjoyed the way Cornelia's body trembled under him.



James heard stories about how the mark is a sensitive spot, almost like an erogenous zone if touched by a mate.

Curious about the effects of his mark, he licked her there, and Cornelia's arms snapped around his torso as a hearty moan escaped her lips. His cock lurched painfully. Damn, he was about to blow! But not yet. While Cornelia slept, James was thinking about the things he wanted to do to her, and now that she was awake and clinging to him, James had no intention of keeping his hands (and the rest of his body) to himself.

James trailed kisses as he moved down her body. Collarbones, and then he kissed each of her breasts and between them, another kiss landed on her navel, and another above her neatly trimmed intimate bush, and then he spread her legs wide as far as they go, and he stared into her glistening pussy.

James took a deep breath, savoring the scent of wild berries that intensified due to her arousal.

"James...", Cornelia called breathily while clutching his hand nervously.

"Let me taste you, Cora", James said, his words splashed against her tender flesh.

### **Chapter 697 The breakfast feast**

James stared at Cornelia's intimate bush as possessed while spreading her glistening folds with his fingers to expose her pleasure button.

He touched her there plenty of times last night, but this was the first time for him to get so close. He really wanted to lick her there.

James raised his gaze to meet Cornelia's. "I was dreaming about this while you were sleeping."

She was staring at him without blinking, and the fact that she didn't object, told him that he didn't need to persuade her further.

James didn't break the eye contact as he lowered his face into her, and he loved seeing her breasts jiggling when she jolted at the same time when his tongue landed on her clit.

"Mmm...", he hummed while licking her. She tasted fantastic! It was sweet with a touch of tartness just like wild berries, and he wanted to drown in those juices.

Cornelia's body was twitching uncontrollably, so James' arms moved under her thighs and he gripped her hips to hold her in place while burying his face into her.

He wondered if he will know how to do this right, but her moans told him he was doing fine. Better than fine.

Cornelia fisted the bedsheets and gasped for air, unsure how to deal with this sudden invasion on her pleasure centers. The room was spinning, and she was biting her lower lip harshly to suppress her sounds.

"Let me hear you, Cora", James spoke against her flesh. When she didn't obey, he lifted his head to look at her. "Say my name. Say that you are mine. Say that you are fucking mine! I need to hear it. Let the whole world hear that you are mine!"

"Yours... just yours...", she rasped.

He hummed in approval and then his lips latched around her clit, and he sucked on it while his tongue flicked it in inexplicable ways and Cornelia dissolved in a mass of moans, sobs, and cries, and there was James' name in there somewhere.

James groaned and continued his ministrations as her body spasmed in ecstasy. It was early in the morning, the day was still young, and they had their lifetimes ahead of them. James had no intention of wasting a single minute of it. He planned to eat her up, and then he will fuck her thoroughly, they will clean themselves up, and then the cycle will repeat.

...

After Liseli and Sapa returned from the run, Talia and Damon went to their room and made love and woke up energized for more lovemaking before breakfast. Nothing was out of place, and it made Talia wonder if she was exaggerating the whole not-able-to-feel-Damon incident due to the fear of losing him that was settled into her bones.

The sun was rising when Talia and Damon left their room in search of food.

Talia had no problem being nude in front of Damon, but once they determined it was time to head out she was happy to wear a t-shirt and shorts. Also, her mother's necklace was now tucked out of sight, under the t-shirt.

Seeing that Talia was making sure the necklace didn't show, Damon said, "I thought you wanted to ask witches if they can help you unlock the message in that necklace."

Talia puffed her cheeks. "That was the plan but now... I'm not sure that's a good idea."

"Why?", Damon asked. They talked about it. The necklace was magical, and witches were experts in magical items.

"What if they want to keep it? What if they ruin it? We don't even know if there is any message inside. It's the only thing my mother left me."

"It's OK", Damon assured her. "Follow your gut feeling. Even if you don't show them the necklace now, you can do it some other time."

Talia smiled at Damon gratefully. His words calmed her down.

Last night, Talia left the necklace in the room, because it was standing out on Talia's (almost) naked body. Damon suggested that Talia leaves the necklace on due to the possibility of the ceremony triggering any message that Talia's mother left behind in that piece of jewelry. Talia was tempted, but then she refused. If there was a message, Talia didn't want to end up hearing it in front of the whole audience of witches. Besides, what were the odds of her mother predicting a fountain in the witches' realm as a way to unlock the message?

In their search for food, Damon and Talia were drawn to the noise which came from the garden and they were surprised to see that the last night's feast that was still ongoing. Many witches were eating, and based on their messy hair and slurred speech, it was obvious that some of them didn't go to their rooms to sleep at all.

In any case, the mood was good.

Talia met Keith's concerned gaze coming from the table where he was sitting with Calla and three more healers from the Midnight Guardians pack.

Talia went there to wish them good morning and she gave Keith a reassuring smile. "We are fine, Keith. Both of us are fine." She knew that he was worried about her and Damon. "But you don't look well."

Keith waved his hand like it was not important. After his last night's outburst at Cassandra, he couldn't make himself talk to her. Luckily, the Oracle didn't appear at the feast after the ceremony, and he could sit at that table where healers were so witches won't bother him.

Some of the witches were coming there as servers, and they used that opportunity to rub on his arm or shoulder, so he needed to stay vigilant because witches were less restrained under the influence of alcohol.

Keith didn't regret his words to Cassandra. They were true. She acted against Alpha Damon and caused many troubles. If this was a normal situation, she would be sentenced to death. How can he be friendly with an enemy of his pack?

Unfortunately, Cassandra was one of the few people in the realm of witches who could hold a decent conversation without Keith fearing that she will eat him up.

How Keith saw this, if they decided to return home (or at least to the Midnight Guardians pack) that same day, it would be perfect. But he didn't want to complain to Talia. She was here with Alpha Damon, her mate, and Keith was just a guard and he needed to focus on his duty.

Talia glanced at the table where she should sit with Damon and noticed that the other two couples were not present.

"Did you see Liam or James this morning?", Talia asked Keith.

Keith shook his head. "They didn't come out yet. I met Yasmin earlier so I know that she arranged for the food to be left in front of their rooms."

Talia guessed that Liam and Amelia will stay in the room seeking solitude, but James and Cornelia staying in came as a pleasant surprise.

They all knew that James and Cornelia were a couple, but the fact that they spent the night (and the morning) together, meant that their relationship was cemented. That was confirmation of how one more witch will be staying in the human realm, and Talia saw this as another reason for the portal to connect the Dark Howlers pack and the Silver Flame Coven. Now only if she could find Evanora and convince her to make one, that would be perfect.

### **Chapter 698 Discussing portals (1)**

It was late morning when Talia and Damon found Evanora sitting on the edge of the Silver Flame fountain and staring at the water.

Evanora had breakfast in her room, so they didn't see each other since the last night's ceremony that ended with Evanora collapsing.

"Good morning", Talia wished before asking, "How are you feeling?"

Evanora raised her head to see Talia and Damon approaching her. "I'm good. Thank you. How about you?"

"We are alright.", Talia responded.

"I'm sure you have questions about what happened last night.", Evanora said.

Talia was glad that she didn't need to beat around the bush. That was one of the reasons why she wanted to talk to Evanora. "Yes. What can you tell us about it?"

Instead of answering, Evanora eyed Damon suspiciously. "Are you sure he is fine?"

Damon hid his displeasure behind a frown. What did she mean by that? He was not defective, alright? But he also remembered that due to a nasty spell he forgot about Talia, so he didn't voice his complaints.

Talia responded, "Damon's body is fine. Your healers confirmed it after breakfast." Talia forced him to go for a checkup. "The one thing that stands out is how from Damon's point of view, the ceremony lasted only a second or two."

Evanora looked at Talia. "And you?"

Talia felt discomfort while remembering the void in front of her where Damon was supposed to be. "For me, it felt like a long time. The energies intensified my senses, and I could feel everything except for the space where he was. It was like he was not there. It was like... the space where he was, was not there. Do you know what it means?"

Evanora shook her head. "This is the first time I've heard of anything like it. But we can always look into our old records. Maybe we can find some clue."

Talia wanted to agree, but she could imagine that witches had a lot of records. How long will that take? As much as she was hungry for answers, she didn't want to spend her vacation buried in old parchment and deciphering faded scribbles. And also, what if this was a ploy to keep them there?

"Do you know what's the source of your power?"

Evanora's question pulled Talia out of her daze.

"The source of my power?", Talia asked, unsure if Evanora's question was directed at Liseli's existence, or maybe at her bloodline.

Talia had no intention of revealing anything about Liseli, and she didn't know her mother, but she could bring up her father.

"My father was Valerian Moonrider. He was the next Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack, but due to unclear circumstances, he disappeared, and his sister took over the pack."

Evanora was curious. "Unclear circumstances?" She noticed that Talia forgot to mention the second source of her gene pool. "Who was your mother?"

"I don't know who my mother was. I was a baby when my father left me with Axel's parents and said that he had something urgent to handle. That was the last time anyone from the Midnight Guardians pack saw him."

"I see", Evanora said absentmindedly and stood up. "I will leave you..."

"Wait!", Talia exclaimed. Did Evanora really think that she can leave just like that? "About the portals..."

Evanora frowned. "I still didn't recuperate since last night and I want to rest. Let's talk about it later."

Talia couldn't believe this! Was Evanora trying to dodge talking about the portals AGAIN? She steeled her resolve to use her last resort. "You owe me a favor. I lit up the flames in this fountain and you said that you will fulfill my request. We had a deal, right?"

Evanora's expression stiffened. "Right."

"This is my request. I want us to talk about what is needed to create a portal."

Evanora stared at Talia like she was growing a second head. "Are you sure you want to use your favor for a talk?"

"An honest talk.", Talia clarified.

Evanora narrowed her eyes. "If one uses a deal, witches can't lie. We will stay within the confinements of the deal or suffer serious consequences. That's how things work."

'Yeah, right', Talia thought. They will stay within the confinements of the deal, but they will also use ambiguous terms and scheming to make it work in their favor.

At the thought of ambiguous words, Talia got an idea to prevent those by being specific.

"I won't insist that the portal should be opened. But I want us to discuss ways how it can be done. I am confident that Yasmin, Cornelia, and Amelia are only the first witches to have soulmates outside of this realm, and there will be many others. With our increased collaboration, a portal would be convenient for everyone. At the end of the talk, if we establish that we can create a portal to connect the Silver Flame Coven with the Dark Howlers pack, and you are not willing, I want to hear why. That's it."

"That sounds like a good deal to me.", Yasmin's voice drifted from the side.

Talia turned to see Yasmin and Axel walking toward them.

"I am also curious about the portals", Yasmin said. "You don't mind if we join, right?"

"No", Evanora said, surprising everyone present.

"No, for which one?", Damon asked. The meaning could be, 'No, I don't mind if you join', but Evanora's stern tone was more like, 'No, you can't join.'

Evanora looked at Talia. "If Yasmin is present, we won't be having that talk."

Talia was surprised by the blunt rejection. But then, Evanora said that she was not lying so maybe this was normal. After all, Evanora is the high priestess, and she didn't need to sugarcoat her words.

Yasmin couldn't believe this. "What is so important that I can't hear it? You know that I can just go to our archives and dig out the information myself."

"You can't", Evanora said stiffly. "Information about portals is not there."

"Where is it?", Yasmin asked. Did they have a secret library or something?

Evanora shook her head. "No one knows. When your aunt Summer left with her group to investigate portals, they took everything written we had. They didn't return and we never found any trace of them."

"So, if you don't have any documents, how are you going to tell me about portals?", Talia asked.

Evanora tapped her temple, indicating that she has the information in her mind. "One of the first spells I mastered was committing things to memory. I practiced by going to the archives and memorizing whatever I could get my hands on."

'The witch is lying!', Liseli growled in Talia's mind. 'If she memorized whatever she could get her hands on, why did she tell us to check the archives for clues related to what happened last night? Or should we really believe that she memorized only portal-related things?'

Talia had to agree with Liseli.

'Let me force my way in and see what she has in there', Liseli growled and Talia panicked.

'If you force your way in, she might become an imbecile. How will we explain that to other witches? What about Yasmin?'

'No one will know that we did it', Liseli said smugly. 'Think about it. Can we trust the words that come out of that old hag?'

## **Chapter 699 Discussing portals (2)**

Talia was conflicted.

Liseli was eager to take charge, but Talia didn't want to do anything rashly. They came here on a FRIENDLY visit, damn it!

However, Liseli had a point. Was there any use in talking to Evanora if Talia couldn't trust her?

Evanora said how she was not lying, but what if that was a lie? And what if Evanora bluntly rejected Yasmin as a way to distract Talia so that she can't tell truth from falsehood? Ah, all this was stressful!

'Let's try talking first', Talia said to Liseli.

Talia could feel Liseli's hostility and it was hard to pacify the ancient spirit.

Liseli disliked Evanora since the mate-for-mate deal. Sure, Axel ended up jumping into it, and then Evanora gave up on cashing it in when it was confirmed that Axel and Yasmin were mates. However, if not for Axel, there was a chance that Talia would be facing the choices of Damon (and Sapa) being free and not remembering Talia (and Liseli), and the other choice of Damon regaining his memories, but being forced to stay with witches. Unacceptable!

'What is there to talk?', Liseli hissed. 'The old hag can lie her mouth off. And what's the deal with Yasmin not being able to hear it?'

Again, Talia agreed with Liseli's points. It was strange. Was Evanora insisting for Yasmin to stay out of it because Evanora wanted to lie (or worse), and she didn't want to do it in front of Yasmin?

Talia steeled her resolve and spoke to Evanora.

"I want to use my deal with you on discussing the portals. I expect that you will tell me everything you know about them. And I want Damon, Axel, and Yasmin to be present. You are welcome to add more people from your side if you wish."

Evanora shook her head. "Not Yasmin. You don't understand. This impacts our family."

"Then, more so I should be there.", Yasmin said. "Mother, you said how the written documents are gone. Knowledge will be preserved by sharing it with other members of the Coven. Or do you plan to take it to your grave?"

Evanora sucked in a breath. "Are you cursing me to die?"

Yasmin rolled her eyes. "I'm just stating the facts, mother. We all come from nature and we will all return to nature, eventually. No one lives forever."

"I will get some other witches to join. Serena and..."

"Me.", Yasmin interrupted Evanora, this time she was visibly angry as her pregnancy hormones fanned her temper. "Information about portals is sensitive. Who is better to carry the legacy of the Coven than me? Or are you saying that Serena is more important than I am?"

"Of course, not. But..."

"Then, it's settled.", Yasmin said. "Let's go to mother's office. No one can eavesdrop there."

...

No other witch joined them, and for the next hour, Evanora was talking about portals.

Evanora didn't know the details of setting up a portal, because the blueprints were missing, but she was familiar with the theory about runes, diagrams, and materials needed.

Talia listened attentively, and she was glad that Yasmin was taking notes because Evanora's explanation sounded esoteric to Talia's non-witchy brain.

When Evanora ended her explanation, she asked, "Any questions?"

"Yes", Damon said right away. "Based on what you've said, the prerequisite for a portal to open is that these things need to be set up on both entrance and exit. If that was true, how were initial portals created?"

Evanora looked at Damon like he was an ignorant child. "There are legends which talk about ancient creatures who were able to cross great distances at will. The portals we have are their legacy to provide lesser creatures with the convenience of travel."

Damon eyed Evanora suspiciously. "Are you talking about Gods? Do you believe that such creatures existed?"

Evanora stifled a laugh, noticing that he spoke in the past tense. "As a werewolf, you should believe in the Moon Goddess. If she can decide on your soulmate from the moment you were born, bless you with powers and the ability to shapeshift, why is it difficult to believe that she can cross realms with a thought? You believe in the Moon Goddess, and we worship nature. No matter what you call it, nearly every creature believes in existences that are above them. Time and retelling changed the original stories but the fact is that all legends were based on truth."

Damon's brows came in a frown. She was right. All legends were based on truth. Even the silly belief that there are mermaids at the bottom of the lake next to Darkbourne started because of the unusual movements down there. Damon wondered when will Talia mention that phenomenon to Evanora.

Yasmin raised her hand, like an obedient child in school. When Evanora waved at her to go ahead, Yasmin spoke, "Portals twist the space between two points. If we don't know how to set it up, the portal can work in reverse and increase the space."

Evanora cocked an eyebrow. "Was there a question in there?"

Yasmin pressed her lips into a line and glared at her mother.

Over the last hour, Evanora said a lot, but it was useless.

It all looked like a pile of Legos without instructions on how to put them together. Oh, and there was a chance that some of the pieces were missing. Axel had an impressive collection of Legos at home, and Yasmin was playing with them in her free time so she knew that the same pieces could create different shapes, depending on how they came together.

Sure, they can use this information to start experimenting, but even if they manage to open the portal, going in there would be suicidal. What if one gets in and exits on the other side a hundred years later? Yasmin remembered how James mentioned drones, so maybe they could use that.

Yasmin pushed the useless thoughts to the side because one thing was bugging her.

"Mom", she called. "Why was this something I couldn't hear? You said it's a family thing. Is it related to my father?"

The way Evanora lowered her gaze, told Yasmin that she hit a nail on the head.

"Is father's disappearance connected to the portals?", Yasmin asked. "Part of the deal was that you will disclose everything related to the portals."

"Do you really want to talk about it in front of outsiders?"

"Yes!", Yasmin exclaimed. She feared that if she gives Evanora a breather, she will find a way to wiggle out of it. "Besides, Axel is family, and so are Talia and Damon."

Evanora pressed her lips into a line while sorting out her thoughts. She didn't tell Yasmin much about her father because Evanora feared that Yasmin will go looking for him. Was he alive? Evanora was not



sure. The connection between them was gone, but she never felt the ache that came with losing a soulmate, so she believed that he was out there... somewhere.

Evanora hoped that he will return when the time was right, and then he will explain what happened and make it up to them after centuries of separation because Evanora didn't know much, and she had a bunch of questions of her own.

### **Chapter 700 Edgar and Evanora [Bonus chapter]**

Evanora released a long breath and looked at Yasmin's pleading eyes directed at her. She denied Yasmin this information for too long. It was time for the girl to get some answers about her father.

"When I met your father, this realm was different. We had several portals open and people were coming in and out at will. Sisters of the Silver Flame Coven lived outside, in nature, with nature, and we would gather to celebrate milestones.", Evanora said in one breath and paused. "When I met him, I knew immediately that he was my soulmate. He said that he will take me to his realm, but later he changed his mind and we stayed here."

Evanora spread her arms like she was gesturing at everything around her. "This was the place where high-ranking sisters stayed. It was an administrative building, a gathering point for the Silver Flame Coven. Your father was the one who suggested creating the illusion so that the entrance is hidden."

"In time, the number of outsiders was reducing as the portals started closing. We formed teams to investigate and try to reopen them, your father was at the head of that research, but it was in vain. One day, we had an energy disturbance in the North. He went with a team to see what was causing it. He never came back."

Yasmin stared at her mother. Evanora didn't speak about Yasmin's father and a few times when Yasmin asked, Evanora had a pained expression, so Yasmin assumed that he abandoned them and she even hated him for leaving her pregnant mother on her own, but now it seemed that he encountered some accident.

"Did you look for him?", Yasmin asked anxiously.

"Of course, I did", Evanora snapped. "But there was nothing. Like they disappeared into thin air."

"Do you think that they passed through a portal?", Damon asked.

Evanora shrugged, indicating that she was not sure. "At that time, we were experimenting with reopening the portals, and the disturbance matched something an unstable portal could create. However, we didn't have any approved tests in that area, so it was unusual. That's why he went to investigate."

"Was the portal to the Midnight Guardians pack open then?", Axel asked Evanora.

"No. That portal was closed for a very long time."

Yasmin asked her next question, "Was it possible that someone entered the realm and attacked them? Or that my father left through a portal?"

"I told you everything I know, Yasmin.", Evanora said. "Shortly after they left, the disturbance was gone. Anything beyond that is just guessing. We assumed that they dealt with the issue, and when they didn't return after some time, we went to look but there was nothing. Shortly after that, I found out that I was pregnant so I couldn't take risks."

Evanora now turned to Talia. "There. That's all. Our deal is completed."

"It is", Talia confirmed while her eyes darted to Yasmin who was visibly shaken up by this information.

Talia saw Evanora's hand waiting for a handshake, and Talia realized that the witch wanted to close the deal. Did Evanora really tell her everything about the portal there was to tell? Talia had no way to verify, so she shook Evanora's hand and white light flashed upon contact.

"I'm sorry I can't tell you more about your father, Yasmin", Evanora said, this time sounding genuine. "But I know that he loved me, and he would love you as well only if he had a chance to meet you."

"You can tell me more.", Yasmin said.

"I told you everything..."

"His name.", Yasmin interrupted her. "What was his name?"

"Edgar", Evanora responded.

"I want you to tell me about him. How he looked, what he liked to eat, how you met. Everything."

"Now?"

Yasmin was impatient, but she realized that her emotions were fluctuating. She decided to leave talking about her father for later. After so much time, waiting a few more days won't make a difference. Besides, if there was really a portal there and her father passed through it, investigating that place and finding clues was more important compared to listening to Evanora recollecting her romance.

"Not now, but soon. What I want to know now is the exact location of the incident he was investigating, and any reports you have from that time.", Yasmin said with resolve. "Is any of the sisters present that was investigating his disappearance?"

"I know what you are thinking. But that happened a long time ago and we looked everywhere.", Evanora said to Yasmin.

"You did, but we didn't.", Talia said and turned to Yasmin. "Let's look for your father together. There was no body so we can't be sure he perished. He might be still alive." Talia was also hoping that her parents might be alive. Was this connected somehow? That would be a stretch.

Yasmin's eyes filled with tears at the sight of determined Talia and Damon who was right there nodding in agreement.

'Kitten?', Damon's voice sounded in Talia's head through their private mind-link. 'Are you thinking of doing something reckless again?'

Talia turned to smile at the overprotective Alpha. 'It's just to check the area. How can that be reckless? Besides, you will be right by my side to keep me safe.'

Damon's eyebrows twitched. He had a bad feeling about this.

Evanora looked at Yasmin who was talking to Axel about water and healthy snacks they will pack for their trip. With coordinates from Evanora, Yasmin can teleport them there, but Axel wanted to have nourishment for his pregnant mate. She was eating for three now. Damon also joined in the discussion about food and Talia started teasing him if an Alpha needs to pack sandwiches for an outing or if he can hunt when he gets hungry. Axel and Yasmin laughed at this comment and Damon's comical expression.

Evanora wanted to say that she will go as well, but somehow, after seeing the cheery mood among the four youngsters, she felt like an outsider.

At least Yasmin was in good spirits, Evanora thought. She feared that Yasmin will be sad or blame her for keeping this from her, and Yasmin was probably doing that, but she didn't want to show it.

Everyone who sees the mother-daughter duo says how Evanora and Yasmin are alike, but that was only skin-deep because Yasmin's personality resembled her father's. Yasmin always had her ways of doing things, achieving unexpected with determination and a spirit ready for adventure while making it look easy... Just how her father used to do things.

Before leaving Evanora's office, they finalized their plan.

"Let's go tomorrow after breakfast", Yasmin said. "That will give us the whole day to check the area. I will get the coordinates and prepare the spell for instant travel."

Since he had nothing else to do, Axel expressed his desire to see the archive of the Silver Flame Coven. Evanora said how information about the portals was gone, but what if she missed something?

Axel was not a witch, but there were probably all kinds of useful information in there.

Seeing Evanora's frown of disapproval, Axel was quick to come up with an excuse.

"I want to see if you have any recorded history of interaction with the Midnight Guardians pack."