

Alphas Bride 701

### **Chapter 701 Males can't be witches?**

It was obvious that Evanora was not willing to allow Axel to go into the archives of the Silver Flame Coven, but due to his relationship with Yasmin, Evanora couldn't reject him outright either.

Before Evanora could come up with an excuse that will make sense, Yasmin said to Axel, "I will go with you after lunch. You don't need permission. Every witch from our Coven has access to that area, and you are family so... you are one of us."

Evanora pressed her lips into a line. Yasmin was right, but Evanora still had issues thinking of Axel as a non-outsider. Evanora saw Axel when he arrived, and then he took Yasmin away. And now they were back, after months, and Evanora needed time to adjust to his presence. Evanora saw that Yasmin trusted him completely, but what if Axel abandons Yasmin, just how Edgar abandoned her?

"Can we also go?", Talia asked Yasmin for herself and for Damon. "I would love to see it." She didn't want to look into documents but seeing archives belonging to a Coven of witches was something novel.

"Sure.", Yasmin said.

Damon frowned when he realized that Talia was eager to poke her nose in old documents. The good thing was that she included him in that activity, but he didn't want to do anything other than lazing with Talia, yet she already volunteered them for a search mission and for checking the ancient archives.

Sure, Talia said that she wanted only to look, but knowing her, there will be a ghost popping out or she will accidentally open a portal to the realm of goblins. With Talia, anything was possible.

This was supposed to be a vacation!

Yasmin and Axel left Evanora's study, and Evanora looked questionably at Talia and Damon who were still lingering.

"Is there anything else?"

Talia nodded. "I want to ask you if you are familiar with any male witches."

Evanora looked at Talia like she said something silly. "Male witches? There is no such thing."

Talia was confused. Why did Evanora sound so confident? Weren't Guardians male witches? And how was Yasmin's father leading the efforts on portal research if he didn't know magic? "Are you sure?"

Evanora pointed at the window. "Just as I am sure that it's day outside. Who told you that male witches exist?"

"No one told me but... I saw a man casting a spell. He was using Runes, so I thought...", Talia's voice trailed. Now she sounded quite silly.

'Didn't you say they are witches?', Talia asked Liseli.

'I am wise, but not omniscient. We both saw that Guardian using Runes to cast a spell, and I could feel unusual energies flowing through them', Liseli responded defensively.

'Alright, alright', Talia tried to pacify her wolf who was getting offended by Talia doubting her.

"Females of any species can sense the energies better compared to their male counterparts.", Evanora said. "Men could be using runes, but that wouldn't be the type of magic we use."

"There are different types of magic?", Talia asked.

"Of course. The world is full of wonders", Evanora said. "I don't want to spend days telling you about different types of magic because my knowledge is not comprehensive. However, I can tell you about magic in general. Every creature is a child of nature, and we all resonate with our Mother on a certain level. Our Mother is just and loves us all equally so we all get gifts. Some creatures are swift, some nimble, some smart, strong, can fly or manipulate energies around us. However, what we get at birth is just a potential that will grow if we nurture it, or wither if we neglect it."

Evanora gestured toward Damon. "Alphas have their aura and are born leaders, but if they don't train hard, that will be for naught."

Damon puffed his chest. In a way, Evanora was recognizing his abilities in front of Talia, and he approved.

Evanora shook her head at cocky Alpha and continued talking to Talia, "Being a witch is not a different species. Anyone can be a witch. I am confident that in the human realm there are many females whose potential dwindled because no one was there to guide them when the time was right. Sensing and controlling the energies is something like walking or breathing. In order to achieve a satisfactory level of synergy, we start early and by the age of twelve, witches become full members of our Coven."

Talia had so many questions! "Why is it important to start early?"

"Children accept new things easily as their senses are still developing. A thirty years-old person already established her way of thinking and even if she focuses all her efforts on mastering the energies, it won't be the same."

"Can werewolves be witches?", Talia asked her next question.

"It is possible, but not very likely. You already have your wolf, enhanced senses, and strong physique. It is natural that you will focus on developing those instead of something foreign like communicating with energies found in nature."

That was why Evanora was surprised to see what Talia was able to do at the Silver Flame Fountain. She-wolves are not magical, yet here was Talia, proving it wrong. But that made Evanora curious to find out about Talia's mother. And also, Damon's unusual display from the ceremony told Evanora that he was not just an Alpha either. Evanora wanted to do some tests on both of them. Would they agree? Evanora knew that with the right motivation, anything was possible.

Talia wanted to ask more about magic and wolves, but she saw that Evanora was eyeing Damon, so she stood up with, "Thank you for your time."

"You are welcome", Evanora responded. "Before you go, one more thing. You will find a human or a she-wolf who can predict the weather, or whose houseplants flourish. Does that make her a witch or a creature with an ability?"

This brought Talia back to her original question. Were Guardians witches? "Are you saying that the man I saw using runes is a human with an ability?"

Evanora shrugged. "He could be many things. Stories say that in ancient times Gods would mix with mortals and produce offspring. Over generations, their bloodline thinned, but some might be awakened under the right circumstances." Evanora leaned over her desk and gestured at Talia. "Did you wonder if Gods walk among us? What makes one a God? A long lifespan? Ability to shapeshift? Power to revive the dead? Considering how you reignited our fountain, I might tell my Coven that you are a Goddess and none of them would doubt it."

"I am not a God.", Talia said with urgency.

Evanora continued pushing. "Do you think of yourself as a she-wolf who can do magic, or as a witch with a wolf? The fact that you are both is breaking the balance and it makes you..."

"Dangerous.", Damon growled. He had a feeling where this was going.

Evanora smirked at him. "I was about to say, special, but we can go with dangerous also." She turned her attention to Talia. "I was wondering if you will be willing to..."

Damon raised his hand toward Evanora, interrupting whatever she was about to say. "We are done here."

Talia had more questions, but she saw that Damon was getting into his protective mode, so the only thing she could say was, "Thank you for your time, Evanora."

## **Chapter 702 The best teacher**

Damon and Talia walked out of Evanora's office in silence.

Subconsciously, Talia touched the necklace that was under her t-shirt. Would Evanora know something about it?

Everything would be so much easier if they could have an open conversation, but Talia couldn't trust the witch. Was there even any point in talking?

'You can let me force my way into her mind', Liseli barked, irritated that Talia was being friendly with people who didn't return the sentiment.

'Let's not go crazy, Liseli', Talia responded. 'We need to be reasonable. Is there a point in making a move against the high priestess of witches? Every witch here will become our enemy and what about Yasmin, Cornelia, and Amelia? Besides, this was not a total waste.'

'It was not?'

'Of course, not', Talia said with confidence. 'We got information to start working on portals, Yasmin found out about her father, and we know that Evanora is not aware of the Guardians.'

'That's if we assume that she is not a lying hag.'

Talia rolled her eyes. 'I believe that what she said was the truth.'

'But you can't measure how much she omitted.'

Talia had to agree with this.

"Kitten?", Damon called after assuring that there was no one else in the visible range. "How long are we going to stay here?"

Talia understood his discomfort. He was protective of her, just how she was protective of him. "Let's help Yasmin find clues about her father."

Damon grimaced. "Do we need to do it?"

"It's obvious that Yasmin doesn't trust Evanora with this task." And it was normal because Evanora was keeping this information to herself for a long time. "I know there are many other witches here, but they are all loyal to Evanora. We are Yasmin's family now."

"Family?"

"With Axel being my cousin, we are a family.", Talia reminded him. "Besides, family is not defined by blood relationships. The family is people who will have your back when needed, and right now, Yasmin needs us. Can we be her family?"

Damon wanted to say how having her as his family was enough, but he knew that Talia dreamed of a world where everyone will get along. He hated the idea of sharing Talia with anyone, but he consoled himself with the fact that he was her most favorite person. There was the mate bond, and she loved him unconditionally, and that was enough. It had to be.

With this, Damon confirmed that he can't avoid the outing to find what happened to Yasmin's father. He had no intention of letting Talia go without him, so he decided to do his best to find clues so they can leave this realm as soon as possible.

"One condition.", Damon said.

"Anything.", Talia was quick to say.

Damon chuckled. "Why are you rushing into this? What if I want something you won't like?"

Talia smiled at him smugly. "As my mate, you will never want something I won't like."

Damon had to agree with this. His instinct was to keep her safe and happy.

"Well, what is it?", Talia asked.

"When we return to the Midnight Guardians pack, can we spend more time in the cave?"

Talia's eyes flashed in approval. He didn't need to say which cave because there was only one.

"Absolutely."

"Can we spend the rest of our vacation there?"

"The whole vacation?" That could be weeks! But... was there anything wrong with being in a cave with Damon? It actually sounded romantic. "Let's talk about it when we get there."

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Damon waited to reach the room with Talia before asking, "Kitten, why did you use your deal with Evanora for information? Why not for opening the portal?"

Talia smiled slyly. "Evanora was avoiding to talk about it. If she didn't want to talk, I doubted she would create one. It's obvious that creating a portal is not simple, otherwise, they would be everywhere. Also, if Evanora knew how to make one, they wouldn't be stuck in this realm for centuries. That's why I thought that if I used the deal to ask for a portal, at most I could ask her to try and that would leave her with a lot of ways to wiggle out of it."

Damon thought how it made sense, but... "Did you give up on creating a portal?" No, that didn't make sense. If she gave up, she wouldn't use the deal to get information. "How will we create portals now?"

"We won't, but there are witches in the human realm who will."

Damon needed a moment for this to sink in. "You are talking about Cornelia and Amelia."

Talia's eyes flashed in approval. Her mate was smart. "Evanora was not motivated to create portals, but Cornelia and Amelia will be. Now that they are mated to guys from the human realm, they will wish for a quick way to visit their sisters. And let's not forget that Yasmin is there also. We will leave it to Yasmin to get them excited about the idea of creating a portal."

"But Cornelia will go to the Red Moon pack. How will they meet without Alpha Edward noticing?"

Damon's points were valid. However, Talia had a solution. "Cornelia can come to the Dark Howlers pack with one quick spell. Actually, that will be safer for her. We all know that Cornelia won't have it easy if Alpha Edward finds out about her existence. James will need to hide her as his mate and without a wolf, she will be treated worse than an Omega."

Damon understood where this was going. "You think that James will agree to hide Cornelia in the Dark Howlers pack while he does his daily routine to trick his father."

Talia loved that they were continuing on the same wavelength to the point on finishing each other's thoughts. It was fantastic! "James spends his days studying and training." Talia lived there and she was aware of his schedule. "While James is busy, Cornelia can be in the Dark Howlers pack. She can work with Amelia on a portal or discuss rituals with Gideon or anything other than hiding in the Red Moon pack. When James finishes his duties, he can give her a call and she can teleport there."

"You got it all figured out.", Damon said dotingly.

Talia was proud of herself. "The only thing we need to do is to wait for James to ask us for this favor. If he doesn't, we can throw some hints to guide him in that direction. You will pretend that it's difficult so that he appreciates it more when you agree."

Damon pinched the tip of her nose. "I am happy that you learned about subtle ways to maximize your gains."

Talia rubbed her nose with her palm. Why did he pinch her? But she probably deserved it. The last time when Damon delayed agreeing to James' request, Talia pinched his thigh under the table harshly, thinking that he was torturing the boy.

"Of course, I learned.", Talia said smugly. "I am smart."

"And you have the best teacher.", Damon added shamelessly.

She wanted to bicker with him, but she couldn't, because he was right. "I do. You are the best."

Damon grinned cockily. Talia praising him will never get old.

### **Chapter 703 The archives of the Silver Flame Coven (1)**

Talia stood in front of Damon and looked at him seriously. "Damon?"

"Hmm?"

"You don't mind that I kind of..." Talia paused while picking her words. "...took over?"

"What do you mean?"

She didn't want to provoke him, but she wanted to make sure he was OK with the current situation or if she needed to make some adjustments. Damon was a seasoned Alpha who was used to making calls for himself and for the whole pack, yet since they left the human realm, he took the back seat and Talia was calling the shots.

"I mean... coming here, the ceremony, the talk with Evanora, I decided that we should check the disappearance of Yasmin's father. There are probably more, but you got the point how all these I decided on my own. Are you OK with it?"

Damon caressed her cheek with the back of his fingers. "Thank you for thinking about me, kitten. Trust me, if I am not OK, I would let you know; but let me confirm now that I don't mind. I admit that this is new to me, but I don't hate it. If I'm going to treat you as my equal, I need to see what you are capable of. What's a better way to do it than to let you spread your wings? Show me how high you can fly. So far, you've done wonderfully, and I am eager to see what else you can do. If you bite more than you can chew, I will be right here to support you."

Talia teared up. Can he be any sweeter? "You are the best."

"I am", Damon said right away. "Aren't you the lucky one?"

"I am", she responded and got on her toes to kiss him on the lips. "Thank you for everything you are doing, Damon. I love you."

Damon smiled. "And that, my kitten, makes me the lucky one."

Without breaking the kiss, Damon's hands moved to her buttocks, and he gave her a squeeze before lifting her up.

Talia's legs wrapped around Damon's waist right away, and she smiled into the kiss when she realized that he was walking them to the bed.

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After lunch, Talia, Damon, Yasmin, and Axel went to the archives in the company of two high-ranking witches who introduced themselves as Serena and Feya.

As Yasmin said, the archives were open to any witch of the Coven, but Talia had a feeling that Serena and Feya had a task to keep an eye on them.

Talia wondered if Evanora thought they came to steal stuff or to ruin books. Or were these two just watchers who will report to Evanora what their group of four will do? Did they know that she can communicate via mind-link with Axel and Damon?

When they passed through the massive double doors made of dark wood, the newcomers paused to look around.

Talia imagined archives to be a dark and dusty place where books and parchments were thrown in piles, but this was different.

Rows of shelves stretched as far as the eyes could reach, and books and papers were neatly organized. Along the middle were several long tables with benches on the side, and there were papers and pens ready for note-taking. The place looked like a library.

To add to the cozy feeling, long windows allowed for plenty of sunlight, and there was no dust or stale air. Witches obviously took care of this place.

"Nothing is off-limits", Yasmin said for everyone to hear. "I want to check what kind of maps we have for the area we are going to investigate tomorrow." With that, Yasmin disappeared among shelves.

"Are you looking for anything specific?", Serena asked Talia, Damon, and Axel who were just standing and observing the space.

Axel responded first. "I want to see if you have documents about interaction with other werewolves. My pack in particular."

Serena nodded in understanding and gestured to the right.

Axel followed after Serena while looking around. There were thousands of books. Tens of thousands.

"Are you admiring our collection?", Serena asked with pride in her voice.

"Yes. I appreciate how everything is kept in optimal conditions."

"Of course. These are precious. Once a sheet of paper gets stored in here, it's in the protection of the Coven. Anyone can take it to read and research, but it can't be taken out."

Axel now understood the purpose of the tables they left behind. It's for witches to sit and read. Considering that they were locked up in this realm for centuries, and they were not connected to the human realm where books can be mass-purchased, he had to ask... "From where did you get this many books?"

"We write down everything. You can find books about someone's life, research, plants... anything."

"But not about portals.", Axel said.

Serena paused. "Right. Not about portals."

Axel thought how some things don't add up. "If books can't be taken out from here, how come records about portals are missing?"

Serena cleared her throat. "That... You will need to ask the high priestess."

Axel realized that witches were hiding something about portals which made him wonder if Evanora was trying to lock them up in this realm on purpose. Was she behind the closing of the portals?

Axel shook off those unpleasant thoughts. He was here to get more information and coming up with conspiracy theories won't do anyone good.

"Here we are." Serena's words got Axel's attention. She was gesturing toward the shelf on their right. "From here onward, are records about our sisters interacting with outsiders. As for the ones that mention werewolves..." Serena waved her finger and murmured chants, and a few books lit up.

Axel frowned. "Just those?"

Serena looked at him like he asked something silly. "We don't address your kind as werewolves. If you want to read about creatures that can shapeshift..." Serena's finger moved and nearly a hundred books lit up. "Keep in mind that if a shapeshifter didn't change shape, it would be categorized as human. So for the books that mention outsiders that are humans..." With another wave of her finger, almost all the books Axel could see lit up.

"I understand", Axel said while looking helplessly at densely arranged books on the shelves. This will take forever!

Yasmin warned him that witches are devoted researchers who love to write down stuff and keep it in the archive. They have a board that features top-ranking witches based on who contributed the most content and also rankings on the most popular books. It's a serious competition.

Their archive contains personal diaries, musings, funny moments, as well as information on monumental events, research, and recipes for making anything from relaxing teas and mouthwatering desserts, to deadly potions, and they also have instructions on spellcasting and historical documents.

Axel guessed that there will be a lot to go through, but this was beyond his wildest imagination!

Axel gave himself a pep talk. Even if he reads only a book or two, it will be better than nothing. But there was no way to figure out which one of these books will have something useful. What if he wastes his time reading a diary of a frolicky witch who spent her days talking to frogs?

Axel steeled his resolve and reached for a book. He needed to start somewhere.

#### **Chapter 704 The archives of the Silver Flame Coven (2)**

Axel reached for a book while wondering what information was contained inside it.

The moment Axel's fingers touched the leather binding, an image flashed in Axel's mind, and he could see himself holding that book and reading it.

The book was written by a witch named Holly describing her visits to a temporary settlement in the South-West. The dwellers there were outsiders with tall and lean bodies and pointy ears. Holly admired



their archery skills and how they could move about stealthily. Those people consumed a vegetarian-only diet, they loved to sing, and she depicted encounters where they would exchange jewelry made of leather, colorful stones, and beads.

Axel realized that he saw a glimpse of the future. He will read this book and find nothing useful.

He made a grumpy face. His premonitions so far always came true. Will he really need to waste time reading this book?

Instead of pulling the book out of the shelf completely, Axel pushed the book back and waited for some Godly intervention that will force him to read it. His expression changed with every passing second because nothing happened.

Was it possible that he saw the future where he read the book, and he didn't need to read it in the present?

If that was true, his ability evolved and that would be huge!

Curious to test this theory about his ability evolving, Axel hooked his finger on the next book and saw images of him reading that book.

The book was signed by a witch named Zoe, and it spoke about her raising a fawn that she adopted from a merchant that had dark skin and was covered in heavy layers of clothing. There was a sketch of a man and a caravan of merchants that Zoe befriended. The fawn's mother died due to illness, and they wanted to eat the creature because they didn't have the conditions to raise him, but Zoe traded several magic crystals for the fawn.

Axel took this book out and flipped to see the sketches. The book was full of them. And then he kept the book back.

His face lit up when he realized that he still remembered the contents of the first book even though he never opened it. But... should he open it to confirm the contents? If he opens it, won't that make his vision come true?

Axel got an idea.

He gave that first book to Serena. "Can you tell me who wrote this and what it is about?"

Unaware of Axel's intentions, Serena opened the book and flipped through it. "This was written by Holly. It's about her encounters with a tribe that stayed in the South-West. I remember them. They were tall and pale no matter how much time they spent in the sun. They didn't eat meat and were very good with bows and knives even though they pledged never to kill because they believed in reincarnation and how every creature could contain the spirit of their ancestors." Serena paused. "Holly should be working on potions in the lab. Do you want to meet with her and ask about those creatures?"

"No, no...", Axel responded breathily while keeping the book back. He confirmed that he didn't imagine it. What he didn't read in the first book was truly there.

Axel's mind was working a million thoughts a second.

Did his ability to see the future really evolve? Yasmin told him that it will be beneficial to get close to the fountain during the ceremonies because the energies will impact everyone, even the audience, but... did this mean that he was finally able to see the future that CAN be changed?

Somehow, it made sense. He could see the future where he would read a book, and even though it didn't come true, his knowledge of that future remained.

He realized that this could backfire. What's the point of a premonition if it won't come true?

Ah! So far, he was stressing because he was unable to change what will happen, and now he was stressing that he will change it.

He decided to focus on the positives. How can he put that to good use? Well, for now, he will start touching each of those books and reading them without actually reading them.

Serena frowned at the sight of Axel who started moving slowly, pausing for a few seconds with each book to touch the cover before moving to the next one.

Axel was elated to confirm that this was working, but even with this super-speed, there were so many books, and it will take ages!

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After Axel and Serena disappeared among shelves, Feya turned to Talia and Damon.

"What topic interests you?"

Seeing that Talia was struggling to answer, Damon asked. "Do you maintain a Catalogue of your archives?"

"Yes, we do."

A minute later, Talia and Damon stood in front of a massive book that was placed on a chunky stone table that looked like three cuboid rocks stacked on top of each other.

It was THE Catalogue.

Talia opened it and started flipping the pages.

'What are you hoping to find?', Damon's voice sounded in Talia's head through the mind-link.

'Something about the Guardians', Talia responded.

Damon understood Talia's intention. At this point, Guardians were their biggest threat as their interest in Talia was unusual. Their invitation for Talia to join them came abruptly and Damon suspected that it had something to do with her impressive show with that glowing sphere. The Guardians made Damon nervous. They had the ability to suppress Alpha's aura, and he had a guess that they are not a bunch who will take a 'no' for an answer.

Evanora said that there are no male witches, but what if Guardians were some other types of magical creatures? Damon remembered reading stories about dragons who had their own magic and could shapeshift into human form.

It didn't take long for Talia to realize that the Catalogue was useless. It had names of authors and titles, and everything was neatly categorized in alphabetical order, but unless it said, "THIS IS ABOUT THE GUARDIANS", Talia would definitely miss it.

Dejectedly, Talia closed the massive book.

"You didn't find what you were looking for?", Feya asked, startling Talia. The witch was standing on the side quietly and Talia completely forgot about her.

"I was hoping to find something about different creatures that can use magic.", Talia said sadly.

Feya smiled and waved her finger while chanting something under her breath.

The Catalogue started shaking and words shot out of it to hover in the air.

Feya produced a long sheet of paper and words flew into it, the whole sheet shimmered until the magic settled down for Talia to see a list of books. There were authors, titles, and numbered shelves where those books can be found.

"I believe this will be helpful.", Feya said while handing the paper to Talia.

Talia facepalmed. How did she forget that she was in the realm of witches? Magic. Did she really think that witches will do things "manually"?

"That's a long list", Damon grumbled from the side. He was itchy to leave this realm, yet now it seemed they will spend days (or weeks!) in this place reading books.

That was NOT his idea of a vacation!

"Let's call Keith and see if he can help us find something useful.", Talia said and Damon's eyes lost focus as he was already mind-linking the Coach to come.

"If you tell me what you are looking for, I might be of assistance also.", Feya offered.

"We are looking for creatures where males can use magic.", Talia said right away. It was the truth and even if Feya reports this to Evanora, it won't be anything new.

### **Chapter 705 Removing the evidence**

After dinner, Talia went to the garden to meet with Yasmin.

Damon, Axel, and Keith were in the archives, looking at the maps and documents that Yasmin found about the area where her father disappeared. Guys were planning tomorrow's expedition.

Keith was glad that he was included in this activity. Since he came to the realm of witches he barely slept, and he was always alert. Now he finally felt useful, and with Damon and Axel around, witches didn't dare get too close.

Talia found Yasmin standing next to the Silver Flame fountain and staring at the water.

"Am I interrupting something?", Talia asked when she approached Yasmin.

"Not at all."

Talia looked around. The garden was usually lively, but this was different. "Where is everybody?"

"They have a meeting to discuss ceremonies and what they learned."

Talia thought how that made sense. "What are you looking at?", Talia asked when she realized that Yasmin was focusing at the same spot where Evanora was looking earlier that day when Talia came to ask her about the portals.

Instead of answering, Yasmin gestured toward the water and asked, "What do you see?"

Talia wanted to say that there was water in the fountain, but she knew that it wouldn't be something so obvious. Was there something else? How much she knew, there were no fish, and witches cleaned the fountain with their magic as part of their practice to control the energies.

The water was rippling from the center of the fountain in all directions. Ripples were reflecting the silvery flames that danced at the top of the statue that was in the middle of it all.

It looked beautiful, but Talia didn't see anything out of place.

It took Talia a few long moments to notice an area on the surface of the water that didn't reflect silvery flames when the glowing ripple passed through it. It was the spot where Yasmin was staring at.

"What is that?", Talia asked.

"That's where Damon was standing last night during your ceremony."

Talia was not sure if she heard Yasmin right. "What?"

"Mom told me about this", Yasmin said, and she looked at Talia. "She is hoping that we can repeat the ceremony and do some other tests for the two of you. Well, mostly on Damon. Your reaction during the ceremony was exceptional but not unexpected. Damon acted like a black hole that couldn't be touched by magic. We can't detect any remnants of your power here, which is normal because all spells dissolve if not maintained artificially. However, where Damon was standing... You see."

Yasmin was talking in a friendly tone, but Talia saw red flags that made her uneasy.

"You said that Evanora wants to do tests. What about you?"

Yasmin realized that Talia was tense, so she quickly explained, "I must admit that I am curious. However, I would object to anything that might harm my mate, so I won't waste my breath persuading you if you are not willing. Actually, I should be talking to Damon, but I thought of checking about this with you first."

Talia was alerted. "Evanora wants to do harmful tests on Damon?"

Yasmin raised her hands defensively. "The tests won't be harmful, but since we never saw anything like this, we can't predict how he will react to our probing." Yasmin gestured toward the dark patch. "We tried to affect it with our energies, but there was no reaction..."

Talia didn't hear the rest. The idea of Evanora doing tests on Damon was extremely unsettling. Talia's heart pounded wildly in her chest, and she felt like the air was thinning around her.

'Lis?', Talia called.

'We won't know unless we try', Liseli said, knowing what Talia had on her mind.

Talia's instincts for self-preservation kicked in, and they included Damon because he was her other half. It was to do whatever it takes to protect mate. Destroy evidence. Remove witnesses. Liseli had no objections.

Yasmin's voice trailed when she saw that Talia's hand was lighting up in rhythmical pulses.

"Yasmin?", Talia called without looking away from the dark patch in the water.

"Yes?"

"You said that Damon and I are your family."

Yasmin confirmed. "I did."

"Family sticks together and they won't harm each other. Do you agree with that?"

Yasmin swallowed hard. Talia's solemn tone told her that she would regret it if she gave a wrong answer. "Yes."

The silvery flames at the top of the fountain started dancing wildly, and all the light that was pulsating in the fountain now converged around the dark patch, but not a speck of light penetrated it.

Talia narrowed her eyes while focusing and a beam of light shot from her palm to the dark patch, hitting it right in the center.

Yasmin's eyes widened when she saw that the dark patch was getting saturated with light that came from Talia's palm.

Yasmin knew very well that several witches chanted to channel the energies of the fountain in there, but it was in vain... and here was Talia, doing it on her own without any chants and magical items.

A few seconds later, everything returned to normal. The surface of the water in the fountain was pulsating rhythmically in rings of light that were expanding from the statue to the edge of the fountain. The dark patch was gone.

"Woah...", Yasmin said breathily.

"Yasmin", Talia called, and Yasmin swallowed hard when she realized that not everything returned to normal.

Talia's eyes were glowing in silvery light, and even Talia's hair turned silvery. She looked like a Goddess. But why did the Goddess appear to be hostile?

Now that the evidence was gone, Liseli was ready to get rid of witnesses.

Talia looked at Yasmin and she thought of Axel and two lives sprouting inside Yasmin and Talia couldn't do it.

"Can I trust you?", Talia asked.

"Yes!", Yasmin exclaimed in a squeaky voice.

"If you consider us as a family. You will not mention this again. If anyone asks, say that it dissolved naturally."

Yasmin nodded in small choppy movements.

"Thanks", Talia said stiffly and walked away, while fighting against that small part of her that told her to get rid of witnesses. She couldn't kill, not without a reason, and especially not Yasmin.

Talia disappeared out of sight and Yasmin resumed breathing.

Yasmin wiped her forehead which was drenched in sweat and she shivered uncontrollably. Why did it feel like the grim reaper was right behind her?

Yasmin turned to look at the fountain with a complex expression on her face.

Talia's performance confirmed Yasmin's suspicion. Other than being a she-wolf, Talia was something else, and that else was not a witch. No matter how powerful a witch is and how much energy she channels, she never turns into a silvery Goddess that can perform spells without any chants. Talia was different.

Yasmin's mood dropped when she remembered her mother. Evanora told her to talk to Damon and convince him to take tests. Knowing Damon's temper, Yasmin thought of talking to Talia first, and considering Talia's icy response, Yasmin was glad that she didn't go to Damon right away.

But... how will she tell her mother that she failed? Evanora is not a person who will give up. Will she scold Yasmin, or will her mother try something on her own?

Yasmin didn't want to deal with this so she decided to say how she didn't get a good opportunity to talk to Talia. Yasmin bobbed her head at this idea. It was perfect: postponing her mother's anger. Hopefully, until they leave this place.

### **Chapter 706 A soothing kiss**

Talia ran through the hallways with the archives of the Silver Flame Coven as her destination. That was where Damon was with Axel and Keith.

Talia went to the garden for a relaxing chat with Yasmin, but she ended up with another stress and she had difficulty breathing.

She needed Damon. She needed his proximity to confirm that everything was fine.

Talia took a turn and bumped into Damon who was rushing toward her.

"Kitten." By the time he finished the word, his arms were around her already. "What's going on?" He could feel that her emotional state was unstable.

"Oh, Damon", Talia cried while fisting his shirt.

For a fraction of a moment, she was actually thinking about harming Yasmin and Talia was terrified. Since when was she a monster? What if the next time she goes through with it?

That was not her. She didn't want to hurt others, she just wanted to be left alone!

"Let's go home.", she spoke into his chest.

Damon was willing, but he had to ask, "What about investigating what happened to Yasmin's father?" Until a minute ago he was looking at the maps, but then he sensed Talia's discomfort and left Axel and Keith to deal with it.

Talia didn't want to stay here longer than necessary, but she promised. Also, considering the hostility she showed toward Yasmin, helping with this expedition will be a way to apologize.

"Let's go home after that. No matter what happens, there will be no more delays and we will go back. At least to the Midnight Guardians pack."

"Alright." Damon agreed. He wanted to come to these realms because time passed differently and they would have more time for relaxing, but if she was going to get stressed because of various reasons, it would be better to return to the Dark Howlers pack.

Damon held Talia tightly until she stopped trembling, and then he touched her chin to make her look up to him. Her eyes were flickering in silver, which told him that she used her abilities. "Will you tell me what got you upset?"

Talia released a slow breath and nodded. She couldn't make herself talk about it without falling apart, so she decided to show him.

In the next moment, Damon saw a scene of the fountain and pulsating lights, a dark patch in the water, and Talia dispersing it with the beam of light from her hand.

'Yasmin said how that was the spot where you were standing during the ceremony', Talia spoke through their private mind-link because she didn't want to risk someone overhearing them.

'Why was it not reflecting light?', Damon asked.

'It was not accepting magic', Talia explained. 'Witches tried channeling energies there, but it didn't work.'

'But you could do it with ease.', he said with pride in his voice. His kitten was awesome! Was it because they were mates, or because she was so powerful? It didn't matter, she was still awesome.

'Remember that Evanora said how there are different types of magic?', Talia reminded him. 'Evanora said that I'm special. The thing in the fountain makes you special as well.'

'Of course, we are special', Damon said with confidence. 'You have Liseli and I have Sapa.'

Talia shook her head. 'This is different. They want to do tests on us.'

Damon frowned. 'Why did you remove that black patch and expose yourself in front of Yasmin? Who knows who else was watching?'

Talia's chin trembled. She did it for him, yet he was worried about her. He always put her first, no matter what.

Talia knew that she acted on an impulse, but she was thinking about protecting Damon. To her, Damon came first. Always.

'No one was there other than Yasmin. This is about you, Damon. No matter how powerful it is, every magic will disappear when not artificially maintained. The black runes that impacted you last time were feeding of your lifeforce, portals rely on crystals and enchanted items to gather the energy from their surroundings to keep it going. No matter how you created that dark patch in the water, it should have disappeared after the ceremony was over, yet it stayed. I didn't want to give them a chance to test it further so I removed it.'

'Witches could give us answers.'

Talia couldn't believe this. 'Are you serious? Evanora wants to cast spells and make you drink potions! Who knows what she will do?'

Damon rubbed her back to calm her down. 'I am not willing to put myself in that situation. But if I can understand it, I could use it to keep us safe.'

'This could be due to the ceremony, or maybe your ability is awakening.' She raised her head to look at him sadly. 'Or it could be remnants of the dark magic that Cassandra performed. We did the ritual to clear the effects of the dark magic, but there is no guarantee that you don't have some permanent consequences.'

'You think that I can create darkness?' He thought that would be cool. Damon had black hair, Sapa was a black wolf, and somehow, darkness suited him.

'Not to create darkness.' Talia said. 'What if it's an ability to reject magic? If that's the case, do you think that Evanora will let you be? They are already suspecting that we are powerful and dangerous, what will happen if they confirm it? Sure, we are friends now, but what if one day we won't be? Will Evanora allow us to leave with the possibility that one day we will turn hostile?'

Damon stared at Talia and then his lips stretched into a big smile.

'What?', Talia asked. She said so many things, mostly bad ones. Why the heck was he happy?

'You are finally using your head, kitten.', he said. 'I am so glad that you are not trusting Evanora or other witches. I would love it more if you had a little reservation toward Yasmin and Axel as well, but this is a great start.'

Talia exhaled helplessly. She just told him that witches want to do experiments on him, yet he is happy because she was cautious. Silly Alpha.

She wouldn't be so cautious if it was about anyone else. Damon was her first priority, and she couldn't stand anyone who thought about harming him. Damon was her life. He was her everything.

Damon choked on emotions that swelled within him, and he knew they came from Talia. She was so pure and wonderful, and he thought that he might burst from all the love he had for her.

Damon cupped her cheeks and kissed her slowly, tenderly, sweetly, without igniting the wild flames of passion. It was a kiss that allowed him to enjoy the lush softness of her lips. A kiss that whispered of love



and everything good that existed in the world. A kiss that silenced the demons and dispelled negativity. A kiss that created a safe personal space, for just the two of them.

Talia fisted his shirt and whimpered into the kiss.

Damon was gentle and firm, every move of his lips told her how much he cherished her, and his solid embrace was confirmation that she can rely on him, and at that moment, that was exactly what she needed.

### **Chapter 707 The expedition (1)**

A teleporting spell flashed, and human figures appeared.

Talia and Damon were on the top of a bare hill that provided a good view of their surroundings.

The first thing they noticed was the lack of trees.

Low bushes speckled the pale red ground where dust swirled with the dry wind. Hills of irregularly shaped rocks could be seen here and there, some as tall as two-story buildings.

The greenery of bushes contrasted with the red color of ground and rocks, and it all looked odd against the blue sky.

Other than the rustling of leaves among bushes caused by the breeze, there were no other sounds.

"Are you sure we are in the right place?", Damon asked Yasmin.

"Of course, we are sure", Serena responded with an edge in her tone. It was her and Feya who performed the spell to teleport because Evanora insisted that Yasmin should preserve her strength because of the pregnancy.

Damon sneered at Serena, itchy to teach the ignorant witch that she should speak to an Alpha with respect. He flexed his fingers before balling them into a fist while waiting for her to say more, but she didn't.

"If I knew that so many people will tag along, we would stay behind.", Damon said. He thought that it will be just Yasmin, Axel, Talia, and him, so he insisted for Keith to join as well, but then Evanora arranged for witches and healers from the Midnight Guardians pack to tag along!

Talia put her hand on Damon's forearm and gave him a squeeze, and he understood that she didn't want any trouble. Both of them were tense and they couldn't wait to finish this task and leave the realm of witches.

"I apologize, Alpha Damon", Cassandra said submissively. "Witches are not used to our ways."

Damon turned to look at Cassandra and his hostility swelled. He thought of ignoring her presence, yet now that she spoke, ignoring her was impossible. "Remind me, why are YOU here?"

Cassandra shrunk, and Talia responded, "The Oracle is the one who helped open the portal to this realm, so I thought that her knowledge might be useful."

Cassandra smiled at Talia gratefully.

Damon couldn't believe this. Did Talia invite her?

With Damon calling out Cassandra, Yasmin explained the presence of two witches with, "Serena and Feya are here on my mother's orders, mostly to help in case of an emergency."

Calla felt that she should say something also. "We came because this was a unique opportunity to observe the scenery of this realm and learn beyond what's available in books."

Damon cocked an eyebrow at Calla and two healers from the Midnight Guardians pack.

'Wasn't there one more?', Damon's voice sounded in Talia's head through their mind-link.

Talia understood the question. Calla came with three more healers, yet now only two were here. 'The missing one is Olive. She found her mate last night among witches.'

Damon turned to Talia robotically. 'Aren't witches all females?'

'Mates are mates, regardless of the gender', Talia responded. 'Are you shocked that two females are soulmates?'

'No, no', Damon responded right away. Actually, the mental image of two naked females entangled was hot. But whenever he heard of same-sex couples, it reminded him that there was a possibility of him ending up with a guy, and that thought made his skin crawl.

"Alright!", Yasmin exclaimed, breaking the tense atmosphere. "How about we focus on why we are here?"

Other than Damon being unusually hostile, Talia was also reserved, and the air between Keith and Cassandra was suffocating.

Yasmin thought this will be a friendly group or at least a group that won't be at each other's throats, but now it seemed that she had high expectations. Will they be able to achieve anything if they are just bickering?

Axel was quick to pull a map out of his backpack and spread it on top of a flat rock for everyone to see.

"We are in the area where the disturbance was reported", Axel said. "Since we don't know more than that, let's split into groups and start looking around. Report if you find anything unusual."

Calla looked around. This looked like an alien planet. "Can you define, unusual?"

"When you see it, you will know", Serena responded.

"Regardless of if you found anything or not, let's meet back here in... three hours?", Axel suggested.

They looked at each other, and Talia asked the question everyone had. "How do we tell time here?"

Yasmin pointed at the sky and a silver spark shot up. Once it was high in the air, the spark transformed into a long white string that emitted pulsating light.

"It will grow smaller with time passing. When you don't see it anymore, it's time to come back.", Yasmin said.

They all murmured in agreement and moved in groups of twos and threes.

Talia and Damon were surprised to see that Serena and Feya were in a group with Cassandra. Didn't two witches come to keep an eye on Yasmin?

Axel was with Yasmin, Calla with Keith, and two healers from the Midnight Guardians pack moved on the right with notepads ready to write down any observations about this realm.

With everyone dispersing, Damon thought how this was not bad. It was just him and Talia. He hooked his arm around her shoulders, and they started walking.

Talia would stop occasionally to check on some plant that she had never seen before. Her actions reminded Damon that Talia had knowledge of herbology and that she wanted to work in the pack hospital. He felt guilty that her wish got pushed to the side because she was his mate, which made her the Luna of the Dark Howlers pack, and that role put her in the spotlight (and danger) she never wanted.

Of course, she was also the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack, and her wolf was ancient, but those were not because of Damon so he didn't think about them with guilt.

The groups met when the white string disappeared, they shared what they observed, had a snack, and then dispersed again.

Werewolves used their senses to scan the area, and witches chanted to increase their perception of energies, but there was nothing out of the ordinary.

The cycle continued until sunset when all of them gathered on the hill from where they started that morning.

Serena and Freya were busy on the side drawing the teleportation diagram that will take them back to the center of the Silver Flame Coven. With the lack of daylight, there was no point in lingering, and a pregnant woman like Yasmin shouldn't spend the night outside.

Axel looked at Yasmin helplessly. She was excited and hopeful in the morning, but now he could feel her dejection. They spent the whole day circling the area, yet they didn't find anything unusual.

"I'm sorry, love", Axel said. "It seems that too much time passed."

Yasmin smiled at him sadly and tears swelled in her eyes. "It's OK." It was not OK. "Since we are here, how about we watch the sunset? It will be a farewell to my father."

They all sat on the ground and faced solemnly the small orange circle that was disappearing at the horizon.

Yasmin leaned on Axel and cried silently.

## **Chapter 708 The expedition (2)**

Yasmin knew that Axel was right, too much time passed. But she still hoped that they will find something, anything. The possibility of her father being alive was slim, but she wanted to know what happened... maybe retrieve his body to give him a funeral, and like this... she had nothing.

Serena and Feya were chanting softly, it sounded more like a sad song than a spell, and it added to the somber atmosphere.

Yasmin's vision of the sunset was blurry from the tears that ran down her cheeks, and Axel's solid arm around her shoulders did little to comfort her.

It was a strange thing because Yasmin grew up without the presence of her father, and most of the times when she thought of him, it was with hate. Just one day ago, she found out about his name, yet she mourned his loss.

Talia wanted to help Yasmin, but she didn't know how. Since she became the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack, Talia's senses were amplified and she was not sure if the sorrow she felt was coming from Axel or from Yasmin, or from everyone around her; or maybe that was her own guilt because instead of sympathizing with Yasmin who was right now suffering, Talia was keeping her distance because of her paranoia how everyone was set to harm her and Damon.

Talia stood up and walked to sit next to Yasmin.

"I am sorry...", Talia choked on her words because she was crying as well.

Yasmin released Axel and embraced Talia, and the two females sobbed into each other's shoulders.

"I wish I can help you", Talia said. She knew very well the pain of uncertainty as her heart was aching from the desire to find out what happened to her parents.

Yasmin sobbed harder and neither of them noticed that the air around them stilled.

Damon was alerted when a gust of wind started circling around Talia and Yasmin. The red dust was black in the darkness, and it rose with the wind, enveloping Talia and Yasmin and obstructing the view of them completely.

Everyone got on their feet, unsure what to do.

Keith started walking toward the wind funnel, and Cassandra pulled him back.

"Let go!", Keith growled.

"It's not your time", Cassandra responded.

Keith was not sure what to do. Should he trust the Oracle? But she already wanted to harm Damon, and how can Keith stand still and watch while Talia was trapped in who-knows-what?

"Talia! Yasmin!", Damon and Axel shouted at the same time, but the only thing they got in response were pulses of light that came from the spot where Talia and Yasmin were.

Damon and Axel exchanged panicked glances that quickly turned into determination. Both of them crouched, ready to jump into whatever tornado was going on, but then it all suddenly stopped, and the dust fell down like someone canceled the wind completely.

Talia and Yasmin released each other and blinked to look around.

"Kitten", Damon called desperately while pulling Talia in his embrace. He had enough of these mysterious events that made him feel like he was about to lose her. "Let's go home. Now." Before something else happens.

"I'm OK", Talia assured him, and then she noticed that Axel was frantically hugging Yasmin while everyone else stared at them.

"What happened?", Talia asked.

"Your magic resonated", Axel said.

"How do you know about that?", Serena asked Axel suspiciously.

Axel frowned at her. "Why wouldn't I know about it?"

Feya responded. "Because magic resonance on this level is something that only high-level witches with compatible energies can achieve in specific circumstances. We didn't have such an occurrence in our Coven in this generation, but we know about it from the ancient texts. Did you have such events in your realm? Did you lie about not meeting witches before?"

"Whoa! Whoa!", Keith stood in front of Feya, blocking her view of Axel. "How about we all assure that Alpha Talia and Luna Yasmin are fine before we start pointing fingers?"

"Look at this..."

Cassandra's breathy voice was heard, and everyone looked at her staring at the ground.

Only then everyone noticed that the ground below them was pulsating in an eerie light blue glow that formed a big circle, resembling an image that one would make with irregular scratches.

"These are remnants of concentrated energy", Axel said and looked at Yasmin. "Your resonance with Talia activated it."

"And how do you know that?", Serena snapped. This was obviously witches-only knowledge!

"Instead of doubting me, start analyzing the formation. This will last a few minutes at most.", Axel growled and both Serena and Feya shrunk.

Talia realized that Axel was kind of an expert here. When did that happen?

'Seriously, how do you know about these things?', Talia asked Axel through their pack mind-link.

Axel smiled smugly. 'I spent yesterday afternoon and the whole night in their archives.'

'And you accidentally read about these things?'

'Not accidentally. It was systematically', Axel responded smugly. 'My ability evolved. I will tell you about it later.' He continued talking normally for everyone to hear. "We should focus on this formation as it might be a clue we were looking for."

Halers quickly took their notepads and started scribbling while witches crouched to probe with their energies areas that were glowing.

Just as Axel said, a few minutes later, the circular glowing formation from the ground dimmed and then it disappeared completely.

"What was that?", Cassandra asked, unable to contain her curiosity. She was scribbling notes while trying to copy the way designs in the ground curved, but with Talia taking away her power, that was as far as she could go. Everyone was quiet and she wanted answers.

Axel hummed before responding, "Based on the circular pattern, it looked like a wind created by magical energies."

"Was it because of Talia and me?", Yasmin asked.

Axel shook his head. "No. If you caused it, you would be at the center. But it is highly likely that your energy reached this area and stimulated it in some way."

"Do you think it could be a portal?", Talia asked.

"Portals require runes and items to work. This area is completely flat.", Serena said.

Axel disagreed. "There are different types of portals. This could be a teleportation spell."

"Teleportation spells don't leave magic traces behind. Once the diagram is erased, it's gone.", Feya argued.

Damon snorted. "You are assuming that all portals are the same. Don't you preach how the world is full of wonders and creatures with different abilities?"

"There are stories about Gods who could open portals at will.", Talia added to reinforce Damon's point.

Yasmin frowned. "Are you saying that a God opened a portal and kidnapped my father?"

Talia spread her arms helplessly. "God is just a term for a creature that's beyond our comprehension. Maybe not kidnapped. What if two Gods battled here, caused a disturbance in energies that your father came to investigate and he ended up swept away in it? Unless you have a better idea, we will go with that."

Axel waved his hand to get everyone's attention. "Let's not stray from the topic. We came here to investigate what happened when Evanora's mate disappeared, and we found a clue. Since it's night, I suggest that we return back. We could all use some rest. It won't be too late to discuss our observations tomorrow."

Serena and Feya stiffened. With Axel making a point on how this was related to the high priestess, it became more important.

### **Chapter 709 The expedition (3)**

Yasmin was not willing to leave that place. Not now when she found something.

"Talia and I can stimulate the area with our energies. Maybe we find more clues."

"How will you stimulate it?", Axel asked with disapproval obvious in his voice.

"We will use our abilities at the same time.", Yasmin responded.

Talia was not sure if that was a good idea, but Yasmin looked at her pleadingly, so she thought about how to please everyone.

"Yasmin and I will make a small circle around this hill and see if we find something. In the meantime, you guys organize notes and prepare for the teleportation back to the Coven." She turned to Yasmin. "Even if we find something, we will take notes on it, and investigate further some other time."

"OK. Let's do this.", Axel said.

Yasmin stopped him. "Just Talia and I. You can pack the maps and make sure everything else is ready."

Axel didn't want to leave Yasmin out of his sight, but then he remembered that she will be with Talia, the strongest Alpha ever, so... Yasmin will be safe.

Damon wanted to come along, but Talia stopped him with one look, and words only he could hear, 'Let me be alone with Yasmin. I want to apologize.'

"Be safe", Damon said, without bothering to use the mind-link. "If anything, and I mean if ANYTHING, unusual happens..."

"I will let you know.", Talia ended instead of Damon. She gave him a quick kiss on the lips and then Yasmin and Talia walked away.

Talia and Yasmin moved among the bushes, neither of them had difficulties seeing in the dark.

Yasmin was chanting occasionally, and Talia would follow with a silvery light that was emitting from her palms.

Talia wanted to apologize for being insensitive and keeping her distance from Yasmin since their talk at the fountain, but Talia didn't know where to start. Yasmin was completely focused on what she was doing, and Talia decided to keep that apology for later. Besides, Yasmin didn't seem to be bothered by it, probably because she had other things on her mind.

"Thank you for indulging my unreasonable request", Yasmin said after some time.

"Don't worry about it", Talia was quick to respond. "If I had a single clue on how to find what happened to my parents, I would do anything, no matter how silly it sounds."

"Yet you didn't show your necklace to my mother", Yasmin said.

Talia paused. Yasmin was right. Talia wanted to show the necklace to Evanora, who was the most knowledgeable of witches, but Talia also feared that Evanora might misuse the information contained there. What if it has something super-secretive and Evanora decided to use it against Talia?

Before Talia could respond, Yasmin said, "I understand. You are wary of my mother, and... it's for a good reason. I'm not saying that she has malicious intent toward you, but she has her priorities."

Talia released a slow breath. "Don't we all?"

"So, what are your plans?"

"Damon and I want to return to the Midnight Guardians pack as soon as possible. No later than tomorrow. What about you?"

Yasmin thought they will stay longer. She wanted more time with her mother and sisters in the Coven, and she also wanted to know more about her father. She just scratched the surface! But they came together, would it be fine to separate? Yasmin also knew that Axel wanted to spend time with Talia, at least while she was here.

Yasmin wondered if she should try to convince Talia to stay longer.

Unfortunately, considering Talia's reaction from the previous night at the fountain, Yasmin understood that Talia feared for her safety and no amount of persuasion will let her stay unless Yasmin can guarantee that no one will touch them. Could Yasmin make such a promise?

What if someone makes a move against them sneakily? Based on the amount of power Talia could wield, Yasmin feared for the safety of the Silver Flame Coven if anyone dared to provoke this seemingly fragile female. And there was also Damon who would probably smash any part of the Coven that Talia missed during her rampage.

A rustling from behind was heard, and both Talia and Yasmin whipped their heads in that direction.

It was Cassandra. The Oracle was approaching Talia and Yasmin while nervously looking back like she feared that someone will follow her.

"Why are you here?", Yasmin asked suspiciously. She didn't interact with Cassandra much, but she knew that Cassandra was a she-wolf who came from the Midnight Guardians pack after messing with dark magic which was taboo.

Cassandra lowered her head in submission. "I was hoping to get a word with Alpha Talia."

"Speak", Talia said curtly. She allowed Cassandra to come here because of her knowledge related to the portals, but that didn't mean Talia liked the Oracle. Cassandra's actions that harmed Damon can't be forgiven no matter how much good she did.

"I know that I'm unworthy and undeserving, but...", Cassandra paused. "I implore you to take me with you, away from here."

Talia's brows came together in a frown. "You want to come to the Dark Howlers pack?"

"There, or the Midnight Guardians pack, or anywhere other than here. Please."

Talia tilted her head while processing Cassandra's words. "Didn't you stay here on your volition?"

Cassandra raised her head to meet Talia's scrutinizing gaze. "I stayed with the desire to learn, yet..." Cassandra glanced at Yasmin nervously.

"Do you expect me to agree to your request and upset the witches without understanding your reasons?", Talia sneered while wondering what Cassandra was trying to drag her into.

After a long moment, Cassandra turned her back to Talia and Yasmin.

The duo didn't move as Cassandra lifted her long white dress to expose her legs and back.



Talia swallowed the bile that rose in her throat at the sight of mangled skin. The flesh was ruptured, yet not bleeding, and it looked soft and fresh without any signs of healing.

"What did they do to you?", Talia asked, and Cassandra swiftly released the garment to fall down.

"I know I did wrongs. I am not asking you to heal me or to inquire with witches about this. I am only asking you to take me away from here. If you don't...", Cassandra's voice trailed, and Talia didn't need to hear more. Actually, Talia was aware of Cassandra's emotions because she could feel them through the bond of the pack and Talia knew that Cassandra was genuinely in distress.

"Didn't you make a deal to stay in the Silver Flame Coven?" It was Yasmin who asked.

"My deal was with priestess Cornelia", Cassandra responded. "My intention is not to end that deal. I don't mind following priestess Cornelia if that's what Alpha Talia wishes."

Talia released a slow breath. She was angry at Cassandra for what she did, and she wanted the Oracle to suffer beyond just taking away Cassandra's abilities, but this... this was too much.

"I will talk to Damon about the best approach. Be ready, we are leaving tomorrow."

Cassandra's eyes shook and she fell to her knees with her head so low that she was touching the ground.

### **Chapter 710 Pity for the enemy**

"Thank you... thank you...", Cassandra chanted while prostrating herself in front of Talia.

"Don't make a scene", Talia said. She wanted to sound stern, but her voice was shaking. She couldn't imagine the amount of torture Cassandra went through and Talia was conflicted about feeling pity for the woman who tried to harm Damon.

"Go back quickly. Aren't you worried that Serena and Feyra will find you here?", Talia asked while waving impatiently.

Cassandra scrambled to her feet, breathed another 'thank you', and then disappeared among the bushes.

Talia covered her face with her palms. The image of Cassandra's horrid flesh was etched into her mind, and she wished to erase it. Or maybe not... maybe it should stay there as a reminder of what witches are capable of. And not just witches, many others would cause harm indiscriminately. People shouldn't be trusted. No one should.

"Talia", Yasmin called. "About Cassandra, let me explain..."

"Can you heal her?", Talia interrupted Yasmin.

Yasmin paused for a long second before responding, "It won't be easy, but yes."

Talia nodded curtly and resumed moving among bushes with her palms glowing. "If we hurry, we can be back in time for dinner."

Talia didn't want to hear explanations for Cassandra's wounds because nothing could justify torturing a person like that. Maybe witches had their own way of doing things, but the fact that Cassandra was being watched by Serena and Freya told Talia how witches knew that what they did was wrong.

Talia looked at Yasmin who was visibly troubled, and she didn't know if she wanted to hug and comfort her or hate her.

Talia reminded herself that no matter what, Yasmin was nice toward her, and she should focus on that.

On the clearing...

'Damon', Talia's voice sounded in his mind and Damon jolted to look around.

'Did something happen?', Damon asked with urgency. He felt that Talia was not happy.

'No, no. Things are fine.', Talia responded quickly. 'Ask Keith to stick to Cassandra. I don't want him to leave her out of his sight.'

'Did she do something?' Damon now suspected that the Oracle did something bad. It wouldn't be the first time.

'Witches are harming her, and I fear they will do it again if none of us is nearby. I will also need your help to get Cassandra to leave with us. Let's discuss details later.'

'Alright', Damon agreed. 'When will you finish what you are doing?'

'Almost done...'

...

After the group returned to the Silver Flame Coven, and things settled down, Axel called Talia to the side to discuss something.

Talia and Axel went into one room and Talia closed the door before asking, "Did Yasmin tell you we are planning to leave tomorrow?"

Damon and Talia were still waiting to disclose this to Evanora, but people who were supposed to leave the realm of witches were notified.

"Yes, I know.", Axel said. "We will come with you."

Talia didn't think that Axel and Yasmin will also leave. Won't this make Evanora hate them more?

Talia was aware that there could be many benefits if they stayed longer. Other than investigating the disappearance of Yasmin's father, Damon and Talia could learn more about portals, their abilities, Guardians, and many other things. But Talia was unsettled as her instincts told her to leave, and no matter how much knowledge was in the Silver Flame Coven, there were also many traps. Cassandra's wretched condition was proof of it.

Would witches do something so vile to her and Damon if they could? Talia didn't want to think about it.

But no matter what they would do to Talia and Damon, Yasmin and Axel were safe. After all, Yasmin was Evanora's daughter, and Axel was her mate. Considering how protective Evanora was of Yasmin, Talia was confident that no harm will come to Axel because harming Axel meant harming Yasmin.

"Are you sure you want to leave with us?", Talia asked. "Don't you want to stay here and bond with your mother-in-law while researching the phenomenon we observed? I'm sure that Yasmin would like to investigate it more."

Axel waved his hand dismissively. "We don't need to be here to figure out what it means."

Talia eyed him suspiciously. "It seems you know more than you are telling me. Is that why you called me here?"

"I don't know much about what we observed, but..." He told her that his ability evolved and how he used it to mentally devour thousands of books. Serena was keeping an eye on him when they went to the archives in the afternoon, but then he returned on his own after dinner, and he spent the night reading anything his hands could reach.

"Wait, wait...", Talia said. "Are you telling me that you just need to touch a book and you know its contents?"

Axel was surprised by Talia's excitement. "Yes."

"Woah! Can you go through a few textbooks and then explain them to me quickly?"

Axel was not sure where she was going with it. "Textbooks?"

Talia was embarrassed to admit her situation, but if Axel was about to help, she needed to tell him. "I am taking online courses to get my high school degree. With Damon's help, I'm making good progress, but I still need at least a year to complete everything. With your help, that can go down to months."

Axel couldn't believe this. "You want to use my ability to cheat?"

"That's not cheating. It's not like I'm asking you to take exams in my place." Even though, that would be a good idea. Did she really need calculus in order to be a good Luna and Alpha? Does anyone need those things?

Axel chuckled. She was adorable and he couldn't refuse her. Besides, it will give him more time with Talia, and he wanted to get to know her better.

Talia was happy that Axel agreed, and he even said how she can bring books to the Midnight Guardians pack, and even if it takes her a week of studying (with Axel's help) to prepare for an exam, that would just be hours in the human realm. Talia liked this.

Thinking that they were done, Talia was ready to leave the room and join Damon. Only when he was in her visual range, she was at peace.

But Axel stopped her, saying that there was one more thing he wanted to discuss.

"Now that I've had time to think about everything I've read, I noticed one oddity. As much as witches' archives have a lot of information, there are gaps in data, like someone purposely removed specific records."

"And you are telling me that because...?" Talia waited for him to finish that thought.

"Because I noticed a similar pattern in the Midnight Guardians pack."

Talia could sense the concern behind his serious tone. "Can you explain that?"

"I will need to double-check when we get back, but I am fairly confident that specific documents were removed."

"Like?" Talia could see that he was not talking randomly.

"Like information related to the portals. There might be other gaps but without knowing what should be there, I can't guess what was taken."

"Didn't Evanora say how witches who went to investigate portals took that information with them?"

Axel looked at Talia like she said something silly. "Do you really believe that? Witches treat their archives like a treasure. If it's a book or two, maybe they would allow it. However, how was it possible for them to take ALL information about portals to the field?"