

Alphas Bride 741

Chapter 741 Family that can't be replaced

When Maddox and Tatiana returned, they went straight for the stage where the DJ was.

There was a live music performance scheduled for after dinner, and until then, DJ was ensuring that soft and trendy music covered the murmurs from the guests.

Maddox helped Tatiana climb the stairs and he held onto her tightly as he spoke into the microphone.

"I would like your attention for just a moment," Maddox said. "We want to thank everyone for coming today and for watching the live stream to make this occasion a grand one. In addition to Tatiana and I tying the knot, we also want to share important news." He made a dramatic pause. "We just confirmed that Tatiana is pregnant." He turned to look at the camera. "The Blue River pack has an Alpha pup on the way!"

Humans were a bit confused with the Alpha pup reference, but they just accepted it because everyone clapped and cheered as Maddox was kissing Tatiana like no one was watching.

"Do you feel this, my love?" Maddox spoke into Tatiana's lips. "People are happy for us."

Did she feel it? Yes, she did. Since she became the Luna of the Blue River pack, Tatiana's mood was impacted by the overall atmosphere in the pack. The people were happy and the happiest one was Maddox.

Tatiana and Maddox were still under the shock of this news that came out of nowhere, and anxious about what it meant, but the overall support was encouraging, and Tatiana was confident that things will be alright.

She smiled at Maddox whose eyes were sparkling with excitement, and she couldn't believe that only two months ago she had a totally different life, a life she was happy with, yet she turned her back to it in exchange for this. And she had no regrets. It was a new home, and they were starting their own family and even though it was totally new and unexpected, it felt right. Everything with Maddox felt right.

Damon watched as Maddox helped Tatiana off the stage, and then they drowned in the people from the Wilkow and River family who were waiting to congratulate them.

"Do you want to go there?" Talia asked.

Damon refused. "Not now. We should let their family go first."

Mindy was there bouncing from excitement, and Varya, Kalina, Tony, and Gideon were there as well, but they were letting future grandparents have the first round of hugs.

Kalina was happy for her sister, she really was, but she was mated to Tony before Tatiana and Maddox met, and Kalina also had her heat (more than a month ago) but no baby on the way. Sure, heat doesn't guarantee a pregnancy, but the chances of conceiving a child were high, yet Kalina's oven was empty. Tony told her that this didn't change anything, and they will try again next time, and she shouldn't worry because they were still young, but now that Tatiana was baking Maddox's bun, Kalina felt that she was lacking.

Damon saw that future grandparents were super-excited, giving hugs and kisses and sharing advice on healthy pregnancy, and Damon felt a pang in his chest.

'What's wrong?' Talia's voice sounded in Damon's mind, and he turned to look at her.

He was sure that he blocked all negativity seeping through the mate bond, but Talia could always sense what was going on with him. Was it because Liseli was stronger than Sapa?

'Is there something I can hide from you?' He asked.

'That didn't answer my question.'

He puffed his cheeks. 'It's just... Look how happy Max and Tanya are, surrounded by parents and siblings, and we will never have that. No amount of love will be able to substitute a family you lost.'

Talia's heart shook under the weight of his words. She never met her parents, so any ideas about what family was were just that... ideas. Compared to that, Damon lived with his parents for seventeen years before they were ripped out of his life, and she knew that he yearned for their presence and things that would never happen. Even with all that, he spoke about her needs, putting her first. Wasn't he the sweetest?

'We are a family, Damon,' Talia said while squeezing his hand under the table. 'And we have Maya and Caden, and Axel, Yasmin, Mindy, Gideon, Max, Tanya, Tony, Kalina, Meg, Kai, and so many others. We are not alone.'

Damon stared at Talia and wondered, how did this turn into her comforting him?

'If you don't want to expose Talia's identity, you should stop what you are doing. Right now,' Caden's voice sounded in Damon's head, and Damon realized that he was inching toward Talia. Was he about to kiss her? Probably.

'What is it?' Talia asked when she saw Damon frowning after his eyes lost focus for a moment.

'Caden reminded me that I should keep my lips to myself.'

Talia stifled a laugh, and then she remembered, 'Tell him that Maya will go into heat in about a month. We should give them a vacation.'

Damon was surprised to hear this. 'You can tell when someone is about to go into heat?'

'Not me. Liseli can. Oh, and she said that Mindy will go in heat in five days.'

Damon's eyes lost focus for a moment, and both Mindy and Gideon froze and then whipped their heads to look toward Damon and Talia. They just heard that in five days there will be a window open for them to become parents, and that was huge!

But Damon was ignoring them as he was focused entirely on Talia.

Gideon turned to Mindy. "Did you hear what I heard?"

"I don't know. What did you hear?"

"I heard that in five days..." Gideon paused to pick his words so that his in-laws don't think badly of him. "...my pumpkin will be ready for harvesting."

Mindy's cheeks warmed as moisture pooled at the cradle of her thighs. She knew that she shouldn't imagine visuals of Gideon and her entangled, but it just happened, and she was getting aroused. Mindy took Gideon's hand in hers and pulled him to the side. She didn't want her parents to smell her arousal, and they needed to talk about babies!

At the table, Damon was staring at Talia. He just heard that she can not only diagnose pregnancies but also predict heat, and he had to ask, 'What about you, kitten?'

Talia's eyes widened in slow motion. Was he asking about her heat? It looked like it.

Did she want to know? No matter if it's one day, one month, or one year, she will be super-stressed, and she could only imagine how much fuss Damon will make about it.

Somewhere in the back of her mind, a scary thought appeared. What if she can't have babies? Will Damon hate her for it? Before coming to the Dark Howlers pack, her life was not exactly healthy. She was malnourished, surviving on scraps, and didn't exercise, and even now, her frame was smaller compared to any she-wolf her age. And there was also the point that they marked each other weeks ago (months! If they count time spent in other realms), and she still didn't go into heat.

'I prefer not to know.'

Damon was visibly disappointed but didn't want to push for it.

Chapter 742 Games of deception

Talia thought that the evening was progressing well.

There was music and people, fancy decorations, food, and drinks. The only thing preventing Talia from enjoying it entirely was that she was repeatedly reminding herself not to get too close to Damon. He was next to her, right there, holding her hand under the table; however, leaning on him, cuddling, kissing, and feeding each other were off limits. Talia realized how used she was to those small intimacies with Damon and how awkward it was to stay away.

The good thing was that they were among friends as they shared the table with Maya, Caden, Kai, Meg, James, and Cornelia.

Everyone at the table knew who Talia was and her relationship with Damon, and also about the fact that James and Cornelia were mates.

To the outsiders, James was an interloper at the table that was occupied by the members of the Dark Howlers pack and Midnight Guardians pack, yet James blended in with them quite well.

James made sure not to talk too much so he doesn't spoil his image of an obedient (and ignorant) son, but if anyone paid attention, they would see that he was relaxed and smiling more than usual.

Alpha Edward was checking on James from a distance. He couldn't hear anything, but he could see that the mood there was good. Alpha Edward wanted to mind-link James for updates, but that would risk

distracting the youngster, and also, people at his table were chatty, and he couldn't just disconnect without others noticing.

Alpha Edward regretted that he didn't bring George as part of their group. When he mentioned that they will be attending the Luna ceremony at the Blue River pack, George immediately started talking with Beta Raymond about increased vigilance during the absence of their Alpha, and Alpha Edward got carried away and let George stay to be in charge of security. But now that he thought about it, both James and George spent time in the Dark Howlers pack, and when comparing them, George had better social skills. If George was present, he would have a reason to approach that table and Alpha Natalia and to see what was going on there. Unfortunately, they were already here, so the only thing Alpha Edward could do was rely on James and wait for his chance to approach Alpha Natalia later.

Damon and Talia were surrounded by friends with whom they talked and laughed, and the close interaction between the couple was easily lost when mixed with everything else that was happening there.

As for James and Cornelia, their knees were touching under the table, and James' hand would disappear down there whenever he didn't need both hands to eat, searching for the smooth skin of Cornelia's thigh under the hem of her skirt. James loved that Cornelia didn't push his hand away like she was aware of how desperate he was to feel those sparks of their bond.

Most of the talks at the table were about babies and pregnancy.

Damon mind-linked Maya and Caden to plan for a vacation in a month because Maya's heat will come, and the couple was super-focused on baby talks.

Meg wanted to head to the Lightclaw pack and visit her family first thing in the morning, but they needed to coordinate their departure with Tony and Kalina due to security concerns. Now that Meg was pregnant, the energies she controlled with her ability were flowing differently, and there was a danger of her ability flaring uncontrollably if her emotions become unstable. Cornelia advised Meg to not manipulate energies because there was no way to predict how it will impact her baby.

The consensus was that it would be safest for Meg to return to the Midnight Guardians pack as soon as she could, but she wanted to visit her family first, even if it's just for a bit. They didn't meet Kai, and if she delayed visiting them due to the pregnancy, it would be too much.

The mood was good, but as the event progressed, Damon was losing his patience.

Even with Keith, Caleb, and Lulu stepping in to prevent people from approaching their table, one individual managed to disturb their dinner. Many were eager to talk to Alpha Natalia, and Damon called security to remind everyone that drinks and socializing will happen after the meal.

Talia didn't have anything against talking to people, but she noticed that several women were looking their way, obviously at Damon, which reminded her that her mate was highly desirable and that only a handful of people knew how dangerous it would be to get close to him. Those females were not brave enough to approach Damon during dinner, but Talia could see it happening when people started mingling. Did they think Damon was available because he (officially) came without his Luna?

Talia sneered while imagining those women tripping 'accidentally' right in front of Damon and spilling their drinks on him, and then apologizing while offering to clean up the mess personally. Bitches! No one gets to touch Damon. He was hers!

"Do you really want to mix with these people after dinner?" Talia asked Damon, not bothering to use their mind-link.

Damon's expression brightened. "You want to call it a night early?"

"And miss all this?"

Damon didn't get it. Did she want to leave the party or not? "What's your plan?"

Talia smiled and spoke through their mind-link. 'I would love if you could hold me for everyone to see while they wonder what's our relationship.' And those sluts who are coveting Damon could die from envy.

Damon had no objections. But how can he hold Talia without revealing they were mates or making them look like cheaters? And then it hit him. 'You want us to dance?'

'Oh, Mr. Blake! How nice of you to offer. I would love to.'

Damon loved how she was bold and innovative in this game of deception. And he loved the idea of them dancing for everyone to see while not knowing the truth. Now only if he could kiss her, that would make everything better.

James noticed that Damon and Talia went to the dancefloor as soon as they finished their meal. He saw them holding each other while swaying to the music, and he thought it was a great idea.

"Miss Cornelia," James called. "Would you like to dance?"

Cornelia's eyes shifted to the dancefloor. She danced a lot in the Silver Flame Coven, but this music was different, and people danced as couples, and the legs moved strangely, and she wore those wretched high heels.

"Uhm... I don't know how", she admitted.

James smiled a little. He was not really an expert, but as part of his education to be the next Alpha, he also had a few dancing lessons, so he had several moves ready. He could imagine twirling Cornelia, making her bend backward, and then he would help her straighten while their noses touched. Maybe he could sneak in a kiss without people noticing.

James was about to offer to teach her how to dance when he noticed a presence behind him.

"James, my son," Alpha Edward greeted cheerfully. "Good job on representing us at the ceremony. Do you mind introducing me to your partner?"

James' mood went to hell. Why was his father here? And why did he make it sound like James was a groomsman for the sake of the Red Moon pack?

Chapter 743 Alpha Natalia's special advisor (1)

When James snapped to his senses, he saw Cornelia's warm brown eyes directed at him, silently sending him messages he didn't understand, but he knew that she was telling him they were in this together.

Alpha Edward was right there, behind him, exchanging shallow pleasantries with Meg and Kai.

Damon, Talia, Maya, and Caden were on the dancefloor, and James wondered if his father had waited for people from the Dark Howlers pack to leave their table before coming there. Alpha Edward and Alpha Damon never got along well, and things worsened after the Marcy fiasco.

Normally, James could smell Alpha Edward from a mile away, but when James was with Cornelia, everything faded because her sweet scent of wild berries would overtake his system. Like now.

James turned robotically toward Alpha Edward and forced a smile while getting up. Sitting in front of a standing Alpha was a sign of disrespect.

"Father," James called. "This is Miss Cornelia Silverflame, special advisor to Alpha Natalia Moonrider from the Midnight Guardians pack." He turned to Cornelia. "Miss Cornelia, this is my father, Alpha Edward from the Red Moon pack."

With a stoic expression, Cornelia raised her hand toward Alpha Edward with her fingers curling slightly. She saw that in movies. That was how people greeted royal females; in this setting, she was definitely a royal.

Alpha Edward stared at Cornelia's hand, needing a moment to process the situation. Why was she still sitting? And did she expect him to kiss her hand? Did she treat him like he was inferior? He was an Alpha, for crying out loud!

But Cornelia had a special status, and he couldn't risk offending her. Meg and Kai were observing this interaction, and there were too many witnesses.

Alpha Edward held Cornelia's hand and moved to kiss the back of her palm with, "It's a pleasure, Miss Cornelia."

Cornelia's lips lifted into a smile that didn't reach her eyes. "Oh, trust me, Alpha Edward, the pleasure is mine."

As Alpha Edward bowed to kiss her hand, Cornelia noticed a female behind him.

"And this is?" She asked.

Alpha Edward straightened his posture and stepped to the side while gesturing. "This is my mate, Luna Layla."

Cornelia nodded at Luna Layla, not bothering with pleasantries. She heard how Alpha Edward was harsh toward James; any mistake would result in physical punishments, and that woman who called herself James' mother would just stand there and let it happen. James said he doubted that Alpha Edward was his father, but considering how cold Luna Layla was, Cornelia wondered if that woman was James' mother.

Alpha Edward opened his mouth to say something, but he paused when Cornelia stood up.

"I heard a lot about you, Alpha Edward."

He smiled and leaned toward Cornelia. "Good things, I hope."

James gritted his teeth while suppressing the growl that bubbled in his chest.

James knew very well that sleazy smile and how his father would approach little by little, not making it evident that he was flirting until it was too late. By the time female in question realized what was going on, she was forced to accept his advances or to cause a ruckus by refusing an Alpha. No one dared to offend the Alpha of the second largest pack in North America, and then there were those who foolishly thought that they would get some benefits by giving in.

Cornelia tilted her head and didn't respond to Alpha Edward's comment. Instead, she turned to James. "Is your offer for dancing still valid, or does your parents' appearance change that?"

"Still valid," James responded right away.

Cornelia hooked her hand with James' and said to Alpha Edward. "I would love to stay and chat, but my partner asked me for a dance, and it wouldn't be polite to let him wait."

Alpha Edward's smile fell, and he stared at James, silently asking him for an explanation.

"Father, mother," James said while nodding at them. "If you excuse us."

Alpha Edward's face darkened at the sight of James leading Cornelia away.

'What is the meaning of this?' Alpha Edward's voice boomed in James' mind. 'I told you to introduce us and not take her away! And to think that I had to come to her!' Instead of the other way around.

'I asked her to dance before you came,' James responded coolly. 'Did you expect me to go back on my word? I would advise you to avoid Miss Cornelia and let me handle this. Her opinion of our pack is not very good.'

Alpha Edward could smell bullshit from a mile away. 'Not good? She is friendly with you.'

'That's because I prevented her from embarrassment during the ceremony. Didn't you tell me to stick to her and leave a good impression? I am doing my best to turn her gratitude into something more. As a special advisor to Alpha Natalia, Miss Cornelia can open the door of the Midnight Guardians pack for us. Or would you rather I approach those three females you assigned to me in advance? Will you handle the pack that never wanted anything to do with us while I already have a foot through the door?'

After a few seconds of silence, Alpha Edward responded, 'Stay with Miss Cornelia. Make us look good.'

'That's what I'm doing, father. Instead of jeopardizing my progress, I recommend you keep an eye on Nora. If she ends up in a dungeon again, I'm not going to be the one lowering myself so that she can be freed.'

Alpha Edward grumbled something, but James didn't care about it anymore.

James was fuming when his father approached them, and he had no idea how to get Cornelia away from Alpha Edward, but then Cornelia stepped up and humiliated the old guy. Did Alpha Edward realize that

Cornelia looked down on him, and he let it happen? What kind of an Alpha would allow for such a scene to happen? His chocolate-colored Goddess is awesome!

James couldn't enjoy the show fully because now his father knew who Cornelia was. More than her looks, he also got her scent. If Alpha Edward gets a whiff of Cornelia's presence at the Red Moon pack, things will turn sour quickly.

James was spending his nights with Cornelia, and if Alpha Edward could pick up her scent on him, he would think that it was any woman, but now... James will need to shower well after leaving Cornelia's side. Maybe he should get a different shower gel.

They were on the dancefloor now, and James and Cornelia turned to each other.

"I hope you can focus on me now. Others won't disturb us.", Cornelia said.

James agreed with this. He had no idea how tonight would end or the next three, but he knew that right then and there he was with Cornelia, and staying away from her was impossible.

"Put your hands on my shoulders."

Cornelia did as he asked, his hands landed low on her waist, and they started to sway to the music.

They didn't do more than one step left and right, but it was still wonderful because James' hands were on her, and they were close, in the middle of the people who danced, yet it seemed like they were alone. Finally.

Chapter 745 Alpha Natalia's special advisor (3) [Bonus chapter]

After Beta Milo from the Silverfur pack came to ask Cornelia to dance (and she rejected him), James' mood became unstable as he was fighting to control his wolf that craved violence.

James was gripping Cornelia's waist to the point of hurting, and she saw that he was on the verge of snapping.

At first, Cornelia wanted to scold him and tell him to stop being unreasonable, but a moment later, she realized that James grew up in a hostile environment that taught him people were sinister and always plotting something. In all that mess, she was his happy place, and he couldn't bear the possibility of losing her, even if it was only in his head.

How can she scold him for that?

Cornelia wanted to comfort him; to assure him that things will be alright and that no one can take her away, but how can she do that with all the audience? They needed to leave this party and find privacy.

"My leg is aching. Can you help me to my room?"

James' eyebrows shoot up. "Of course."

He wanted to hold her hand or support her by wrapping his arm around her shoulders, but then he got an idea. "How bad is it?"

"Oh, it's bad. I don't think I can dance anymore."

James' eyes flashed with mischief, and in the next moment, Cornelia was in his arms.

Cornelia panicked, and she would bury her face into his neck to hide, but he was carrying her princess style through the crowd that was watching them already, so she made a pitiful face while twisting her leg awkwardly.

Alpha Edward kept an eye on James, and he didn't miss the spectacle. He was about to ask James about the status, but then he heard James' voice in his head, 'Don't disturb me tonight unless it's an emergency.'

Alpha Edward frowned in the direction where James and Cornelia disappeared. From where did that confidence come from? Sure, James had his share of women, but that was only for fun, and Alpha Edward didn't care if James would transform those hookups into something more, but this was important!

Alpha Edward wanted a word with James, to give him advice or maybe swap places with him, but James had left already, and the only thing Alpha Edward could do was hope that James won't blow this opportunity.

Instead of going upstairs, James paused in the hallway and spoke to an Omega in a loud voice, "Can you get us some ice? Miss Cornelia hurt her ankle."

"Do you need me to call a pack doctor?"

James refused. "No need. After icing and rest, she will be fine. Get us some painkillers as well."

Omega didn't think anything was off. Based on James' physique and identity, Omega knew that James trained a lot. Werewolves who train are prone to injuries, and it would be normal to know first aid to some degree.

"I will bring those in a minute," Omega said and scurried away.

Cornelia looked at James gratefully. If they just went upstairs, people would think they were going to get frisky. And that was not wrong, but like this, thanks to James speaking loudly, at least a few people heard that Cornelia was hurt, and they will connect that as their reason for leaving.

Cornelia bit her lower lip to suppress her smile. Was he protecting her good reputation? Silly man. The only opinion she cared about was his.

Omega brought two icepacks and a bottle of pills, and Cornelia accepted them, still in James' arms.

She loved that he could carry her with ease, like she weighed nothing.

James wanted to take Cornelia into his room, but she gestured in the opposite direction.

"I'm in the secure wing," she said, and he didn't have any objections.

James closed the door behind them and took a split second to scan the room. It had one bed, an attached bathroom, a sofa, and a desk.

Cornelia thought he would take her to bed, but he moved toward the sofa.

James put her to sit there, and then he got on his knees.

Cornelia stared at him as he carefully removed her shoes, one by one. He looked at her feet for a moment before reaching for the right one that had a little swelling in the ankle area.

He caressed her ankle gently while inspecting it visually.

For such an injury, a werewolf wouldn't need ice or medicine, but she was a witch, so he asked, "Does it hurt?"

When she didn't respond, James lifted his gaze to see her staring at him without blinking.

"Cora?"

"Yes?"

James started kneading her foot, and his index finger traced the grooves of her big toe, tickling her, but she didn't want him to stop.

"Do you like this?" He asked.

"Yes," she said, feeling a bit dazed. They were alone, and he was on his knees, tending to her injury like it was the most important thing in the world, and how could she not be affected?

Cornelia sucked in a breath when he put her toe into his mouth. His tongue moved over the pad of her toe, and she gripped the sofa's edge.

He wanted to lick her all over, starting from her toes, and he did.

James arranged kisses and licks, and he grazed her with his teeth while making his way up her leg. By the time he reached her knee, she was breathing heavily.

He loved that he had this effect on her, but what he loved even more was that she was allowing him to explore her freely, to touch her everywhere and see where her pleasure points were hiding. James had already discovered many spots that made her soft like clay for him to mold, but he knew there were more, many more, just for him to find.

James continued kissing and nipping her skin while pushing her skirt higher, and the scent of her arousal muddled his mind.

He pushed her panties to the side and touched her there.

"Fuck!" He cursed under his breath. She was wet and hot, and his, and he didn't bother with undressing her, for now.

James grabbed her hips and pulled her toward him, until she was sitting at the edge of the sofa.

Cornelia held her breath at the intensity with which he stared at the cradle of her thighs while spreading her legs as far as they go. No matter how many intimate moments they shared, he always looked at her with the hunger of a man who never tasted meat.

She saw him licking his lips as he leaned closer, and then he lapped at her love nectar with urgency, savoring her taste of wild berries, his favorite.

Cornelia fisted his hair and cried his name, desperate for a release he was happy to provide her with.

James smiled smugly when he lifted his head, and he licked her juices from his lips while looking at her disheveled appearance. When did she mess up her hair? It didn't matter.

He unbuttoned his pants impatiently, and the moment his erection sprang free, he was already pushing inside her.

That was it, the Heaven he was looking for.

"I love you, Cora... only you... my only one..." He murmured while thrusting into her.

She gripped his shoulders and threw her head back to stare at the ceiling, happy to be with her mate, alone, just the two of them, just how nature intended it to be.

The party, Alpha Edward, three women who hoped James would return and give them his attention, and those nobodies who wanted to dance with Cornelia... none of those mattered anymore.

Chapter 746 The calm before the storm

Alpha Maddox and Luna Tatiana were hosts, and they had many famous and powerful people in attendance. However, one person was the center of attention: Alpha Natalia Moonrider.

Alpha Natalia stepped into the limelight reserved for the most influential individuals of the werewolf society at the Council of the Alphas. At that time, she introduced herself as Talia Moonrider, but everyone accepted her name as Natalia. It was apparent that Talia was just a part of her name, and people assumed that whoever spread the news of her existence didn't hear it right the first time. She appeared out of nowhere, but considering the mysterious status of the Midnight Guardians pack, no one could find a fault in that.

Pretending not to notice many eyes on her, Talia immersed herself in dancing with Damon. There was so much meaning in how he held her firmly and guided her skillfully over the dancefloor. She hoped this could last forever.

They moved like one, without breaking eye contact, and only a blind person wouldn't notice the magnetic attraction between them.

Damon's aura was leaking as a warning to others not to get too close, and there was a circle devoid of people around them.

'I'm sure everyone thinks we are sleeping together,' Talia's voice sounded in Damon's mind through their private mind-link.

Damon's lips twitched into a smug smile. 'And they are not wrong.'

Talia exhaled helplessly. 'They think that you are cheating on your mate with me.'

Damon didn't care. 'As long as you know I am yours only, everything will be alright. But if anyone dares to say anything bad to you...'

He stopped talking because Talia burst into giggles.

'Who will dare to say anything bad to me?' Talia asked while looking around. As her gaze traveled over faces, heads dropped in submission.

'Do you see this?' Talia asked, 'They are bowing their heads, and I'm not even suppressing them.'

'I can see that. My woman is amazing,' Damon said without missing a beat. 'If you aren't my mate, even I would struggle against the urge to submit to you.' He really meant it.

Talia's eyes snapped to look at Damon. 'I am stronger. Is it because of your mark?'

Damon was not sure. 'It's possible. This is the first time you see so many high-ranking werewolves. Release some of your aura, to test the range and strength.'

Talia was tempted to test her power, but she didn't want to cause a commotion. 'You think this is a game.'

He looked at her like she had said something silly. 'But this IS a game, a game of power, and we are at the top, kitten.'

Being at the top reminded her that everyone was watching them. People would submit the moment they met Talia's gaze, but she knew that under that submission was fear and uncertainty. It was not difficult to guess that most of these people would try to get her on their side or backstab her if they got a chance, and that thought left her unsettled.

But above tangible hostility, there was one more point that made her nervous. Things were quiet, too quiet. How come no one approached her so far? Talia thought of trying out something.

"How about we get something to drink?" Talia suggested.

Damon's brows came together in disapproval as he shared his thoughts through their mind-link, 'You want to make yourself available.'

Talia didn't deny it. 'I came here as Alpha Natalia and not your Luna so that we see what will happen. Nothing will happen if we spend the evening dancing. Even if people don't think of us as mates, they see you as a wall they need to cross before reaching me.' She looked at him with admiration. 'And no one would dare to challenge you.'

Damon loved the praise, but he hated the idea of others coming close to Talia. However, he knew she was right. Backing out now would mean wasting the last few hours of their efforts to pretend that Talia was not his mate.

Reluctantly, Damon released Talia from his hold. "Let's go to the bar."

The event hall connected to the garden; both were filled with tables where people were sipping drinks and munching snacks and desserts. Along the left wall of the event hall was a long bar behind which five Omegas were busy mixing drinks.

When Damon and Talia approached the bar area, people moved to give them space.

She sat on a barstool, and Damon stood next to her protectively.

Talia glanced over her shoulder at the silly Alpha, who glared at anyone brave enough to look their way.

'This won't do,' Talia said. 'How about you go and chat with someone? Or use a restroom?'

Damon grumbled something under his breath, and then he said, 'Sure. Let me just call Keith here.'

'No, no,' Talia was quick to refuse. Keith might not be so intimidating as Damon, but he was also protective. If people try to get close to her casually, Keith will make a big deal out of it.

'Give me ten minutes. Fifteen at most.' She pleaded.

'At least call some of your girlfriends.'

'Who will I call?' Talia asked. 'Everyone is celebrating,' with their mates mostly, 'and I don't want to ruin this for them. Besides, look where we are, this is Max's backyard, and no one will dare to do anything inappropriate.'

Damon was not willing, but he didn't want to push it. 'Ten minutes. Make that five. After that, I'm sticking to you whether you like it or not.'

'How can I not like it?'

Damon shook his head helplessly. 'I will keep an eye on you.' And then he moved away and disappeared out of her sight.

Talia waved at one bartender who was ready to take her order. She was not sure what to get, so she pointed at the pink cocktail that was further down the bar.

Talia could feel many eyes on her, and she wondered how long it would take for someone to approach her.

Damon made his way to where Keith was. Caleb and Lulu were in different locations, all three keeping their eyes on Talia. Damon approved.

'Do you want us to get closer?' Keith asked Damon through their mind-link.

'No need,' Damon responded. There was a need, but Talia didn't want it. 'How is the night going? Anything suspicious?'

'Nothing really', Keith said. 'It feels like people are keeping their distance from the two of you on purpose. Do you think Alpha Maddox instructed that you shouldn't be disturbed?'

Damon thought about this for a moment. That was a possibility, but it didn't make sense. Why would Maddox do such a thing? Damon and Talia didn't come here to pretend they were untouchable; they only wanted to conceal Talia as Damon's mate.

Damon attended many events in the past, and no matter how grumpy he was, there was always someone bold enough to strike a conversation. This was different.

Their friends would engage in chat, and the neutral ones would keep their interaction to small pleasantries, but their enemies would use events like these to gather information and backstab them. Damon didn't like this. It was too quiet, almost like the calm before the storm.

Chapter 744 Alpha Natalia's special advisor (2)

Cornelia was worried about her high heels, but with her holding onto James' shoulders and moving slowly at the beat of the music, it was not so bad. Actually, she enjoyed it very much because it was with James.

"Will your father give you a hard time?" She asked.

James shook his head. "Don't worry about him. My mission for tonight is... you."

Cornelia's eyes widened. "Did your father ask you to charm me with your good looks?"

"What if he did?"

"Then, I look forward to being charmed. But you should tell him I'm not a woman who will be satisfied with just one night."

James chuckled, and he really wanted to kiss her, but he knew it wouldn't be appropriate. Damned party! He was glad that he didn't need to entertain random women, and that Cornelia was right there, close enough for him to inhale her addictive scent of wild berries, and he could hold onto her, yet it was not close enough.

"What is weighing on your mind, Jay?" Cornelia asked in a whisper.

He smiled sadly, her concern was genuine, and it touched his heart.

"Many things," he admitted. Mostly about the future and the two of them. He didn't want to spoil the mood, but the images of his father getting kissing Cornelia's hand were flashing in his mind, and he feared that Alpha Edward will take her away.

"Don't worry too much," she said. "Nature has a way of making things work. You were worried about this party, yet here we are, together, dancing."

James knew she was right, but... "Things don't always work out for the best."

"Nature is teaching us by providing situations where we get to learn and grow, and if the same challenge repeats, it means we didn't overcome it the previous time."

"You are saying that as long as I don't get rid of obstacles, this will keep repeating." The biggest obstacle being Alpha Edward.

Cornelia confirmed. "If you pay attention, you will notice that every next time, you are handling it with more confidence. Your experience taught you lessons you wouldn't know otherwise. On top of that, you are not alone."

He was not alone. James knew that she was talking about herself and all the other people they had befriended in the last few weeks; some of them were present at this event. Could he call them friends or allies? Would they help him if it meant jeopardizing their safety? That would be the time he needed them the most, yet he had a feeling that if things turned to worse, only Cornelia would stand by his side. And it was contradictory because in that case, he wouldn't want Cornelia with him; he would want her far away, where it was safe. If anything happened to Cornelia, he would go mad, and if she suffered because of him, it would make things so much worse.

Cornelia could feel his mood fluctuating again. She knew that James had a lot on his mind, it was a habit that allowed him to survive in harsh conditions, and her heart ached for him.

She wanted to comfort him, but how could she do that with all these people around?

"Excuse me..." A male voice drifted their way, and both Cornelia and James snapped to look at the middle-aged man.

Cornelia had no idea who the man was, but James recognized him.

"General Dalton," James called grimly. "What brings you here? Did Alpha Richard send you here to deliver a message for my partner or me?"

General Dalton's expression darkened. Why did James reduce him to a messenger? He decided to ignore James and focus on the person why he was there.

"Miss Cornelia, I wonder if I can have the honor of dancing with you."

Before she could respond, James asked her, "Do you know him?"

"I didn't get a chance to meet the gentleman."

James shook his head. "Miss Cornelia, you are too kind. A gentleman wouldn't interrupt two people dancing. This is General Dalton from the Steelbite pack. And it seems that he left his mate at home, otherwise, Melanie wouldn't allow him to approach you."

General Dalton couldn't believe this. "Don't twist this into something that is not."

"And what is it?" James sneered.

"I just asked the lady for a dance with the hope that we can talk and get to know each other. There is nothing more to it." He turned to look at Cornelia. "I had no indecent thoughts."

Cornelia observed James, who had fire coming out of his eyes. Her mate was possessive, and she liked it very much.

"I apologize, General Dalton," Cornelia said. "But I am dancing with young Alpha James, and we were in the middle of a conversation. If you still wish to dance with me later, you can approach me when I'm at the table."

General Dalton forced a smile and, "Of course. Pardon my intrusion." And then he turned on his heel and walked away.

Cornelia smiled at James, who was still glaring in the direction where General Dalton disappeared.

"If you act like that, people will suspect something," she said.

James' eyes flashed at her. "Should I step to the side and let him take you?"

"No. But you should let me reject him."

James liked her answer, but he was still pouting.

How come no one interrupted Damon and Talia? Damon was too strong, and no one dared to cut in, while James was just a fledgling. He needed to get stronger and do it quickly, or someone might snatch Cornelia away from him!

Thinking about how to pacify her mate, Cornelia said, "I have a feeling that soon my ankle will get worse, and I will need help from someone to escort me to my room."

James was not sure if her injury was really worsening or if she was just playing, so he had to ask, "How bad is it?"

"It won't get better for a long time. Probably until morning."

Now he knew she was joking. "It will be a pity for such a beautiful woman to spend the night alone. I will be honored to give you company as you heal, Miss Cornelia."

"I will hold you to your word, young Alpha James."

He wished that she held much more than just his word. And she will. Soon.

Cornelia noticed James frowning while looking at the left side of her neck, realizing that's where his mark is. She covered it up with makeup, and he didn't like it.

"I'm sorry", she said.

James was surprised by this apology. "What? Why?"

"Because I... covered it up."

He pressed his lips into a line. "It is I who should be apologizing."

It was Cornelia's turn to be confused. "Why would you apologize?"

He leaned closer and spoke softly, "If I'm not this weak, there wouldn't be a reason for you to cover it up."

"Please, don't blame yourself," she quickly said, the guilt was gnawing on her insides. Now that he was looking at her sadly, she wondered why she hid that mark in the first place.

"Jay," she called. "Remember what I said about nature giving us challenges and teaching us lessons? Think of this as one of those. Next time, I won't cover it up."

James' heart expanded at the sincerity his chocolate-colored Goddess was encouraging him to stay strong. She was wise, and her words touched his soul, and no one ever coaxed him so gently yet with so much strength.

But James didn't want the next time because he wanted to figure out the mess with his father and to come up with something that would allow him to be with Cornelia, without hiding.

Chapter 747 An instigator

Talia was sitting at the bar and mixing her pink cocktail with the tiny umbrella while wondering how much time had passed. Was it too obvious that she made herself available on purpose? Was that why no one had approached her so far?

"Alpha Natalia," a male voice got her attention, and Talia perked up. Someone took the bait!

"I am Beta Milo from the Silverfur pack. I wonder if you remember me."

Talia was pleased that someone had made a move. "Of course, I remember you, Beta Milo. We met at the Council of Alphas."

"It's an honor." He looked around. "I don't see your Beta here."

"Betas," Talia corrected him. "Meg and Kai are enjoying this event. It is a party." Talia was itchy to skip the useless chit-chat. "What brings you here?"

Beta Milo shifted on his feet awkwardly. "This is about my daughter."

Talia didn't get it. "Your daughter?"

"Yes, my daughter, Jade. I'm not sure if you got a chance to meet her."

Talia needed a moment to connect the dots.

Jade... the Silverfur pack... Beta's daughter... Jade... JADE!

Jade was the latest on the long list of females who dared to come to the Dark Howlers pack with the intention of claiming Damon as hers!

'Kitten? Do you want me to handle him?'

Damon's voice pulled Talia out of her thoughts. 'No need. Unless he is hostile, let me talk to him. Please.'

'Feel free to provoke him into hostility. I'm ready to beat him into submission and make this party more memorable.'

Talia bit the inside of her cheek to prevent herself from smiling. Beta Milo will think she was flirty!

Where were they? Oh, yes, he brought up Jade, the wretched woman who was now doing hard work at the Dark Howlers pack with Omegas, and the WW Magazine published an article about it. But if Talia said she was familiar with that, it might be suspicious. After all, why would the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack bother with gossip about the daughter of a Beta from another pack?

"No. I didn't meet your daughter, Beta Milo. Is she here? Do you plan to introduce us?" Talia asked.

"I wish," he said. "Jade could learn a lot from you, but unfortunately, she is being detained in the Dark Howlers pack."

"Detained?"

Beta Milo nervously looked around. "Pardon my crude choice of words. Officially, she is there doing charity work, but I know that's not my Jade. She is there against her will. Her agent called to tell me that she missed her latest fashion show, and Jade would never miss those. I tried talking to Alpha Damon about Jade's situation, but he refused to answer my calls. Something is wrong. I know it. Please, as a female, you should understand. She is my only child, not used to harsh conditions."

Talia's eyes widened when she understood where this was going. "You want me to talk to Damon about your daughter."

"If it's not too inconvenient..."

"What's in it for me?" Talia cut him off impatiently.

He looked at her in disbelief. "What do you want?"

"Surely you know that Alpha Damon and I are on good terms. However, our relationship is rather new and fragile. If I'm going to ask for a favor, it won't come for free."

Beta Milo swallowed hard. "Can you at least find out why she was detained and her current circumstances? Based on that, we can negotiate further."

Talia leaned closer and spoke in a low voice. "Your daughter is detained because she crossed Alpha Damon's bottom line."

His eyes flashed. "So, you know about it!"

Talia shrugged. "Yes and no. I don't know because I have never heard of your daughter, but it's not difficult to deduct that considering her status, if she was detained, she offended Alpha Damon enough for him not to worry about offending you. I'm sure you heard recent rumors."

"What rumors?"

"About the females that were imprisoned and disappeared because they dared to insult his Luna. Do you know why your daughter went there? Was it an official function, a social visit, or did she go there to seduce him?"

Beta Milo's expression stiffened.

Talia made a face. The old guy not only knew, but he probably encouraged her to do her best and get into Damon's bed. Bastards! They were all in this together, set to take Damon away from her!

"Beta Milo," Talia called. "Are you aware that you are looking at the Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack? Is my title worthless in your eyes? I wonder what gave you the courage to speak to me openly about going against my ally in order to save a random woman. It would be different if you offered me some compensation, yet you thought I would do it because I am a woman. Is the Silverfur pack so misogynic?"

Beta Milo's lips were moving, but no sound came out. What came out of him were beads of sweat that covered his body, making him look like he had just come out of a shower. His whole body shook as he bent awkwardly under Talia's pressure.

"You should think before you talk, Beta Milo. Is your Alpha aware you are here, instigating me to work against the Dark Howlers pack? Do I look like an easy target to manipulate? Is it my age or gender that gives you the courage to look down on me?"

Beta Milo saw dark spots, and he was sure someone had turned off the lights. "That's not what I'm..."

"What are you trying to do? You are old enough to know that your actions might provoke a war." Talia sneered. "You are lucky that this is a party, and I don't want to ruin it for Alpha Maddox and his Luna. Your Alpha will hear from me."

Talia slid from the barstool and walked out while ignoring all shocked gazes directed her way.

She knew that she exaggerated, but she was royally pissed that the man came with a request for Talia to speak up for Jade, a woman who called her Omega just because she was holding a tray with food, a woman who came to seduce Damon while pretending there was some deal between them. Shameless!

She needed a moment to calm down, so Talia decided to go into the section of the garden that was not set up with tables and chairs and not illuminated with fairy lights. It's not like she needed lights to see anyway.

Talia found an unoccupied bench nestled between two rose bushes, and she sat there searching for solitude. Looking around, Talia realized that the bench was quite hidden. Should she call Damon and steal some kisses? Sneaking around sounded exciting, and she could use his proximity. Where was he? Would he let her come out here on her own?

Talia was about to mind-link Damon when she heard rapid steps approaching. Her head snapped that way to see a child running toward her. It was a boy, about six-to-seven years old, with a head full of short blonde hair. He wore black pants and a white shirt, dressed up for a party.

Talia thought it was kids playing, but his expression showed distress.

The boy zoomed past Talia, leaped over the bench, and squatted between rose bushes.

He was breathing heavily, but he managed to whisper, "Please, don't tell them I'm here. I will make it up to you."

Chapter 748 Damon's competition

Talia wondered who would chase a boy that obviously belonged to this party. Did he make some mischief? Did he see something he shouldn't have? Or were baddies after him?

Talia's every next possibility was more dangerous and her head whipped in the direction from where more hurried steps were heard.

Talia looked incredulously at the three girls that came into view; they wore fancy dresses and had neat hair. None of them could be more than ten years old, and Talia wondered if they were also being chased by someone.

The three girls stopped to talk to Talia.

"Aunty, did you see a pretty boy?" One girl asked.

Talia realized that the girls were looking for the boy who was behind the bench. Were they his friends? Should she expose him? She decided against it. "I am here for a while, and I didn't see a boy."

The girls exchanged dejected expressions and then continued to follow the path with urgency.

Talia craned her neck to see the boy squatting behind the bench. "They are gone now; you can come out."

His head peeked out, and then he climbed over the bench.

Talia looked at the little man straightening his shirt with, "Girls are pretty. Men are handsome. They are stupid." He had black shoes, black dress pants, a white shirt, and a green necktie.

He ran his hand through his hair several times and then turned toward Talia. "Thank you. I will reward you generously."

Now she was confident that those girls were chasing him.

Talia thought he was adorable, and she wanted to pinch his cheeks. She took a double take at his face that was scratched by the thorny bushes where he hid, and then she realized from where she recognized him. "Are you Ashton, Alpha Cristian's son?"

Alpha Cristian, Luna Michelle, young Alpha Ashton, General Jordan, and General Allen arrived together, but there was a commotion when Jordan and Lidia Wilkow recognized each other as mates, and the boy left into the area where the youngsters were playing, so Talia didn't interact with him.

The boy lifted his chin smugly and confirmed. "I am Ashton Pascal, the future Alpha of the Spring Leaf pack. What is your name, pretty lady?"

Talia smiled at the boy, who already knew how to flatter a female. Those manners, combined with the attitude and handsome physique that his Alpha bloodline will provide when he grows up, he will definitely be a heartbreaker.

"My name is Natalia. Come here."

She helped straighten his shirt and necktie, and then she took a moment to scan their surroundings. No one was there.

"Can you keep a secret?" Talia asked, and he nodded. Talia placed her hands close to his cheeks, and her palms lit up in silvery light, helping the scratches on his face disappear within a second.

Ashton's eyes widened at the warm and soothing sensation that lingered on his face, and he reached to touch his cheek. "You are a fairy," he said breathily.

Talia put her index finger over her lips, indicating how that was a secret, and he nodded fervently.

"Why were those girls chasing you?" Talia asked.

"Apparently, it's a problem when one is this handsome."

"PFT!" Talia burst into laughter. He spoke with a straight face like it was a totally normal thing. Well, he was cute, and he probably will be handsome... in about a decade.

Ashton narrowed his eyes at her. "Are you laughing at me?"

"No, no. I am laughing at those girls who were chasing you, thinking that they can outrun and outsmart a future Alpha."

He scrutinized her for a moment before nodding in agreement. "I like you. You will be my Luna."

"Aren't I too old for you?"

"You can't be more than sixteen years old. When I am twenty, you will be thirty, and that won't be much of a difference. I can see that your sight is good, you helped me when I was facing a crisis, and you are pretty. I will take you."

A growl came from the side, and Talia didn't need to look to know it was Damon.

"How dare you seduce a taken woman?" Damon spoke in a dangerously low voice.

Ashton's eyes moved to Damon. "Alpha Damon, people are saying that you left your Luna at home. Why don't you go to her and leave my Natalia to me?"

Talia couldn't believe that Damon's hostility was rising. "He is just a child."

"A child who wants to take you away. I don't discriminate based on age."

Talia gaped at Damon, unsure if he was joking. Why did it look like she was stuck between two kids fighting over a toy? And she was the toy!

Ashton stood in front of Talia and faced Damon. "Did you come here to bully me because you are bigger? Sure, you can hit me now, but I will get back at you when I get older. However, no matter what you do, Natalia will be my Luna. You can't stop true love. It is only a matter of... Ahh!"

Talia grabbed the child and put him to sit next to her on the bench in order to prevent him from provoking the big bad wolf. "Uncle Damon was just joking. He fears that you are too young for things like love and picking your Luna."

"I am serious. You will be my Luna."

Talia shook her head at the silly child. "Don't you know that an Alpha should take as his Luna his fated mate?"

Ashton pouted. "I am too young to confirm you are my mate. When I am of age, my wolf will confirm it. Don't tell me that you have a mate because you are not of age either."

That reminded Talia that she put makeup to cover up Damon's mark.

"What if I could sense my mate, and I marked him already?" Talia asked.

Ashton's eyes widened. "That will only make you more special. I will introduce you to my parents. I'm sure they will approve."

Talia wanted to respond, but instead of words, a surprised cry left her lips. "Ahh!" Damon lifted her from the bench and held her in his arms, away from Ashton's reach.

"Say that again, I dare you," Damon growled at the boy.

Ashton stood up and pointed his little finger at Talia while glaring at Damon. "Put my future Luna down. You are bullying her!" And then he kicked Damon in the shin.

Damon gritted his teeth while wondering how to punish the stinky boy.

Talia looked down helplessly. "He is a child, Damon." She couldn't believe that she needed to remind Damon of that fact.

"Is our boy causing you trouble?" A female voice came from the side, and they saw Alpha Cristian and Luna Michelle approaching them.

"Ashton is a darling," Talia responded. "The trouble is coming from another boy."

Damon frowned at Talia, and he lowered her in slow motion, careful to place her in such a way so that he was between Talia and Ashton.

"Mother, father," Ashton addressed them in an official tone. "I decided who will be my Luna."

"You did?" Luna Michelle asked.

Ashton nodded seriously. "I asked Natalia to be my Luna, and she accepted. She meets all my criteria. Let me introduce you officially..."

Alpha Cristian and Luna Michelle looked at Damon nervously, and Talia would laugh if Damon was not on the verge of snapping.

Chapter 749 Damon's competition (cont.)

"Please, don't mind him," Luna Michelle said to Damon and Talia, unsure if it was alright to smile at Ashton's silly antics in front of Damon's furious expression. "Come on, Ashton. It's time to go home."

"You are not staying overnight?" Talia asked.

Alpha Cristian responded, "The drive is not long, and I need to handle a few matters in the morning. If schedule allows it, we will return tomorrow or the next day."

Ashton was not willing to part with Talia. He ignored Damon and stood in front of Talia, craning his neck so that he could look at her.

"Come with me!" Ashton demanded. "My room is big enough for both of us."

Talia's eyebrows shot up in surprise. The boy was decisive. "That is very generous of you, but I can't come. I have work to do here."

Ashton pouted. "When will I see you again?"

Talia thought how he was adorable. She would hug him if not for the fear that Damon might blow a fuse and harm the kid. "Soon."

"Will you come to my birthday?"

Talia squatted to get down on his level. "I will."

His eyes widened. "Really?"

"Yes. Your mom and dad were kind to invite me. How about you use this chance to tell me what you want as a present?"

"You will be my present!" Ashton exclaimed excitedly. Before Talia could react, Ashton kissed her cheek. "You promised to come to my party. I will be waiting."

"Who will you be waiting for?" Damon grumbled while pulling Talia to stand up. If Ashton was not a snotty kid, he would be a meat paste. How dares he surprise-kiss Talia!?

"I will be waiting for my future Luna, and that's not you," Ashton said to Damon defiantly. "If you want to come, you better bring something big."

Damon couldn't believe this. "Do you know how to spell death?"

Talia wrapped her arms around Damon in an attempt to pacify her devil. "Is it OK if Uncle Damon and I come together?"

Ashton thought about it intently before responding, "That will be fine also. I see that Uncle Damon is protective of you. He can ensure no man gets close to you, like a guard." He turned to Alpha Cristian. "Dad, can you compensate Uncle Damon for his efforts? He will protect my Luna until I'm big enough to do it myself."

"Sure, sure, we will pay him. If you keep on talking like that, we will need to pay more than we can afford," Alpha Cristian said while pulling Ashton up and putting the boy to sit on his shoulders.

Alpha Cristian turned to Talia and Damon. "Sorry about this. Kids can be a handful."

"No need to apologize," Talia responded right away. "Ashton was like a breath of fresh air at this party."

After exchanging goodbyes, Alpha Cristian, Luna Michelle, and Ashton left.

Talia sat on the bench and patted the spot next to her, indicating for Damon to join her.

Now that they were hidden among bushes, Damon had no intention of sitting next to Talia. He pulled her to sit on his lap.

Damon closed his eyes and took a moment to relish the feeling of Talia's body pressing on his. It felt like ages since they had been that close, and he loved that she leaned on him completely.

"I want us to have only girls," Damon grumbled. "Sons like those will make me go bald. I don't want to share you with another male."

Talia didn't want to argue. Damon was acting like a baby, and there was no point in talking about it.

Talia had a question, "What took you so long?" She came to this part of the garden boldly because she thought that Damon will be right behind her.

Damon hesitated with answering, and then he decided to go with the truth. She will probably find out anyway.

"My view of Beta Milo bowing to you in submission was obstructed by two females."

Talia's eyes flashed dangerously, and she noticed that Damon didn't use their names, which meant they were random women coveting Damon.

"Did they touch you? Who were they? How long did you talk to them?" Talia started raining questions.

"It doesn't matter who they were." He forgot their names anyway. "There was no touching, and I spoke with them a few minutes. I thought that someone had sent them, but when I realized they were just flirty, I scared them away. Keith was watching over you. Remind me to punish him for allowing you to get engaged in my absence."

Talia didn't react to Damon's jokes about engagement and punishing Keith (if those were jokes). She was focused on the part about how Keith was watching over her. Before healing Ashton's scratches, Talia scanned the surroundings and found no one. "Are you sure that Keith was watching over me?"

Damon confirmed. "When you left the event hall, Keith was right behind you. His instructions were to give you space but to be close enough if anything suspicious happens. He mind-linked me that some kids were approaching and that you used your ability, and he told me where to find you. Didn't I tell you not to use your abilities? What if the kid talks? Oh right... he won't spill your secrets because he has a crush on you and thinks you will be his Luna..."

While Damon grumbled, Talia was thinking about Keith's whereabouts when she was scanning the surroundings. If he knew about the kids and her using ability, he was in visual range. How come she didn't detect him? Talia could clearly feel the energies and even the smallest lifeforms. Was her ability faulty, or was there something else to it?

Talia snapped out of her thoughts when Damon tightened his hold on her.

"When can we go to our room? Guests started leaving. Do we need to stay last?"

"Not last, but let's make an appearance at our table," Talia said.

Damon pouted. "Your friends are with their mates, and others don't care." It would be more accurate to say that he didn't care about others. The whole evening he kept his hands to himself, and then that stinky boy pushed his buttons, and Damon needed comforting.

"It doesn't matter if others care. We should do what's right," Talia said. She puffed her cheeks when she remembered, "What was the point of us hiding my identity if no one took the bait? It seems it was for naught."

"Don't say that. This is only the first day. People are watching."

Talia was not sure if she should be happy about this or scared. "You think they will make their move tomorrow?"

Damon shrugged. "Tomorrow, next week, next month, next year. If they have enough patience, they will take their time to befriend you, wait for you to lower your guard, and then they will strike."

Talia's insides churned. Damon's words were grave, and she knew he was not exaggerating; he was talking from experience.

"I have no intention of hiding my identity for so long." She put her palm on his cheek. "I want everyone to know I'm yours."

Damon turned his head and kissed the inside of her palm. He wanted that as well.

"Kiss me," she demanded. "Give me a dose of Damon before we return to the party."

"I'm not sure I can stop at kissing."

She was not sure if she could stop at kissing either, but... "I need to feel you, at least on my lips. It will keep me going until we reach our room."

Damon hummed lowly as he closed the distance between them, and Talia inhaled his breath greedily.

Chapter 750 Lulu's help

When Damon and Talia returned to their table, they found it unoccupied.

Maya and Caden were on the dancefloor, and Talia was unsure if they had taken any breaks from dancing. The Beta couple was visibly excited about the upcoming heat, and Talia was touched that they didn't question her source of that information.

James, Cornelia, Meg, and Kai went to their rooms, and it was not farfetched to think they won't be seen until tomorrow.

Damon and Talia sipped their drinks while chatting thoughts through their private mind-link. Damon would point out people and share their backgrounds, and Talia listened with interest. The duo would also use their super-hearing to eavesdrop on other people talking.

Alpha Edward was at the table with Alpha Richard and Alpha William. Talia was surprised about them not doing more than greetings when they passed nearby, but Damon told her that all three of them would be here for the next day or two, so they were probably waiting for the audience to thin out before they approached Alpha Natalia of the Midnight Guardians pack.

Alpha Cristian, Alpha Peter, Alpha Patrick, and Alpha Robert left the Blue River pack that evening. Each of them left behind a few of their people as representatives for the next two days.

One of the people who stayed behind was General Jordan from the Spring Leaf pack. General Jordan was not planning to stay longer than one evening, but considering that he didn't show his face since he and Lidia Wilkow went into the packhouse, Alpha Cristian had no choice but to leave him a message to return whenever he was done with his... business.

Among gossip, Damon and Talia heard that Nora disappeared with a high-ranking member of the Steelbite pack. They didn't need to guess what that was about.

Maddox approached Damon and Talia; his wobbly steps were a giveaway he was drunk.

"Sorry for neglecting you," Maddox said. His steady voice didn't match the drunken haze in his eyes, but the grin on his face was impossible to ignore.

Maddox didn't want to drink so much, but people lined up to congratulate him while toasting for his Luna and his pup, and he couldn't refuse.

"Don't worry about it," Talia was quick to respond. "You have a lot to celebrate. Enjoy, Max. We are happy for you and Tanya."

Maddox smiled gratefully and swayed a bit while saying, "Alright. I will catch up with you later." And then he walked back to the table where Tatiana was surrounded by people.

Talia never saw Maddox drunk like that, but he didn't stand out because many people laughed and talked loudly. It was a party, and the mood was good.

Talia wondered if Damon would be with Maddox, drinking and having fun, if not for her presence and the danger that loomed over their heads. She hoped that he won't blame her for missing out. Should she just tell him to go and enjoy it, and she will be okay? She could join Tatiana and a group of women there, but they were all from Wilkow and River families, and Talia would be an outsider. She could take a walk or just stay at their table. How dangerous could that be? The party was ongoing for hours, and nothing happened.

Talia pressed her lips into a line when she remembered how Damon said this deceptive peace could last a week or a month... what if it's years? Will she need to live for so long with this lump of anxiety in her stomach?

Talia jolted when someone sat at the table, one chair away from Damon. It was Lulu.

'Why are you here?' Damon asked Lulu through their mind-link.

Lulu had an instinct to shrink in front of Damon, but she gathered her courage to respond, 'If you plan to get people to approach you, you need to be approachable, Alpha. As of now, you and Luna look like a couple, and not a legal one. Unless you start mingling with others, no one will dare to talk to you or Luna.'

'Did something happen?' Talia's voice sounded in Damon's head. She guessed that he and Lulu were mind-linking, and she hated that she couldn't join in that conversation.

'Lulu says that we look unapproachable, and she thinks that her presence will signal others that it's OK to talk to us.'

Talia thought for a moment before responding, 'She is right.'

"Thank you, Lulu," Talia said. "How are you finding the party?"

Lulu perked up when she saw that not only Talia spoke to her, but Damon relaxed as well. Keith told her not to meddle, but she thought that joining this table would be a good idea, and she was not wrong.

A few minutes later, two Alphas approached Damon and Talia to exchange pleasantries. Talia didn't meet them before because their packs were too small to participate in the Council of the Alphas, but Damon knew who they were. He told Talia through their private mind-link that two newcomers were usually neutral, keeping to themselves so that they don't provoke bigger packs, and some other helpful information that made her appear knowledgeable about other packs.

When the second group of people approached the table where Damon and Talia were, Lulu excused herself and returned to her position.

'What were you thinking?' Keith seethed at Lulu through their pack mind-link.

'Are you jealous that I got to sit with Alpha and Luna while you were watching? I think that a reporter took a picture of us. I might be in the next edition of the WW Magazine.'

'You are playing with fire, Lulu.'

'Stop making an issue when there is none. Alpha and Luna didn't object to my presence, actually, I might get a reward.'

Keith didn't respond, but Lulu knew he was sulking.

Keith told her not to go there, mostly because he feared she would cause trouble. Damon and Talia didn't say anything about isolating Lulu, but they were all pressed by the fact that Lulu was the only one out of Talia's guards who didn't take a blood oath. Keith was aware that Damon had increased vigilance when it came to Lulu, and Keith feared that Lulu would end up in trouble for the smallest mistake. She won't dare to provoke Alpha Damon, but even an ambiguous situation can be blown out of proportion, and if any of the guards messes up stuff, it will come crashing on Keith.

Keith needed this job; he needed to keep an eye on Talia and ensure she was safe... even if he had to bear the sight of her being with another man.

Eventually, Damon and Talia decided to call it a night.

Talia left first, and Damon was a few minutes after her.

Talia was eager to remove the bridesmaid's dress and hit the shower. She was nearly done washing up when Damon joined her.

He smiled in approval when he saw her getting the shower gel for him.

"What do you think about tonight?" Damon asked while she was soaping his back.

"The party went well, but..."

"But?"

Talia released a long breath. "I don't know what I was expecting." It was a lie. She was hoping that baddies would jump out of the shadows, Damon and she will tackle them, and that would be the start of their happily ever after without any dangers.