Damon POV

"Killian," she cried as she buried her face in his chest. Her head was wrapped in bandages.

"Oh love!" Killian peppered her with kisses and I felt... jealous. The sense of loneliness returned with a bang.

Eliza cried against him for a few minutes. I knew that it would be a mistake to talk to her right now. Killian would go mad and I didn't want to lose my future Beta. Finally when Eliza raised her head, she looked at me with teary eyes. "Damon..." she murmured. "I don't know where to begin."

Killian set her on the bed and sat beside her. He wiped her tears and stroked her head to encourage her to talk.

"Start from the beginning," I said.

She took a deep breath in, caught Killian's hand and started. "After you left, I offered Poppy to come and sleep with me, but she refused. It was in the middle of the night that Sinclair knocked heavily on the door. I rushed to see him and so did Poppy." She gazed and Anna and then back at me. "He said that Anna was in big trouble and that she was being abducted in an unconscious state. Poppy became panicky. She tried Anna's phone but she didn't answer. So she went to the dorm with me to find Anna. She wasn't there. so we sniffed her all the way to the woods outside

the academy. Over there, someone hammered me from the back. I fell on the floor unconscious and after that I don't know what happened." Tears started pouring out of her eyes. "I—I am so sorry, Damon. I failed to protect her!"

I clenched my jaws so hard that it was a wonder that my teeth didn't break. "Anna," I said, "Why weren't you picking up the phone?"

"Damon, I was holed up in the lab with my coven sisters. I told you that we were researching something big? Remember?"

I nodded, recalling that conversation.

"We had to keep every phone outside according to the rules and that's why I couldn't contact her!"

I placed my hands on my waist and raised my head to the ceiling. Letting out a shaky breath, I closed my eyes. My heart was going through so many emotions that I was finding it hard to control. "Where is Sinclair and what about Monica?" I asked her.

"I had gone to the Dean and she told me that Monica has left the academy for good. She has returned to her pack," Anna replied. She rolled her lips in between her teeth as if too anxious about it. "The worst part is that she left today in the early hours of the morning. I could have nabbed that bitch!" She pointed with her chin at Bob. "He told me what happened to your pack."

"And Sinclair?" I asked, my voice low.

"He has also gone back to his pack. That sneaky bastard!" Anna cursed. "I would have loved to turn him into the reptile he is!"

I called Bob inside. "Did you check out the woods?"

"I did," he replied but we couldn't find anything. We have no idea where Poppy is."

I thumped the table beside me in rage and it cracked under the impact. "Where the hell is she?" My heart was bleeding without my mate.

All of a sudden, my phone buzzed. I saw my mother's name flashing on the screen. "Mother?" I was dreading the news that she was about to give me. My legs felt jelly.

"Damon, you have to come here as soon as possible," she said in a shaky voice.

"Why mother? What happened?" I asked with a hoarseness scratching the back of my throat.

"The doctor said—" there was a long pause as she tried to regain her senses. I knew it was heavy on her. "He said that your father has gone into a coma and— and that he is not sure when Kevin will recover. So now you are the Alpha of the Umbra pack."

My mouth fell to the floor as goosebumps lined my skin. "Goddess!" I wasn't expecting this at all.

As I turned my gaze to Killian and Bob, I saw that both of them had dropped on their knees. They had inclined their heads to expose their necks in submission. Eliza too had gotten up and was kneeling on the floor. Every warrior outside the room had knelt. Soon the hospital was filled with my pack members and they all were kneeling.

Shocked was an understatement for what I was feeling. I wanted to go and find my mate urgently but duty called me. My choices were ripped apart. I wanted to give it all up and go to my mate.

"Damon?" My mother's voice came from that side.

"Yes, I am here," I rasped.

"I know that you are there to find Poppy, but come back here, take your position as the Alpha of the pack and then go and find your mate," she advised. "It is important that our people see you as their leader."

I knew the urgency of the situation.

"Alpha Damon," Killian said.

The word Alpha sounded… heavy.

"We must go," he said in a serious voice.

I let out a rough exhale. "Prepare the chopper. I will go." Then I turned to Anna. "Can you try and find whatever lead you can? If possible?"

"Of course!" she said. "I will keep you updated. Now go and resume your position!"

I started to leave the room, when she stopped me. "Damon, when you go after them, don't forget to call me."

I gave her a tight nod because now I was going to go after them in a very, very bad way. But first, I was going to find Poppy.

My helicopter was ready. The pilot knelt on the ground murmuring Alpha and inclining his neck in submission. The journey back to my pack was full of anxiety. Eliza mostly remained pressed to Killian as I stared out. We passed over dense forests. "Where are you, Poppy?" I murmured, looking at them.

What happened next was something I had never thought about.