

THE ALPHA'S BRIDE

Chapter 1056 Alpha Violet (13)

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Valeria crossed her arms over her chest and glared at her twin. "If you don't like being with me, why don't you leave?"

"Leave? Where? This is my home, and this is my place, next to you. We might disagree in private, but the pack should see only unity. As the second who came after you, it is my duty to watch your back, just how you should watch Violet's. If you look at the big picture and think about the pack instead of your pride, you will see it."

She knew that and thought she accepted it, but now Violet showed up with Ashton and was rubbing it in!

As if he could read her mind, Edgar said, "Not everything is about you, Val. It is normal for newly mated couples to show off their other half, and they will do it regardless of who is watching."

Valeria was about to respond, but the crowd stirred, and she looked in the direction where people parted to reveal a pair approaching.

"Keep looking like that at Ashton, and this will turn from a spar into something much worse," Edgar said to Valeria in a low voice.

"Stop talking like I'm doing this on purpose. I can't control how I'm looking! Besides, Vi can't hurt me."

Edgar snorted. "That temper will get you killed. You are a grownup, and it's time to be accountable for your actions. Vi is stronger than she was, and if you think you can underestimate Ashton, think again. He was never the fastest nor the strongest, but he always won."

There were events where Alphas from allied packs would spar, and Edgar knew that he could win against Ashton only with his abilities because Ashton had none. But now Ashton was marked by Violet, which was a big unknown. As for Violet, they were neck-in-neck, taking turns in who was winning, but Violet was never really interested in fighting. This was different.

Part of Edgar enjoyed the thrill, and he wondered how this will turn out. Between him and Valeria, Edgar was the more physical one, eager to make

friends and solve disputes with his fists. How Edgar saw it, life was simpler that way.

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Violet and Ashton approached the fighting area, and they were welcomed by Yasmin and a bunch of Violet's cousins who lined up to wait for their turn to greet Violet.

Axel and Yasmin have twelve kids, six sets of twins, with the oldest being eighteen years old, Valeria and Edgar, and the youngest being two years old, David and Kevin.

Violet counted ten heads. All her cousins were there, except for Valeria and Edgar, who were waiting for them in the fighting area.

Violet gave them hugs, starting with the littlest ones, and they eyed Ashton with curiosity.

After Valeria and Edgar, the next set of twins by age were sixteen years old boys, Blaze and Rema, so Ashton was at least eight years older than the oldest ones. They knew him as the young Alpha of the Spring Leaf pack, and he was too old to be greeted casually.

The unwritten rule was that as soon as they came of age, a certain protocol needed to be followed. That rule could be bent for Violet because they were cousins.

"You smell differently," Blaze said to Violet while scrunching his nose.

Violet grinned and craned her neck to show Ashton's mark.

Rema widened his eyes. "So, it's true." He glanced at Ashton. "You are my cousin-in-law?"

Violet burst into giggles. She never heard of such a thing, but Ashton nodded in agreement and shook hands with the boy.

The youngest ones didn't really get it, but they understood that Ashton was now one of them, and they clung to his legs.

Ashton was a bit uncomfortable. He grew up as a single child and spent the last five years in more-less solitude. Ashton was used to his space and quiet, and he wondered how often he would need to mingle with this rowdy bunch. And also, Violet had four brothers. Just by thinking about it, Ashton felt crowded.

"I am glad you stopped by," Yasmin said and glanced at Ashton. "Consider staying for dinner."

Violet wanted to refuse, but Yasmin said, "Our people will want to meet their future Alpha."

Violet realized that Yasmin was right. With Violet being the next Alpha of the Midnight Guardians pack and Ashton being her mate, he will be their Alpha also.

"What do you say?" Violet asked Ashton.

Ashton's eyes flashed in approval. He loved that she didn't respond without consulting him. It showed that she considered him as her equal, and it meant the world to him.

"We will do what you decide," Ashton said. He pulled Violet closer to him despite Blaze and Rema hugging his legs.

Violet tucked her shoulder under Ashton's armpit and grinned at him.

"Aww," Yasmin gushed. "Newly mated. How sweet."

"What's with that reaction?" Axel huffed from the side. "We are also sweet. Come here. Let me hug you."

Yasmin rolled her eyes, but she didn't bicker with him. Just like any other Alpha, Axel saw everything as a competition.

"Don't hurt my babies," Yasmin said to Violet in a low voice. "Val is prideful, but she means no harm." Yasmin overheard quite a bit of what had happened before, and she was also aware that Valeria carried some bitterness as she always wanted to be at the top. Axel said that was normal for an Alpha, but Yasmin was not so sure about it.

Violet understood that Yasmin spoke as a mother, but that kind of protocol worked in private. Here, in front of the pack members, Violet was a future Alpha Violet Blake, and she needed to act like it.

Violet raised her chin. "I won't hurt them more than necessary, Aunt Yasmin."

In truth, Violet had no intention of going easy on Valeria. It was one thing when they were kids, but now they were both of age, and Valeria dared to look at Ashton in front of their people. Violet's wolf was itching for a fight.

Damon taught her from a young age that image is everything. If she allows Valeria to act out in public, it will reflect poorly on Violet as an Alpha, and it can plant a seed of doubt in the hearts of her people. That doubt will open the gates to treachery, and Violet will have none of it.

"Vi?" Yasmin called pleadingly. Violet's expression told her Violet meant business. It was the same face Damon would make when he disconnected just before he did something reckless.

Axel put a hand on Yasmin's shoulder and shook his head. "Let the kids sort it out. They need to establish themselves, and we shouldn't be in the way."

Axel looked at Violet gratefully. "Thank you for taking this seriously. Anything less would be an insult to Val and Ed. Teach them well. As their future Alpha, it is your duty to show them the way."

Yasmin never approved of the pack hierarchy where the strongest one rules. If it were up to her, she would cast a spell to isolate bickering parties until they came to their senses and made up. However, Axel pointed out that was precisely the hierarchy of the strongest rules, but in this case, it would be Yasmin using magic to get her way.

'The strongest makes the rules,' Axel would say, 'It was always that way, and it always will be. People might praise leniency, but they will follow power...'

Yasmin raised her hand, and the magical barrier cracked open for Violet and Ashton to enter.

Chapter 1057 Alpha Ashton (1)

Edgar rolled his shoulders when the magic barrier closed behind Ashton and Violet. "Are we following any specific rules? Can we use abilities?"

"Don't hold back because of me," Ashton said, and Edgar's eyes flashed in surprise.

Ashton's confidence was evident, and Edgar wondered if there was a genuine reason for it or if Ashton was boasting in front of his mate.

"How do we determine the winner? And what does the winner get?" Valeria asked.

"I'm sure you had time to think about bets," Violet said. "Whatever it is, we will take it. We are that confident." Violet felt her powers changing in the last month. She didn't get to test her abilities, but everything was clearer and sharper, and she was certain she had an advantage. A big one.

"If you manage to put a finger on Vi, you win," Ashton declared.

Violet's stomach dropped. How can she fight if she can't be touched? "Ash? What are you doing?"

Ashton tilted his head to the side, and his neck cracked. "I've seen how your people are looking at you. You have their trust. I am a new face, and I need to prove myself."

"And you think that fighting Val and me will help you prove something that will go in your favor?" Edgar asked.

Ashton ignored him as he was focused on Violet. He looked at her deeply. "You trust me. Right? I won't embarrass you."

She put her hand on his cheek. "You can't embarrass me, Ash. I am proud to be your mate regardless of this or any other fight. However, if you get hurt, I won't forgive you."

He grinned. "If I get hurt, you will nurse me to health. I look forward to it."

"Let's not go there."

"Hellooooo!" Valeria called impatiently. "We are here to fight, not to watch your PDA."

Ashton pecked Violet's lips, and by the time she opened her eyes, she was looking at Ashton's back.

His broad shoulders looked like an impregnable obstacle that would keep all the bad things away, and if he was not facing two tricky opponents, she would hug him and never let go.

"If any of us touches Vi, we win?" Edgar asked in disbelief, still processing this information. "How do you win?"

"When you can't fight or admit defeat."

Both Valeria and Edgar gaped at him, wondering if their ears malfunctioned.

"Confident much?" Valeria asked with a sneer, feeling that Ashton was looking down on them.

Ashton was painfully aware of his reputation. No matter what his achievements with fighting rogues were, people saw him as a mellow Alpha who was good at politics and strategizing, but not much when it came to fighting. In order to stand by Violet's side as her equal, he needed to trim down all other Alphas by a notch or two. He wanted Violet's pack to approve of him as their Alpha because of him, not because he was Violet's mate. This was important.

Violet was aware that this was much more than a spar. Everyone was fighting with pride on the line, and they needed to show what they could do. If Valeria and Edgar lost, they would be ashamed. If Ashton lost, his image would crack, and their people will think of him as weak.

Violet could use her aura to suppress her cousins' abilities, and Ashton would finish them off, but Ashton declared she would stay on the side, which was a problem.

If Violet was honest, she didn't think Ashton could take on Edgar and Valeria, and even less in a two-on-one fight, but then... she never saw him fight, and his confidence spilled on her, and she decided to trust him. If anything, Ashton had a good head on his shoulders and he wouldn't jump into a fight he couldn't win.

Violet closed her eyes and focused on her surroundings. Her consciousness expanded to feel every rock and heartbeat and to cover the whole fighting area and a bit beyond it.

Violet didn't need sight to see clearly. Talia taught her that this type of perception allowed her to sense everything on a deeper level, including the energies that coursed through Valeria and Edgar. Different colors would reveal different natures of energies, and even emotions.

Violet could see that Edgar was pumped with adrenaline, ready to fight, while Valeria had a mix of guilt and anger.

'Good,' Violet thought. The guilt in her cousin told Violet that Valeria was not beyond salvation.

Violet sucked in a sharp breath when her consciousness landed on Ashton. He was like a powerbomb with several colors twirling within him, and then two more enveloped him to keep the others in check and prevent his body from falling apart under pressure.

Her heart cracked. What did they do to him? That was not normal.

'Trust me, love,' Ashton spoke into their mind link. 'I can't move if I'm the source of your sadness.'

'I love you, Ash.'

'That's better,' he responded cockily. 'Watch me, love. Let me show you what I can do. Let me show you that I can protect you and your pack no matter who my enemy is.'

Violet's eyes filled with tears. That was her mate, saying that he would do anything in his power to protect her. It was a big deal.

'BAM!'

Dust rose when Ashton moved faster than the eyes could follow to block Edgar's advance.

Ashton tried to grab Edgar, but he was already retreating, and Ashton had to move to the right because Valeria was not in her previous spot anymore.

The three of them were like blurs, making spectators wonder if their eyes were deceiving them, but the dust stirring violently was confirmation that something extraordinary was happening.

Edgar and Valeria stepped back and glanced at each other.

'They are coming up with a strategy,' Violet told Ashton. 'Ed is focusing energy into his legs, so expect speed and maybe kicks. Val is...'

Violet didn't have time to finish because Edgar and Valeria were attacking already, and Ashton moved to block their paths to his mate.

Even if he could predict their movements, with two Alphas attacking, Ashton could only defend. He cursed under his breath when he realized his vision was foggy. Who did that? Edgar? Valeria?

When sparring with Damon, Ashton used his reflexes, but Valeria and Edgar were coordinating their attacks from different sides, and it was apparent they were gaining an advantage. He needed an opening, or this wouldn't end well. If he was facing rogues, he could go all out and not care if he snapped a neck in the process, but these were Violet's cousins, and he needed to defeat them without causing too many injuries.

'Ash,' Violet spoke through their mind link. 'Close your eyes and let me in.'

'I don't think this is a good time to be closing eyes, Vi.'

'You said I shouldn't be touched, but that doesn't mean I can't help you. Do you trust me?'

Ashton shook his head and closed his eyes. She asked if he trusted her. How could he say no to that?

Valeria and Edgar paused and retreated a few steps.

"Why did you close your eyes?" Valeria asked warily. "Did you give up?"

"I don't need to see you in order to win," Ashton responded in a low voice, but three other people within the magical enclosure heard him clearly.

Ashton needed a moment to adjust to this new vision that Violet projected into his mind. There were outlines and colors... he didn't see things; he could feel them like they were part of him.

'Do you always feel this connection to the world?' Ashton asked Violet.

'Most of the time,' Violet responded, happy that he approved.

Chapter 1058 Alpha Ashton (2)

Stimulated by the enhanced vision that Violet shared with him, Ashton could see Edgar's right hand glowing in yellowish light, and he reached there before he could finish that thought.

"What...?" Edgar's question was cut short when Ashton punched him on the shoulder, and the unsuspecting young Alpha was propelled backward like a sledgehammer hit him.

Ashton was amazed by the discovery that with his perception changing, his movements became sharper, and it seemed he got a boost in strength. Or maybe that was the mate bond giving him a boost, combined with Violet's mark. After all, her venom was part of him now.

Ashton flexed his fingers, and he was confident that he could crush a rock with ease. What about a werewolf skull?

He decided to analyze that later. Now it was time to whoop some ass and prove himself, without causing serious injuries to Violet's cousins. They were a family.

Valeria stared at Edgar, who was tumbling from Ashton's hit. That was not normal. Edgar was an Alpha with a special ability that allowed him to move faster than his impressive physique would allow. How was Ashton able to subdue him with one hit?

She rushed to her brother. "Are you OK?"

Edgar spat on the side and jumped to his feet. "Do I look OK?" His right arm was numb.

He narrowed his eyes at Ashton. "How did he do that? And he is not even looking!" Other than Edgar's shoulder, his pride was also hurt, and it riled him to take this seriously. Unless it was a fluke, Ashton was a bigger challenge than Edgar thought he would be.

"It's Vi," Valeria said. "I'm sure she is channeling some ability into Ash." Why else would her eyes be closed?

"So, we need to take her out first," Edgar said.

Valeria smirked. "Wasn't that the plan from the beginning?" Ashton foolishly proclaimed that if they managed to put a finger on Violet, he would admit defeat.

Who would accept such a lame victory? Violet and Ashton will need to suffer a heavy defeat.

Valeria and Edgar didn't need their mind link to communicate. The twins were close, and they knew what the other one was thinking without a word spoken.

Valeria and Edgar started walking away from each other, splitting up so they could attack from different sides.

'Vi!' Ashton called only for her to hear. 'I am fast, but I can't be in two places at the same time.' It was obvious what Valeria and Edgar were up to.

'Don't worry, Ash. Go for Ed first. I will delay Val enough so you can get to her also.'

'I don't want you to fight,' Ashton grumbled. He wanted to win this victory for her, in front of her people.

'You can't expect me to stay idle when my mate is facing opponents,' Violet responded. 'I am not fighting. I'm letting you borrow my power. Think of me as your assistant.'

Ashton turned to face her, and his breath hitched. He didn't open his eyes, but he could clearly see that Violet was enveloped in pure white energy that was coiling around her like an impenetrable shield. It seeped from her feet into the ground to touch everyone and everything and stretch as far as his senses could take him.

Violet was standing there like a Goddess of wind and light, and Ashton was confident that she was the center of the Universe.

'You are beautiful,' he said.

'You are not so bad yourself,' she responded.

Ashton raised his hands to see that he was also made of energies, but he had several colors, and they were sometimes flowing together and sometimes would bounce off each other. There were white streaks in him as well, and he

knew those were from Violet. She was stabilizing his powers and making his light brighter, just how she brightened up his life.

'Do you have the luxury of time to idle?' Violet asked Ashton.

'I always have time for you, my love,' he responded in a deep voice that made her stomach tighten.

He was such a flirt.

'They are coming,' Violet warned him, and he could see two figures made of light approaching them.

Valeria and Edgar were similar to Violet, but their glow paled in comparison to Violet's.

Ashton puffed his chest proudly. No one was as beautiful or as powerful as his mate.

Valeria sneered. She didn't know that Ashton and Violet could talk mentally, but it was obvious that they were doing something. Ashton and Violet were facing each other, Ashton was smirking, and Violet was blushing. Valeria felt like cursing loudly. How dare those two look down on them!?

'Together,' Valeria told Edgar, who responded with a small nod.

Ashton sensed that Valeria and Edgar were about to attack, and he wanted to ask Violet what her plan was, but then he saw her energies thickening in the direction of Valeria, and he knew that his task was to handle Edgar.

Ashton stood so still that even his heartbeat was reduced to a crawl, and it seemed like the whole world slowed down.

Ashton would enjoy the clarity if he were not in the middle of an important show of strength.

Ashton's muscles tensed, and he moved so quickly that he became a blur.

Edgar grinned as he leaped toward Violet, confident that he was about to grab her, but then a big hand covered his face.

"What the...?" The rest of Edgar's curse was muffled in Ashton's palm as the latter pushed him to the ground.

Valeria's mood soared when she realized that Ashton was focusing on Edgar. It meant that Violet was unguarded, and she only needed to touch her in order to win.

Valeria was about to shout in victory when a sudden gust of wind pushed her back, and her legs were so heavy like someone had cemented them to the ground.

Valeria's delay was less than a second, but it was enough for Ashton to stand in front of her.

Ashton held Edgar by his face, and his right hand landed on Valeria's neck.

"AHH!"

Valeria screamed in shock when Ashton pushed her down viciously, and he held both Edgar and Valeria to the ground like they were children. The twins wanted to break free, but every time they moved a limb, a fierce current would rush through their bodies like they were being painfully electrocuted. They couldn't muster any strength to resist.

The audience held their breath collectively as they were unsure of what had happened. Ashton and Violet were facing each other with their eyes closed, and Valeria and Edgar attacked from opposite sides, but then they were pressed to the ground with Ashton holding them, and Violet standing behind him with her arms crossed over her chest.

No one knew that the young Alpha of the Spring Leaf pack was this powerful, and they were all glad to confirm he was Alpha Violet's mate, which meant he will be their Alpha also.

"Do you admit defeat?" Violet asked smugly.

Not many had seen this side of her. Only a few people knew Violet inherited her mother's powers and her father's temper. It was a deadly combination.

Violet would normally be sweet and docile, but that was only because she didn't care to bother with things like proving herself. However, now she had

Ashton, and there was no way she would allow any woman to look at him inappropriately, even if that woman was her cousin.

Chapter 1059 Alpha Ashton (3)

Edgar and Valeria struggled to break free. Ashton was crouching between them and holding them down by their necks like an immovable mountain.

The twins knew that Ashton was using his Alpha aura, but wasn't this exaggerated? They were Alphas also!

Violet squatted next to Valeria. "Admit it. Say that I am better."

Valeria sneered. "Everyone knows you are better than me."

"But you don't. I need you to say it. And I need you to keep repeating that until you understand. We are no longer children. Your mother asked me to go easy on you, but I have no intention of making that mistake. I am of age and eligible to take over the Alpha position. No challenge will be left unanswered, even if it's from you. I hope you understand that my position and my mate are two things I'm not willing to share. Got it?"

Seeing that Valeria didn't respond, Violet's next words came with a heavy dose of her aura.

"ANSWER ME! DO. YOU. GET. IT?"

Valeria groaned as her forehead was covered in sweat, but she refused to answer.

Violet's eyes flashed in silvery light. "Admit defeat, or I will crush you for everyone to see. I will rather they think of me as ruthless than weak."

"We admit defeat!" Edgar shouted. Somehow, he knew that Violet was not joking.

Violet's eyes didn't leave Valeria. "I need to hear Val say it."

"Val!" Edgar called. "Save that pride for the time when it's helpful." His eyes lost focus, and they all knew he continued talking to Valeria through the mind link.

"I admit defeat," Valeria said eventually, her voice barely above a whisper.

Violet put her hand behind her ear. "What did you say? I didn't hear you."

"I admit defeat!" Valeria squeezed through her teeth. "Happy?"

"No, I'm not happy, Valeria. But this will do. For now." Violet stood up and narrowed her eyes at Valeria. "This is the last time I'm showing you mercy, Val. Next time you challenge me by coveting what's mine, I will treat you as my enemy. I hope you remember that."

Ashton also stood up and released Edgar and Valeria.

Valeria jumped to her feet and ran away.

"Was there a need to go that far?" Edgar asked Violet while dusting off his clothes.

"I don't know, Ed. You tell me," Violet responded dryly.

Edgar shook his head. "You know how she is."

"She should know who I am."

"Easy for you to say. You will do your thing and leave, and I'm stuck with pacifying her."

"Keep treating her like a spoiled princess, and that's who she will be," Violet said.

Edgar couldn't believe it. "Are you saying it's my fault she is like that?"

"Yours, uncle Axel's, aunt Yasmin's, grandma Evanora's, and everyone else's who is pampering Val. I know what she wants. She wants to be an Alpha. Tell me, Ed. Is she behaving like one?"

Edgar didn't respond and Violet continued talking.

"I don't know if she is born stupid or if someone is filling her head, but she has dangerous ideas. I let her go easily this time because we are cousins. Next time she challenges me like that in front of MY pack, I will treat her as a traitor

because I am the Alpha. You might think this was harsh, but if she dares to pull this shit again, she will be either locked up or exiled."

Edgar pressed his lips into a line. He knew Violet was right. In the Midnight Guardians pack they were easy-going because everyone worshiped Alpha Natalia, so even when she was present, there was no need for her to assert dominance.

Violet is young, and she has a lot to prove to herself and her people. Lenience will be a sign of weakness, and that would lead to trouble.

Edgar took a step back and bowed. "I congratulate you on your victory Alpha Violet, Alpha Ashton. I wish you many happy years together and endless wisdom so you can lead our pack to prosperity. If there are no objections, I will take my leave."

Violet nodded in agreement, and Edgar left in the direction where Valeria disappeared.

Violet wondered if Ashton thought she was too harsh. If it were anyone else, she wouldn't care, but this was Ashton, her mate, and she craved his approval.

She turned to see him look at her with a smile that reflected in his eyes.

"You are amazing," he said.

Violet's face exploded in a grin, and she threw herself at Ashton.

She wanted to tell him that he was beyond amazing, but the sudden clamor startled her.

They were fighting in silence due to the magical shields that Yasmin erected to protect the audience, and Violet completely forgot about them. Now that the shields were down, other than hearing the enthusiastic cheers, she could clearly feel the admiration and approval of her people.

Her arms were around Ashton, and she reluctantly stepped away. "I wanted to kiss you, but I will do that later when we have privacy," she said.

Ashton smirked. "I look forward to it."

"Great performance," Axel praised Violet and Ashton as he approached the couple. "It seems that the mate bond enhanced your abilities."

Violet glanced behind him to see that Yasmin was walking away.

"Is aunt Yasmin angry?" Violet asked.

"She will get over it," Axel responded and continued in a low voice. "You did what was best for the pack. You proved, again, that you are the most capable one to lead, and your mate didn't disappoint. I hope you will stay for dinner and overnight so the pack can celebrate with you. Your room is ready for you to freshen up and rest until the festivities begin."

Violet glanced at Ashton. They agreed to stay for dinner before, but now Axel added an overnight stay and called it festivities. She had a feeling this could last a few days, but her uncle was revealing it in layers so she won't reject it outright.

Ashton didn't object, so they agreed.

Axel raised his hand, and that was the signal for a bunch of Violet's cousins to run to them.

Violet laughed as her little cousins started climbing Ashton's legs, and his hands hovered as he contemplated how to get them off without hurting them.

"Help?" Ashton pleaded with Violet.

"I am enjoying this," Violet admitted.

"I can see that. Can you help?"

"You are a strong Alpha, Ashton. I'm sure you can handle a few kids."

"I don't know how to deal with kids. They are so... fragile."

"What about our kids?"

Ashton froze. Their kids? Surely, she was not pregnant already. Or was she?

Violet rolled her eyes. "It was hypothetical, Ash. Don't overthink it." She turned to the rowdy kids that were crowding Ashton. "Boys! Give him some space."

"We are just playing," five-years-old Mike said with a pout.

"Your play might chase my mate away," Violet said. "Can you bear the responsibility if he rejects me?"

The kids gasped.

Ashton took this moment of confusion to stand behind Violet and wrap his arms around her waist.

"I won't reject Violet. She is too precious." Ashton needed everyone to hear that. He looked at the kids seriously. "However, we are in public. You all have Alpha blood running through you. Pack members are watching. Do you want them to think you are unruly and your parents did a bad job raising you?"

All the kids were frozen for a few seconds, and then they quickly lined up to stand with solemn expressions.

Violet looked at Ashton like she was seeing him for the first time.

"Impressive." She had never seen her cousins so quiet and static.

Ashton puffed his chest. He loved that she praised him.

Chapter 1060 Alpha Violet and Alpha Ashton (1)

Violet and Ashton managed to leave the Moonrider family dynamics behind them as they entered the room reserved for Violet. It was the second largest bedroom in the main building, right after Talia's and Damon's.

Axel and Yasmin stayed in that room until Violet was born, and then they moved into a separate wing with their children. Axel was not the guy who cared about hierarchy and positions. His focus was on his family and his pack. As long as everyone was safe and had food on their tables, he was happy.

Ashton closed the door and hugged Violet from behind. "Are you OK?"

He knew that under that cocky attitude and assertion of dominance, Violet didn't enjoy what they did to Valeria. That was why he volunteered to do all the fighting because Violet wouldn't be able to. Or she would, but every hit Violet delivered would hurt her twice as much.

Violet's façade was solid, but Ashton could feel her heartbreak. She was strong and fragile at the same time, and Ashton admired her very much. If he could, he would take away every hardship from her path.

Violet was unsure what to do with all the emotions. She won and demonstrated that she and her mate were the best, but the victory was bitter. With her brothers, there was never-ending competition, but they all knew their place, and no one showed any intention to claim anything that was hers. It was different with Valeria.

Violet was grateful that Ashton was her shield and her sword, and now her comfort. Alpha Ashton Pascal was the perfect mate. Her mate.

"Hold me, Ash," Violet whispered while fisting Ashton's shirt.

"It will be alright."

"Will it?"

"No one can have it all, Vi. Life is full of choices which means that there will be times when you lose something. If you are lucky, the choice will be easy."

"It's not my fault that my mother is the Alpha of this pack. It's not my fault that the Moon Goddess made us mates. It's not my fault that I'm Violet Blake, and she is not."

"I know," Ashton said. "And I'm sure that Val knows it too. But it will be up to her to accept it." He tightened his hold on her. "You made a tough decision, and I am proud of you."

Violet was embarrassed. She was whiny, and Ashton was comforting her while offering her words of wisdom, and between the two of them, Ashton was the one who made many thought choices. She had it easy, with her parents, brothers, friends, and her pack supporting her, yet Ashton endured solitude, dangerous procedures, and fierce battles for five years... because of her.

Ashton's eyes flashed as he understood what she wanted. It was a sudden change in mood as he didn't expect her to wish comfort by No matter how hard she trained and how quickly her powers grew, Violet was aware that she was missing something... or maybe someone who would anchor her and show her the way without hindering her. The right man was right there, holding her, comforting her, accepting her, and somehow, she knew it will be alright.

Violet looked up at Ashton with her vision blurred from tears. She was not sad. Those were happy tears.

"Make love to me, Ashton," she pleaded.

Ashton's eyes flashed as he understood what she wanted. It was a sudden change in mood as he didn't expect her to wish comfort by indulging in carnal pleasures, but he had no objections. Ashton scooped her in his arms and rushed to the bed, fearing she might change her mind if he was too slow.

Violet watched with amusement as he removed his clothes with urgency.

Every tension of his muscles pulled on her heartstrings.

"I thank the Goddess for making you mine. You are beautiful," she breathed.

Ashton froze and stared at her. "Those are my lines, Vi. You are the most beautiful female in the universe, and..." He crawled on the bed on top of her. "I thank the Moon Goddess for allowing me to be your mate." He kissed her chin. "I am honored..." He kissed her nose. "And humbled..."

"And horny," she said with a grin.

"That too." Ashton clicked his tongue. "Why are you still dressed, Vi?"

"I'm waiting for my mate to undress me."

It took her a moment to realize she had made a mistake. But before she could protest, Ashton tugged the bottom hem of her shirt. The fabric gave in like it was nothing, and within a second, Violet was completely naked, and tatters of what used to be her clothes were falling on the ground all over the room.

"Does my mate want anything else before I start feasting on her?" Ashton asked with a playful smirk.

Violet gave up on scolding him. She didn't care about clothes.

"Nothing, my Alpha," Violet said. "The feast can begin."

They had a few hours before the feast, and Ashton had every intention to have a feast of his own first, with Violet as the appetizer, main dish, and

dessert. He loved desserts, especially when they smelled of open forests and meadows filled with wildflowers, like Violet.

Ashton growled lowly as he descended to claim her lips with his.

Violet closed her eyes and allowed herself to get lost in Ashton because his proximity and the sparks of their bond made all bad things disappear.

They were both Alphas, eager to show dominance, but when it came to carnal pleasures, Violet was happily letting him take the lead.

She wanted him to know that she craved his touch and was submitting to him willingly. It was important for him to know she was his, even though they were equals. Actually, even after all the modifications and hardships Ashton went through, Violet was possibly stronger than he was, but she would never challenge him in such a way. Violet found it easy to let go of control because she knew Ashton will put her first. He always put her first.

...

The pack feast was set up outside, on the clearing behind the main house.

It was crowded. Almost all pack members assembled.

A party of such a size would typically take days to set up, or maybe weeks, but Yasmin and Axel called the whole Midnight Guardians pack to bring drinks and food, like it was a casual picnic where everyone could bring what they could. Ideally, they would bring enough for themselves with a bit of extra. No one came emptyhanded.

The event turned out with quite a surplus of food because people wanted to impress Violet Blake, their future Alpha, and Ashton Pascal, her mate; by extension, their future Alpha also.

The word spread that Ashton defeated Valeria and Edgar while protecting Violet. If not for this, people would think that Ashton was not worthy of being their Alpha because no one could stand by Alpha Violet Blake's side as an equal. But after the news of Ashton's victory, people were curious.

Some pack members prepared gifts for Violet and Ashton, and Yasmin organized her oldest kids to keep the presents in the side room for the newly mated Alpha couple to open later.

For many members of the Midnight Guardians pack, this was their first chance to see Ashton in person. People remembered him as a mischievous child and a teen who didn't draw attention. Ashton was one of the rare low-profile Alphas of the new generation, and it was surprising to hear he was mated to their young Alpha Violet, the most powerful Alpha among young adults.

The crowd stirred when Ashton and Violet appeared.

They were side-by-side with Ashton's arm around Violet's shoulders and hers around his waist. No one could deny that they were beautiful, and the power oozing from them was tangible.

Violet's eyes moved over numerous faces, and she smiled happily as she sensed the approval of her people. They approved of her and Ashton, and that meant a lot.