

Defy 151

Chapter 151: Fashion Murder

A piercing scream snatched Violet from her peaceful slumber, jolting her awake like a gunshot in the dead of night. With her heart pounding, she shot up in bed, blinking rapidly as she struggled to remember where she was.

Right. Her dorm.

Before she could even exhale in relief, another scream sent a shockwave of panic through her.

Shit.

Violet leaped off the bed, adrenaline pumping through her veins as she rushed toward the source of the chaos.

When Violet burst into the hallway, she was met with the sight of Ivy collapsed on the floor, her face drained of all color, and her body trembling as she muttered under her breath, "I hate snakes."

A crowd had already formed, drawn in by the commotion. Some students whispered among themselves, others peered over shoulders to catch a glimpse of the scene. Violet scanned the area, but there was no sign of an actual snake anywhere. The hallway was normal, save for Ivy, who looked like she had just seen death itself.

"Hey, what happened?" Violet crouched beside Ivy, gripping her shoulder. She could feel her friend stiffen beneath her touch like a board.

Ivy tried to speak, but the words lodged themselves in her throat. Finally, she managed to choke out, "Roman, he...."

Fuck.

That was all Violet needed to hear.

She had woken up to an empty bed, which meant that slippery bastard had already left. And if Ivy looked this traumatized, that could only mean that Roman had made his grand exit in snake form.

Daisy and Lila arrived at that exact moment, panting slightly, eyes flicking between Ivy—who looked one scream away from cardiac arrest—and Violet, whose expression looked two seconds away from murder.

"What the hell happened?" They asked in unison.

Violet took a deep, calming breath before answering, her voice flat with irritation. "Roman happened."

"Oh"

Daisy and Lila instantly understood.

Violet clenched her jaw. That asshole. Instead of coming after her directly, he had gone for her friend. And why? Because he knew that would piss her off more.

And it worked. Violet was pissed.

By the time they dragged Ivy back to their dorm and gave her some water, she had mostly calmed down. Her fingers still shook slightly around the glass, but at least she could speak properly now.

"I'm okay now," Ivy said, brushing off the concern. "It just... happened so suddenly, and I wasn't ready. That's all."

Although Ivy's tone was casual as she tried to wave it off, Violet wasn't fooled. Ivy was proud, and Roman had reduced her to a screaming mess in the hallway. That was something she wouldn't forget.

Violet sighed, "I'm so sorry. This is my fault." She apologized, guilt eating at her.

"That's no fault of yours," Lila said firmly with her arms crossed and her voice laced with righteous fury. "Roman Draven is an asshole. Final."

"Well... we did provoke him first with the Kitten Roman show," Daisy said pointedly.

Except that was the wrong thing to say in that situation as three pairs of eyes snapped toward her like sniper rifles locking onto a target.

Daisy shrank in her seat. Shit. Bad move. If looks could kill, she'd be buried six feet under by now.

Before they could fully roast Daisy alive, Lila suddenly perked up, remembering something.

"Oh right, Violet! This is for you!" She reached out and pulled out a big ribbon-bound package, shoving it into Violet's hands.

Violet blinked, taking it with confusion. "What's this?"

"One of the students found me on my way back and asked me to give it to you," Lila grinned. "Said it's from your boyfriend."

Violet's eyes widened. "Alaric?" she whispered.

As if on cue, her phone beeped. Her stomach did a flip as she picked it up and discovered it was a message from Alaric.

"Alaric sent me a text," she announced.

Before Violet could even finish, three bodies crashed into her, pressing against her shoulders to peer at the screen.

Lila, Daisy, and Ivy were practically suffocating her, their excitement electric as they read the message out loud:

"I know you wouldn't like me making the choice for you, but I couldn't help but think you'd look electrifying in these tonight. Your thunderboy."*

There was silence for seconds. Then—

"AHHHHHHHH!!!"

Lila squealed so loudly their ears nearly bled.

"He's so sweet!!!" She grabbed Violet's arm, shaking her violently.

"Damn," Daisy breathed, clearly impressed. "I think I need to get myself an Alaric Storm."

Even Ivy, the one usually jealous of the attention Violet gets, gave an approving nod, "He's good." And coming from her, that was high praise.

"Now open it!" Lila practically bounced on her heels.

"Yes! Open it!" Daisy chimed in.

Violet, completely overwhelmed, had no choice but to comply. She carefully untied the ribbon and peeled back the wrapping, her breath hitching the moment she pulled out the first article of clothing.

It was a black, fitted crop top with delicate lace detailing along the upper chest and shoulders. The V-neck dipped just enough to show off her collar bones but not plunge into anything too scandalous.

Violet swallowed hard and reached for the second piece, a high-waisted, dark-wash distressed skinny jeans. The rips along the knees and thighs gave them a rugged, rebellious charm, while the snug fit would no doubt hug her legs and hips just right.

Holy shit. How the hell had Alaric known?

This wasn't just a good outfit, it was perfect and exactly the kind of thing Violet would have picked for herself. It was almost as if Alaric had crept into her mind, read her thoughts, and materialized them into reality.

It was... touching. Except Violet remembered right at that moment why she couldn't accept it.

Guys," she said slowly, biting her lip. "I don't think I can wear this." Not when she planned on breaking up with Alaric tonight. It would be cruel to take his gift and then shatter him.

But the moment Violet said those words, three pairs of eyes turned on her so sharply the room temperature dropped.

Violet froze. Why were they looking at her like that? As if they were about to murder her.

"Get her," Ivy commanded.

Violet had never known fear until this moment.

"No—wait—!!"

But it was too late as Lila pounced.

"Ahh—!" Violet yelped as the breath was knocked out of her, Lila's full weight pinning her to the bed.

"What the hell are you doing, you crazy girl?!" Violet protested, kicking, struggling for dear life. But there was no escape.

"Grab her legs!" Ivy ordered.

Daisy, who usually preferred staying neutral in such fights, quickly complied, grabbing hold of Violet's struggling legs as Lila fumbled with the outfit.

No. This was not happening.

But it was happening.

"Guys, wait—!!"

Ivy cut her off, saying with determination. "You are not making a fashion disaster at your first official party as a cardinal queen. That would be a social death and I will not allow it."

"You guys have lost it!" Violet wailed as Lila tugged the top over her head.

"Just let it happen, honey." Lila grinned. "Resistance is futile."

Alaric's outfit it was.

Chapter 152: A Tip In Power

"And finally, the moment we've all been waiting for has arrived! We are live at the bonfire party tonight!" Nicole spoke into the camera with excitement as she recorded for her blog.

Ever since the meteoric rise of The Oracle, every aspiring student journalist and gossip columnist had been scrambling to follow in her footsteps.

But no matter how hard they tried to mimic her style, none could match the Oracle's enigma, nor her undeniable dominance in the world of Lunaris reporting.

Still, that didn't stop them from trying.

Nicole pivoted slightly, angling the camera toward the extravagant bonfire setup, her voice laced with awe because the Alphas were definitely not afraid to flaunt their affluence.

Her camera panned across the arena, capturing every excess and indulgence in full, glorious detail.

Unlike ordinary boarding schools, where students had to sneak around, bribe lenient staff, or risked expulsion for throwing unauthorized parties, the Cardinal Alphas did not ask for permission.

They did what they wanted.

Because at Lunaris, the Cardinal Alphas didn't just rule the student body.

They owned it.

The bonfire arena was remote yet accessible, settled in the sprawling, shadowed clearing right next to the infamous Silver Glade, the scary woodland.

But not tonight.

Tonight, the alphas owned the darkness.

Four massive bonfires blazed in different locations, their towering flames casting golden light across the wild faces of the students.

Overhead, fairy lights were draped across tree branches, twinkling like stars. And just beyond the main fire pits, LED floodlights near the seating areas ensured that the students could see exactly who they were socializing with, but not too much to kill the thrill of the night.

The ground beneath them trembled thanks to the deep bass thundering from strategically placed speakers. The DJ was a female elite student who stood on a massive custom setup, flipping through a killer playlist that pulsed with high-energy hip-hop, dark synth beats, and the occasional remix that made the entire crowd of students erupt in excitement.

And, of course, what was a party without alcohol?

There was no sneaking in liquor through flask-lined jackets, no plastic cups disguising contraband drinks. Instead, they were delivered in kegs and crates.

Fine liquor, expensive wines, and imported spirits, the kind of top-shelf exclusivity that only the wealthiest students could casually procure were displayed openly, handled by hired bartenders rather than students trying to mix something lethal in a plastic jug.

Nicole turned the camera toward the VIP section, where the elite students had already marked their territory.

Luxury bean bags, plush seating, and even private hammocks were strewn about for the upper echelon. They had their drinks not from communal kegs but from a private selection, poured into actual glasses, not cheap plastic.

Nicole was still narrating all of this when she caught a familiar face and her journalistic instincts flared.

It was Elsie Lancaster and she rushed over, flashing her perfectly curated on-camera smile.

Nicole wasted no time, mic in hand, she said, "Elsie Lancaster, it is exciting having you grace the party tonight! You look absolutely stunning! Could you look into the camera and say hi to the fans who are definitely digging this outfit?"

Elsie, a natural performer, smiled sweetly at the camera, lifting a hand in an effortless, graceful wave. She lived for moments like this.

And yes, Elsie did look stunning.

She wore a matching emerald-green halter top and miniskirt, the material clinging to her figure like a second skin. The top's delicate cut showcased her toned abs, and the short hem of her skirt emphasized the long, lean power of her legs. As a werewolf, she was naturally hot and never had body issues.

Her slicked-back ponytail accentuated her razor-sharp cheekbones, and the gold statement earrings added a subtle flash of wealth. Around her throat, a brand necklace, worth a small fortune caught the firelight. Elsie had paired the look with gold-strapped stiletto heels, their delicate chains wrapping around her ankles, adding just the right touch of elegance and power.

Nicole, sensing the moment, went for the goldmine question: "Elsie, tell us, what brands are you wearing tonight? And how much does your entire look cost?"

This was exactly the kind of content her audience would eat up.

Elsie beamed, her posture straightening in delight. She was more than ready to flex on the masses.

She lifted a perfectly manicured hand, ensuring the camera captured it as she began listing her high-end ensemble, tossing out obscene price tags with ease.

"This is from the latest I-Piece collection and it's valued at about three thousand Cedes. The necklace and earrings is from Bluemoon brand. A thousand Cedes each. Hair and makeup? Only the best..."

Nicole listened, nodding in appreciation, when her assistant urgently tapped her shoulder. Nicole followed his line of sight and saw her, just as the air shifted.

The music didn't stop, but the conversations did as all heads turned towards her, their breath hitching.

Violet Purple had arrived.

Her black crop top hugged her frame just right, the lace detailing teasing just enough skin without overexposure, while her high-waisted, distressed skinny jeans accentuating her curves like sin, the rips on the knees and thighs adding an effortless rebellious edge.

She had a denim jacket carelessly thrown over her shoulders, giving her that "I don't need to try" attitude that made people try harder to get her attention.

But it was the boots that sealed the deal.

Black, lace-up combat boots. They didn't just compliment the outfit. They defined it, adding an effortless badass alpha-queen energy.

Her silver choker drew attention to the delicate slope of her neck, except only the wolves understood the vulnerability of an exposed throat. It was where dominance and submission met.

Then there was her makeup.

A smoky eye with a shimmer that made the firelight dance in her gaze, her deep berry lipstick bold, striking and defiant. And finally, that signature violet-streaked waves were tousled in that perfect, effortless way, like she had just run her fingers through it.

Even Elsie Lancaster, who had been basking in her moment of vanity, stiffened. She wasn't stupid. She knew what just happened. One second, she was the center of attention, and the next, Violet Purple had effortlessly stolen the spotlight.

And to make it worse, Violet wasn't alone.

Like a cinematic slow-motion entrance, her roommates, Lila, Daisy and Ivy flanked her, each looking like they had just stepped out of a teen drama where the main girl squad always outshines the rest.

Lila, wore a fitted satin mini dress in a light pink shade, her blonde hair catching the firelight. She smirked as she fluffed her hair, her expression screaming, yes, I'm hot, keep staring.

Daisy, the quiet but smart one, was wrapped in a midnight blue off-shoulder sweater dress, thigh-high boots elongating her legs to devastating perfection.

And then there was Ivy, the formerly jealous, formerly distant roommate. But tonight, she had decided to stand with them. Clad in a fitted burgundy jumpsuit with delicate gold accents, she looked like she had been born to belong among the elite yet didn't.

The trio didn't just enter. They conquered. And everyone knew it.

And Nicole was already ahead, tilting the camera to capture the moment in history.

Because tonight, a shift in power had occurred.

Chapter 153: Twitching Hands

Violet knew a mistake when she saw one, and right now, wearing this, appearing this way, was one. But then again, she had roommates who had literally ambushed her, wrestling her into submission with zero regard for her personal autonomy.

Lila and Daisy had done her hair, styling it like she was some royal debutante, while Ivy had conducted an impromptu photoshoot, making her strike a thousand different poses for pictures she insisted on posting on her Moonstagram.

That was the only reason they had arrived at the party so late.

At this point, Violet didn't know which version of Ivy she preferred—the past sassy, jealous, territorial one, or this new overbearing, perfectionist Ivy who had apparently made it her personal project to refine her image.

It honestly wouldn't surprise Violet if at breakfast tomorrow, Ivy started teaching her the "proper" way to hold a spoon.

And the thought of that was terrifying.

As they made their way through the party, the crowd unconsciously parted for them, as if they were an approaching storm no one wanted to get caught in.

But just as Violet was about to relax, a girl suddenly appeared out of nowhere, shoving a camera right in her face.

"The goddess bless our hearts—Violet! You are on fire tonight!"

Violet blinked, completely thrown off. "Excuse me, do I know you?"

She let out a sheepish laugh, clearly trying to cover her embarrassment. "Of course, you can't know everybody. That would be way too much work for the Purple Storm, right?."

Before Violet could even process that, Lila leaned in, the human encyclopedia as always.

"That's Nicole. She's a blogger."

Violet nodded in understanding. That was all the cue Nicole needed. She wasn't about to let this golden opportunity slip away.

"Tell me, Violet Purple, how much does your entire ensemble cost?"

"Excuse me?" A furrow formed between Violet's brows. Even she didn't know how much her outfit cost. So why should anyone else care?

Sensing the conversation was about to take a nosedive, her roommates tried to intervene, but before they could—

"Of course, she doesn't know," a voice cut in, dripping with condescension.

"Because she didn't buy it herself."

A hush fell over the crowd as Elsie Lancaster stepped forward, her heels clicking against the ground.

"The bitch has been leeching off Alaric Storm."

Oh. Here we go.

Even with the party still in full swing, nearly every pair of eyes in the vicinity had locked onto the confrontation between Violet and Elsie. There can't be two queens ruling one kingdom. It was obvious now.

Holding Violet's unfazed gaze, Elsie sneered. "Fate finally smiles on her, poor girl meets rich boy, and now she intends to suck him dry."

Nicole nearly vibrated with excitement, subtly adjusting the angle of her camera and capturing the moment in perfect, high-definition clarity. This was prime content and her blog was going to explode by morning.

Usually, Violet, however, wasn't one for public petty squabbles. But then again, this bitch had been pushing her buttons for far too long.

And tonight? She was in the mood for a little trouble.

With an easy smirk, Violet tilted her head. "If that's the case, then it's an insult to Alaric if an outfit he bought for his girlfriend would render him broke."

A snicker slipped from Lila before she could stop it. Daisy pressed her lips together, barely containing her laughter, while Ivy maintained such a painfully straight face that it was obvious she was struggling to hold it in.

With the intention of teaching her a lesson, Elsie took a step forward before catching herself. Right. She was on camera. Still, her fury simmered beneath her veins, her embarrassment radiating off her in waves.

"You bitch—"

But Violet wasn't done.

She took a deliberate step closer, standing toe-to-toe with Elsie. "I'm his girlfriend," she declared, her voice carrying a confidence that shut down any further protests.

"If Alaric doesn't spend on me, who would he spend on then? You?"

Elsie visibly stiffened.

Violet scoffed. "Learn to mind your business, Elsie Lancaster. It would help your life."

And with that, Violet turned on her heel, her roommates falling into step beside her, the perfect entourage following their queen.

But as they walked away, Lila turned back and made a face at Elsie, sticking her tongue out like a child.

However, Elsie's eyes flashed with pure rage, her wolf itching to surface at the insult.

Nobody told Lila, she immediately quickened her steps. She did not want to die tonight.

Even though Violet had the last word, her veins still burned with anger.

She was a strong, independent woman, and the idea that Elsie would paint her as some gold-digging social climber pissed her off to no end.

So when a passing server walked by with a tray of drinks, she snatched one without hesitation.

"Whoa—" Lila reached out to stop her, but Violet had already downed the drink in one go.

The girl told her as she took her own drink from the tray. "Drink like that, and you'll be drunk faster."

Violet set her glass down with a sharp clink. "Don't worry. I won't be drinking anymore."

From Adele's words at the hospital that day, something was going to happen tonight and she needed to have a clear head for it. She needed to be ready.

Violet turned to her friends, her expression firm. "Don't get drunk. That's an order."

It wasn't just for Lila, but for Ivy and Daisy as well.

"Okay, mama," Ivy's sassy side was back.

Violet rolled her eyes, her focus shifting to the party.

The momentary spotlight on her had faded, and the party had resumed like nothing had happened.

Good.

Now all she needed was to find Alaric, talk to him, and break things off before the night went any further.

But just as she spotted a familiar figure, someone called her name.

"Violet!"

She turned instinctively and smacked right into a wall. Well... not a wall, per se. A wall of muscle.

Violet lifted her gaze, blinking at the sheer presence towering over her.

Griffin Hale.

And suddenly, the breath was knocked clean out of her lungs.

He was wearing a black, vintage embroidered sleeveless tank, which meant his arms were fully exposed.

And holy hell, his arms.

Two corded ropes of muscle with veins running deliciously along the skin, and a peek of tattoos across his shoulders. Her gaze lowered, tracing the ink, but what really stole her attention was his hair.

Griffin had loosened his braids, and now his long, red hair cascaded effortlessly past his shoulders. It looked so well-kept, so meticulously cared for, it was enough to make any woman jealous.

Except there was a little problem.

Violet's fingers were twitching with the need to sink her hands into all that silky, fiery perfection.

Chapter 154: Violate A Tradition

"Violet?"

"Huh, what?"

The sound of her name jerked Violet back to reality, and she realized, to her horror, that Griffin had been talking this whole time while her mind had been a thousand miles away.

"You okay?" His voice was casual, but there was a thread of genuine concern underneath it. "You were completely out of it."

Violet straightened immediately, forcing herself to focus. "Oh! Yeah. I'm good. Perfect. You were saying?"

Griffin didn't look entirely convinced, but he let it slide.

He continued. "I was saying... thank you. For what you did out there on the field today. If it weren't for your ..." He paused, as if searching for the right word, then smirked. "...motivation, we would've lost to Asher's team."

Violet let out a short laugh, waving it off. "Oh, that? It was nothing."

"It wasn't nothing." His voice was firm, holding an intensity that made her pulse zigzag.

Damn.

Then, in a lighter tone, Griffin added, "Although, I don't think I'll be getting that dance out of my head anytime soon." A low, rumbling chuckle followed his words, deep and unapologetically masculine.

And just like that, a hot pulse of heat shot through Violet, settling in places it had no business settling in.

Oh no.

This was bad. She was lusting after Griffin. She was mentally cheating on Alaric with his best friend.

To make matters so much worse, Griffin ran a hand through his hair, the motion so lazy—so careless yet undeniably sensual—that Violet found herself staring, her throat suddenly dry.

Since when was a man's hair seductive?

Violet had never cared much for men with long hair, but Griffin wore his like a goddamn warrior prince.

God.

What the hell was happening to her?

This wasn't her.

This wasn't who she was, and she needed to get her shit together.

"Nonetheless, thank you" Griffin said, oblivious to the absolute chaos in her head.

Thank the gods she caught his words this time.

Violet forced a small, strained smile. "You're welcome."

A silence settled between them, not uncomfortable, but heavy. It was as if they both had something to say... but neither could bring themselves to say it.

They could only stare at each other, the rest of the party fading into the background.

Then as if his senses returned, Griffin gestured vaguely behind him. "I think I'll head back—"

"Your hair!"

The words shot out of Violet's mouth before she could stop them.

Griffin stopped dead.

She had spoken so abruptly, she might as well have shouted it into a microphone. Hence, a few students actually turned to look.

Griffin blinked. "...What?"

Violet swallowed.

Alright. It was too late to back out now.

"I know this might sound weird—crazy, even—but... can I touch your hair?"

And the result was instant. Violet swore she saw Griffin go red.

He stammered. "Y-you want to... touch my hair?"

Griffin looked at her like she had just asked if she could lick his abs.

Perhaps, seeing his stunned expression, Violet realized just how ridiculous her request sounded, so she quickly rephrased.

"I mean, braid it. You must need someone to braid your hair. I'm exceptionally good at it. Trust me, I won't tug too hard."

And that was when Griffin short-circuited.

His mouth fell open and he stood frozen, unmoving. Then, after a long, heavy pause, the first word that escaped his lips was

"...Fuck."

"W-what?"

Violet's stomach sank. Had she said something wrong? Did she offend him? Did she just... ruin everything?

But Griffin just muttered, "I think I need a drink. A strong one."

And with that, he turned and walked away with his

face still burning.

Violet stared after him, completely and utterly lost. She had this unnerving feeling in her guts she just did something wrong.

And that was confirmed when Daisy let out a low whistle. "Damn, Vi. You always go straight for the kill, don't you?"

"What?" Violet whirled around to face her. "What did I do this time?"

She grinned. "Haven't you heard of 'The Way of the East'?"

"I bet she hasn't," Ivy added with a taunting smirk.

Violet narrowed her eyes. "Okay, what am I missing?"

Lila sighed, shaking her head. "Griffin's not just from the East, Violet. He's the future Alpha of the East. And they have... traditions."

"Traditions?" The ominous feelings increased. Had she violated his tradition and provoked him.

Daisy looked far too entertained as she said. "Well... for starters, you can't just go around demanding to braid a man's hair unless you're his mate."

Violet froze. Completely.

And, as if taking turns to destroy her, Daisy continued.

"Eastern men don't cut their hair. Atleast, not until they marry. They grow it out from birth, and their mother braids it for them until they come of age to do it themselves. After that, no one touches it except their mate."

Violet felt her stomach drop. Fuck her life.

And then Lila, the executioner of all hope, delivered the final, killing blow.

"In other words... requesting to braid Griffin's hair? You might as well have been an animal doing the mating dance to entice a partner."

Violet went rigid, her face drained of color.

And, because Lila was apparently Satan incarnate, she leaned in with a coy smile.

"Really? Griffin too? Is Alaric not enough to scratch your itch?"

At that moment, Violet flatlined such that her roommates actually exchanged glances, wondering if they had finally broken her.

Lila, realizing she may have gone too far, tried to soften the blow.

"It's not a big deal. Griffin probably knew you didn't understand the meaning behind it. He won't take it seriously."

But Violet wasn't listening. She was too busy spiraling.

How was she supposed to face Griffin now?

What if he told Alaric?

Would Alaric think she was a slut?

A dark thought crept in.

Like mother, like daughter. Maybe... maybe she really was turning out like Nancy. Maybe her nightmare was coming true. In the end, she wasn't so different from Nancy.

"Violet?"

Her roommates were talking but their voices were muffled, as if underwater.

Someone reached for her and Violet jerked back violently. It was Lila.

"Don't touch me!" Her snarl was almost feral.

Her roommate's wide, worried gazes met hers, but Violet didn't need their concern. If anything, she needed air. She needed to get out. Now.

So before any of them could stop her, Violet turned and fled. Except, in her desperation, she went the wrong way. Instead of escaping, she found herself going deeper into the party.

And for the first time in her entire life, Violet Purple was having a panic attack.

Chapter 155: Looking For Redemption

"I would never be like you!"

How many nights had she spent, staring at the ceiling of the trailer, sometimes the open sky, and whispering it to herself like a prayer?

How many times had she spat those words right into Nancy's face, burning with determination, with fury, with desperation?

And yet, despite all of it, here she was.

Just like Nancy.

The past clawed its way back into her mind, an ugly, relentless thing, reminding her of who she might truly be.

"Is that a Lunar Academy form? Good for you. Just try hard to get in, and your life will get better. If it gets harder to land a guy, remember what I taught you. Just give his dick a good suck, and he'll be putty in your hands. You two could end up together, giving birth to beautiful werewolf babies. What a lucky bitch you are, Violet."

The woman must have cursed her that day.

That was the only explanation for why this was happening.

Why Alaric—who was sweet, who was safe, who was everything she should have wanted—wasn't enough.

Why she was lusting after Griffin?

And worse—why it wasn't just him.

It burned on her tongue, forbidden, unspoken yet Violet couldn't even bring herself to think of the other name. As if the very act of saying it in her head would conjure him into existence.

Something was wrong with her.

Maybe Nancy had lied. Maybe she really was her daughter, after all. It was not beyond Nancy to lie after all, often as a way to avoid responsibility. Maybe whoring ran through their blood, and no matter how hard she tried to escape it, it had finally caught up to her.

But then... the purple hair. She looked nothing like Nancy.

Could she have taken after her father? The father she had never known? The father with purple hair? It was hilarious even as her thoughts spiraled, wild and frantic, searching for something, anything, to hold onto before the guilt swallowed her whole.

Violet came to a stop, sucking in deep, shuddering breaths.

Where was she?

The crowd had swallowed her roommates whole the moment she had bolted. Now, the music pounded in her skull, a relentless, pulsing beat that only made her breathing worse.

Then she saw him.

Asher Nightshade.

Unlike the others, who were lost in the merriment, Asher sat apart.

His pack members were in a corner, drinking, laughing, but Asher lounged alone, a king in his own right.

A lonely king.

Asher blended into the darkness, a shadow amidst the flames, dressed in black hoodies and black jeans, his long legs stretched out as he idly twirled a cigarette between his fingers.

He smoked?

She had never known that.

The white tendrils of smoke made him look even more untouchable, even more dangerous, sharpening the lines of his jaw, the curve of his lips.

But it wasn't the cigarette that unsettled her.

It was his eyes.

They were uncovered.

No glasses.

No filter.

Nothing shielding her from the raw intensity of those slitted, gray irises and her heart skipped a beat. Not from fear. But from the way he looked at her. Because Asher Nightshade not just looked at her— he saw her.

As if he could reach into the depths of her and drag out the very demons she was trying to escape. As if he could take them for himself, make them his own.

He understood and was offering her an escape.

"Come to me, my purple queen. I see you. I understand you. I won't judge you." Those eyes said.

Violet swayed. The offer was too tempting to ignore.

So she took a step forward, her body moving before she could think. Before she could stop herself.

Asher's gaze glowed brighter.

Yes. Come to me.

Then almost immediately, she snapped out of it as if she had been burned.

No. What the hell was she doing? Had she forgotten one thousand reasons why she couldn't go to Asher Nightshade?

He was damaged. Dangerous. And nothing good would ever come out of them being together.

Nothing good could. He would ruin her.

The second Violet made up her mind, the light in Asher's eyes dimmed and his expression hardened.

She turned and fled again, shoving past groups of merry students who barely noticed her.

Except Violet ran straight into another nightmare.

Roman Draven.

Think of them and they shall appear. Why was the universe doing this to her?

Unlike Asher—the lone wolf king—Roman was never alone.

Four women clung to him, touching, fawning, claiming him as their prize. Their hands were everywhere, on his arms, his chest, his thighs, as if they were staking territory. But he wasn't paying attention to them because his tongue was down someone else's throat.

Violet's stomach twisted as their eyes met.

And then, Roman smirked. A slow, devilish curve of his lips, as if he was grateful she had fallen into his trap unexpectedly.

Roman deepened the kiss.

Violet's nails dug into her palms. Because, why was she watching? Why couldn't she look away? And why the hell did it feel like...

Like he was kissing her through someone else?

Roman's grip tightened in the girl's hair, pulling her closer, kissing her harder, his tongue devouring her.

The girl moaned, the sound sending a pulse of heat straight to Violet's core.

Oh fuck no.

Not him too.

She did not want him. She refused to. Roman was not her type. And yet—

Why did she wish it was her? Why did she want to tear those women off him? Why did she want his lips on hers?

No.

No, no, no.

And before she could stop herself, Violet turned and ran again.

This time, Violet didn't stop. She ran blindly, while gasping for air. While looking for something that could anchor her.

She hated herself. This wasn't normal behavior.

Maybe she had been wrong about her not-human theory.

Maybe she wasn't a witch.

Or a fae.

But...

A succubus.

It made sense, didn't it? That would explain why she wanted all four of their attention.

She was just like Micah. And maybe only he could help her. Maybe— Violet crashed into someone.

"Easy—whoa."

She looked up.

And her stomach dropped.

Alaric.

His face split into a grin.

"Finally," he murmured, his arms locking around her like he had caught his runaway girlfriend.

Like she belonged there.

Like he was home.

Warm.

Safe.

Everything she should have wanted.

And just like that, Violet broke.

The tears came out of nowhere.

One second, she was standing there, breathless.

And the next, she was sobbing in his arms.

Completely.

Utterly.

Falling apart.

Chapter 156: His Foolish Girlfriend

"I don't think I can do this anymore," Violet sobbed, her voice breaking like shattered glass. The guilt and judgement she was about to face made her unable to look him in the eyes.

"Hey, hey," Alaric's voice was soothing, gentle yet firm as he lifted her face, forcing her to look at him. Violet resisted at first, but he was persistent.

"Look at me," he demanded.

And she did.

Through tear-streaked lashes and blurry vision, she met those piercing blue eyes, full of concern.

"Good girl," Alaric murmured softly, his fingers brushing against her cheek to wipe away her tears.

But his tenderness only made it worse. How could she betray this? How could she look into those eyes, see all the warmth and devotion he had for her, and still crave another? Others. Was she truly that broken?

"I betrayed you," Violet confessed, her throat tightening around the words. "I kissed Asher behind your back."

The moment stilled, the silence stretching unbearably with unspoken tension. Alaric's blue eyes widened slightly, but that was it. His grip on her didn't tighten. There was no explosion of rage, not even a breeze of tempest. He didn't look angry?

Instead, his gaze flickered around the area, scanning the surroundings as if ensuring no prying ears were listening in.

"Come on." He took her hand, his grip strong yet absent of aggression.

Violet blinked in confusion. Wasn't he supposed to be furious? To yell, you know, demand answers, and break something?

Instead, Alaric's voice was calm as he explained, "This isn't my turf. Anyone could be listening."

Neither did he drag her, nor hold her with the bruising grip of a betrayed man. No, his touch remained gentle, guiding her through the maze of bodies.

And indeed, it was not his turf, as he called it. Violet glanced around, realizing for the first time that she wasn't in familiar territory. There were different faces and no sign of Alaric's packmates. No wonder there were four bonfires set up. One for each pack and she had wandered all three in a haste to get away.

Just like in school, the hierarchy still ruled even in a party meant for everyone. Packs stuck to their own. Yes, it ruined the fun of mingling together, Violet had learned to respect werewolf custom. It was the way of the wolves.

Although now that she looked around, there seemed to be a neutral point where they all met, but most still hung with their pack members.

And now, Alaric was leading her, no, guiding her, through the shifting territories, moving with the kind of unchallenged authority only a Cardinal Alpha could possess.

It was not long before Violet began to recognize familiar faces, and realized Alaric had led her into his domain. The North pack's turf — it was, at least for tonight.

Most of the pack members barely paid them any attention, too caught up in the celebration. A few mischievous wolves howled, cheering on their Alpha for bringing his girlfriend. But not everyone was happy to see her.

Violet felt a sharp gaze burning into her skin and it was Elsie Lancaster, the so-called Queen of the North Pack.

The irony wasn't lost on her. Elsie might be queen in name, but Alaric hadn't chosen her. That had to sting.

Her stare was pure venom, her lips curled in disgust as she watched them pass. But Alaric didn't even acknowledge her. He didn't acknowledge anyone. Alaric kept walking, leading her to a secluded area near the tree line of the Silver Glade.

A chill crept up her spine.

Oh, hell no.

Violet's heart pounded harder, her mind jumping to the worst possible conclusions. Dark, secluded forest. Furious boyfriend. Infidelity confession.

She had heard enough horror stories to know how this scene played out. She was about to be murdered and dumped in the woods.

She swallowed hard. Alaric wouldn't do that....Would he?

Violet barely had time to process her escape if it came down to that before Alaric turned to face her, his gaze searching hers .

"Tell me again, what did you say happened?"

There was no malice in his voice. No sharp edge of rage or judgment. Just patience. Understanding.

Violet's throat was dry, but she forced herself to speak.

So she told him everything. What had happened in Micah's office with Asher. And—God help her—the way she lusted after Griffin, his best friend. Her mating dance—or whatever the hell Lila called it.

By the time Violet was finished, her face was flaming red and she could barely look at him.

Alaric let out a slow, deep breath. "Is that why you've been avoiding me?"

Her stomach twisted and Violet nodded, biting her lip.

Another moment of silence stretched between them.

"You foolish girl," Alaric muttered and before she could react, he flicked her forehead.

"Ow!" Violet recoiled, holding her forehead, gaping at him in shock. What the hell?

"Do you really think I didn't expect Asher to retaliate?"

Violet's jaw dropped. Excuse me?

"You—" She blinked, mouth opening and closing. "You expected this?"

Alaric sighed, shaking his head. "Of course I did. I have known Asher longer than you know him, no, all through my life. It would even be more suspicious if Asher doesn't act like Asher."

Then his fingers traced her jaw gently, tilting her chin so she had no choice but to meet his gaze. "It's my fault. I knew how obsessed Asher was with you, and instead of addressing it. I just let it be when I should have prepared you for him. I'm sorry I failed you, Violet."

Violet felt both stupid and furious, not at Alaric, but at herself. She had spent days drowning in guilt. Fucking Days! when all along, Alaric had already known and accepted this outcome.

The realization hit Violet like a collapsing building and tears spilled over before she could stop them, her body trembling. She had carried this burden alone when she never had to.

"Fuck," Violet choked out, more tears spilling as she flung herself into his arms.

Alaric caught her with ease, wrapping her up in the kind of embrace that made her feel safe. That made her feel whole again.

Alaric didn't rush her, nor did he tell her to stop crying. He just held her like she was something precious. Something worth keeping.

His fingers wove into her hair, soothing, grounding. "Shh," Alaric murmured, pressing his lips to the top of her head. "It's alright. I understand. I'm not mad at all."

Except that only made her cry harder.

By the time she pulled back, Alaric's white polo was thoroughly ruined, soaked with her tears. It left Violet mortified, and she tried to rub away the stains.

"I'm so sorry," she muttered, sniffing.

Alaric merely chuckled, catching her hands before she could fuss over it. "Shh. It's okay."

Then, without hesitation, he leaned down and kissed her. A soft, tender press of his lips that was reassuring and comforting.

"I'm not letting you go, Violet Purple," he murmured against her lips before kissing her again, deeper this time.

"You're mine now," he declared, the possessiveness in his tone sending a shiver down her spine.

Fuck. Alaric was totally hot whenever he was like this. So she let herself sink into him, completely and for the first time in a long time, she felt free and safe.

But then, Violet remembered and she pulled away, breathless.

"What about Asher? What are you going to do about him?"

And what about her feelings for him? And Roman too? But Violet decided not to push her luck yet. One problem at a time.

"I can handle Asher," He murmured, his mouth searching for hers, however, Violet didn't buy it.

"Alaric," she told him, looking him dead in the eyes, "Asher is dangerous."

"And I'm not?" he said, the words laced with quiet menace, his eyes nearly crackling with electricity. And right at that moment, a bolt of lightning streaked across the sky, illuminating his expression.

Okay. Point made.

Alaric was quite scary now he put it that way.

And Violet didn't know why the display sent a thrill of warmth straight to her core. Perhaps she was truly damaged in the head because how could someone be attracted to danger.

Before she could overthink it, Alaric pulled her back into a bruising, hungry kiss. Their tongues tangled, their breaths uneven, their bodies pressed so close she could feel his power buzzing beneath his skin like a current. It was almost as if it was at the surface ready to crackle for her.

Then, just as abruptly, she pulled away.

"Griffin," she panted. "I need to apologize to him."

Alaric groaned, burying his face in her shoulder.

"You really don't give up, do you?"

Violet scowled. "I'm serious!"

Alaric exhaled sharply, then finally, more like reluctantly, pulled away.

"Wait here," He ordered.

Then, with a final kiss to her forehead, Alaric disappeared into the party.

Chapter 157: Catatonic

Violet stood alone in the darkened area, a creeping unease curling in her stomach especially as she stared at the forest behind her.

She shuddered, wrapping her arms around herself. The shadows between the trees stretched unnervingly and though she wasn't a child anymore, scared of the dark and the unseen horrors it harbored, but right now, Violet found herself praying for Alaric to return quickly. After all, the wolves weren't the only creatures that lurked in the night.

And it wasn't long before her prayer was answered. Familiar footsteps approached and she breathed in relief. Except that relief was fleeting.

As soon as she caught sight of the hulking Alpha, her throat went dry. Violet's stomach twisted with anxiety and every ounce of confidence she had built up minutes ago vanished like smoke in the wind. Maybe this had been a mistake. Maybe wanting to see him had been the worst idea she'd had in a long time.

However, Violet wasn't a coward so she planted her feet firmly, resisting the urge to fidget as he approached. Griffin in question

suddenly stopped in his tracks, throwing out an arm to halt Alaric as well.

Their body language shifted, and Violet narrowed her eyes, watching as they turned toward each other, their voices dropping into hushed whispers.

They were arguing about her.

Violet knew it instinctively from the way Alaric's gaze flickered toward her before focusing back on Griffin. Her pulse quickened with curiosity. What were they saying? Before they reached a conclusion, she managed to catch a single fragment of their conversation.

"She's not Lucille."

Her frown deepened at once.

Lucille?

What did Lucille have to do with her apology? A sense of unease curled in her stomach, a gnawing awareness that there was something she wasn't being told.

Violet intended to question them and get answers. But the moment Griffin stepped forward, Violet forgot everything just like that.

She swallowed thickly, feeling the weight of his gaze as if it had a physical hold on her.

And then there was the hair.

Oh, for the love of all things holy.

The very thing that had started this mess was pulled into a messy bun atop his head. Since when had a man bun become this dangerously attractive? Since when had it made her want to unravel it with her fingers, just to see how it would fall around his face?

No. No, no, no.

She was here to apologize, not stand there and lust after Griffin like some weak-kneed idiot.

So get a grip of yourself, Violet!

She took a shaky breath, forcing herself to focus.

"Hi," she breathed, her voice embarrassingly unsteady. She rubbed her clammy hands down her pants, barely suppressing a wince.

God, why was she so nervous?

"Listen, about earlier, I—"

"I think I have something to confess first."

"Huh?" Violet blinked, his words catching her off guard.

She then glanced at Alaric for an explanation, but the lightning prince remained as unreadable as ever. A wall of stoicism that offered her no clues.

That didn't help her nerves at all.

"...Okay?" she said uncertainly, bracing herself.

Griffin hesitated for a moment, watching her cautiously before he finally spoke. "I think it's better if I show you."

Her brow arched in interest, though she shrugged, feigning nonchalance. "Sure. Go on then." She straightened, making a show of preparing herself.

But nothing—absolutely nothing—could have prepared Violet for what happened next.

Griffin's gaze locked onto hers, intense, burning, making her heart race in anticipation.

What was he up to? Violet wondered. The air had already thickened between them, crackling with something she did not understand.

Except it was a second too late when she caught the flicker in his eyes.

The hunger. The intent.

Her body barely had time to react before he grabbed her face and kissed her.

Holy creator of the universe.

What in the actual hullabaloo was happening?

It was just a mere press of his lips. There was no urgency, no overwhelming force. And yet, it was enough to render her completely catatonic.

Ten seconds. That was all it lasted. She had counted.

And yet, time stretched infinitely in her mind, every detail burned into her senses from the warmth of his lips, the roughness of his hands, the way the scent of fresh summer citrus and earthly spices wrapped around her like a spell.

Even when Griffin pulled back, even when he studied her expression as if gauging her reaction, Violet still didn't move. Didn't react.

Didn't breathe.

Then, a frown tugged at Griffin's lips. He turned to Alaric. "Do you think we broke her?"

Alaric stepped closer, scrutinizing her carefully. "At this point, I think we did worse."

He reached out, giving her a gentle shake. "Violet, baby? Are you alright?"

And finally she roused. But words failed her.

Her mind was a hurricane of confusion, emotions, and sheer disbelief. All Violet could do was lift a trembling hand and point at him, her voice barely managing to come out.

"Y-you...!"

Her heart pounded as she turned to Griffin, realization striking her like a bolt of lightning.

He kissed her. Griffin had kissed her.

Right in front of Alaric.

And Alaric had done nothing.

Her cheeks burned, a fierce heat creeping up her neck as her brain fought to make sense of what had just happened.

Why wasn't Alaric mad?

Why had Griffin kissed her in the first place?

What universe of madness had she just stumbled into?

Her thoughts spiraled into chaos, her pulse thundering, her entire world tipping dangerously on its axis.

And the worst part?

Neither of them looked remotely surprised.

Griffin looked at her amused, saying, "I think she needs more demonstration."

No! No more demonstration, mister!

Violet wanted to say except Griffin's lips crashed against hers with devastating effect. He kissed her with a desperate hunger, as if he had been starved for her touch for too long and now, he couldn't get enough.

Shock froze her in place for a heartbeat, her thoughts scrambling to catch up. Perhaps, this was a dream. Unfortunately, there was no mistaking the warm sensation of those lips.

Fuck.

Fuck.

Fuck.

Goddess save her. What was going on here?

And why was her boyfriend's best friend kissing her like a man staking his claim right in front of him?

She should stop this madness now!

And yet the moment she attempted to move, Griffin let out a deep, guttural sound in the back of his throat.

His large hands found her waist, pulling her flush against him, and the heat of his body seared through the fabric of her clothes. And just like that, her breath hitched as every nerve in her body buzzed with awareness.

That was all that was needed to make Violet cave in.

Chapter 158: Sweet Temptation

Violet kissed him back, her hands tentatively lifting his shirt up, fingers grazing over the hard ridges of muscle. Fuck. The guy was built like a rock.

However, no matter how tantalizing Griffin's rock hard abs were, a name echoed in her mind.

Alaric.

He was watching them from a distance with no reaction on his part. What must he be thinking, seeing his own girlfriend being kissed by his best friend?

Did he finally lose his mind?

But Griffin seemed to sense her distraction and his lips moved more aggressively against hers, tilting her head back, stealing all air from her lungs, and all thoughts from her mind.

He caused her head to go blank. Violet couldn't think of anything except for his tongue exploring every corner of her mouth and his hands on her waist.

Her own hands slide up, her fingers finally burying themselves in the one thing she had been aching to touch—his hair.

God, it was soft. Thick, silky, and warm between her fingers, just as she had imagined. If not better.

A shudder wracked through Griffin as she curled her hands into his red locks, deepening the kiss. He groaned in approval, his grip on her tightening as he angled his head, demanding more.

They kissed with reckless abandon, ignoring the audience around them in the name of Alaric. However, Alaric was not one to be ignored, because he had his own plans.

Violet felt a new sensation of warm lips brushing against the curve of her neck from behind. She gasped into Griffin's mouth, and he swallowed the sound whole, but she knew exactly who it was.

Alaric.

He tilted her chin to the side, exposing more of her throat as his lips skimmed over it, teasing, testing, as if deciding where to sink his teeth.

Alaric's breath was warm, his touch intentional, and when his lips pressed just beneath her jawline, a shiver of pleasure raced down her spine.

Oh, gods. Heat pooled low in her belly and Violet arched back against him.

A soft chuckle brushed against her ear. "You didn't really think you could just run from me, did you?" Alaric murmured, his voice dark and causing goosebumps to wash over her.

Violet's heart pounded at the combined effect of Alaric's words and Griffin continuous kisses. The pleasure was becoming overwhelming and was too much for her body to handle, but Alaric made it clear he had plans for her.

His fingers sparkling with small threads of lightning trailed down her arm, brushing against her skin in a featherlight gesture that sent shivers of pleasure through her body.

"Urgh," Violet whimpered into Griffin's mouth.

"You're trembling," Alaric stated the obvious

with dark amusement. "Do we make you nervous, Violet?"

Violet tried to part her lips to get air. She wanted to clear the haze clouding her mind and escape these two bad wolves before they devoured her. But Griffin's hold was like iron and she couldn't escape him.

As Griffin continued to kiss her deeply, Alaric's hand travelled down to her jeans and began undoing the button, then the zipper until a moment later, a finger entered her wetness.

"Mmmh," Violet moaned, her head spinning. This was too much. Too much heat, too much sensation, too much of them. And she needed to breathe.

This time Griffin let her part, and Violet sucked in a lungful of breath, yet there was still nothing to brace her against Alaric's skilled fingers. So instead, she held onto Griffin tightly, else her legs gave up on her as Alaric continued to torment her.

"You're such a greedy vixen," Alaric whispered in her ear as he circled and flicked her clit mercilessly.

Violet moaned long and loud, not caring anyone might stumble upon them. How could she care when the sensation was driving her crazy?

Griffin had taken to nibbling, sucking and biting her skin. Those bites would probably leave a mark later, but she would care about those later.

Except Violet had a bigger problem now as the big man had a change of mind, reaching around to grab her breasts through her clothes. Kneading, fondling and pinching, he added to the pleasure coursing through her body.

Violet's moans grew louder and more desperate as the dual sensations peaked, making her feel lightheaded and overwhelmed. At this point, she might explode from the pleasure.

"Please..." Violet asked for mercy. She couldn't do this anymore. If anyone had ever told her even in her wildest dream that tonight would end like this, she could never believe it!

"As the lady wishes!" Alaric said cockily, the words sending a chill down her spine.

Then his fingers began to move faster and faster against her, bringing her closer and closer to the edge

"Fuck!" Violet cried out, the feelings inside of her already building to that peak that she couldn't breathe. They were going to be the death of her!

Alaric's movements pushed her over the edge into a powerful orgasm and before Violet knew it, she was kissing Griffin again, screaming her pleasure into his mouth and the big man indulged her with passionate kisses.

But Alaric didn't stop either, he kept flicking and circling her clit, drawing out her pleasure for as long as it could last until Violet had a second orgasm and collapsed against Griffin, completely spent.

Only then did Alaric withdraw his fingers, glistening with her wetness. He brought them to his mouth and licked her essence off each finger, savoring the sweet taste with a pleased growl. It was worth it.

Then Alaric pulled Violet away from Griffin, eager to take his turn with her. His kiss was demanding, possessive, as if he was reclaiming what was rightfully his. Violet found herself melting against him, her body still trembling from the aftershocks of her intense orgasms.

Alaric kissed her deeply, making sure she could taste herself on his lips, a tangy reminder of the pleasure he'd just given her. The hard bulge of his member was pressed against her, while Griffin's hands roamed her body, both men promising sweet temptation she might not have been able to resist had they been inside.

Thank the gods for little mercies.

Violet finally pulled away from Alaric, her breath heavy as her chest rose and fell with exertion. Her lips tingled from the kiss, swollen. Not to mention her skin was flushed, and her mind was nothing but a scrambled mess of heat, confusion, and disbelief.

She turned wide, dazed eyes toward Alaric, then Griffin, and the reality of what she had just done slammed into her with a full force.

This was not just a kiss. Nor a heated moment of weakness. No, she had rapidly shifted up a gear from soft touches to heavy petting and with two men.

One, her boyfriend. The other, her freaking crush.

The gods help her. What the hell had she just done?

Her stomach twisted, shame and shock bubbling into a volatile mix of emotions.

Violet whirled on Alaric, because screw it, she needed someone to blame. And that someone was her boyfriend, the one who had pushed Griffin toward her.

"You better start talking now." She demanded, her voice already tight with tension and a single thread away from snapping.

And as the full scope of madness settled in her head, Violet became very aware of the raging temper she was barely holding back.

Her foot twitched, her brain already contemplating kicking Alaric in the one spot where the sun never shone. Not that she had the heart to actually hurt him—her devastatingly handsome, ridiculously good mannered boyfriend—but angry people did angry things, and right now, she was fuming.

Alaric lifted his hands, trying to calm her. Even though she looked a second away from murdering him, he was ever the picture of calm, as if he wasn't the reason she was currently on the verge of a meltdown.

"I know it's bewildering to you, but—"

"Ah-ah! No excuses." She cut him off sharply, jabbing a furious finger at him. "Just explain to me what the fuck just happened right now!"

And then, before Alaric could even attempt to open his mouth, someone beat him to it.

"I like you."

Violet froze.

Her head snapped toward Griffin, her eyes nearly bulging out of their sockets as his deep, unwavering voice reverberated in her ears.

Did... did he just...? Was that what she was thinking?

Fuck. Violet nearly choked on her own saliva.

She gawked at Griffin, completely stunned by the sheer boldness of his confession.

Her face went beet red as she spluttered, "B-But I'm Alaric's girlfriend!"

"And you can be mine too," Griffin said simply, stepping closer, his confidence shattering her fragile grip on reality.

Violet's mouth fell open, then closed. Then fell open again.

Because what the hell was she even supposed to say to that?

Griffin's gaze burned with hope, like he had just offered her the solution to all her problems instead of throwing her into a full-fledged existential crisis.

"We can share," Griffin continued smoothly, as if this was a perfectly rational conversation. "Alaric doesn't mind. I don't mind either."

Oh. My. Gods. She must be on an alien planet right now. This can't be planet earth.

This was simply mental.

The whole thing was completely, utterly, beyond the realms of sanity. But of course, this was Lunaris academy where the impossibility becomes possible. This school keeps getting better day after day.

That was what Violet could think as her brain spiraled into pure chaos.

Of course, polyandry wasn't exactly extinct. She had heard of packs who practiced such relationships, but never—not in her wildest, most outlandish dreams—had she thought that she would be in this situation.

She already had her hands full with Alaric.

How in the ever-loving hell was she supposed to handle Griffin too? And the threat of Asher too. Nope, she would run mad.

Moreover, she didn't know how that stuff worked anyway. Neither did she even want to think about how it worked.

Violet shook her head violently, as if trying to physically rid herself of the thought. "No, I don't think I can handle this. It's too much—"

"You can handle this."

Alaric's voice was gentle yet firm, as he took her hand in his. The warmth of his touch seeped into her skin, grounding her. More like coercing her.

He said "Others before you did it. You can."

And just like that, something clicked in Violet's head. It hit her like a bolt of lightning.

Lucille.

Violet sucked in a sharp breath, her eyes widening.

"Lucille..." she murmured, pieces falling into place at an alarming rate. "That's right."

She looked between them, her stomach twisting as the truth became unbearably clear to her.

"She had a polyandrous relationship with both of you." Violet rephrased, "All of you."

Her voice trailed off, but everything already made sense.

That's why Alaric and Griffin had been arguing earlier. 'She's not Lucille.'

That's why they had looked at her like she was an enigma they couldn't figure out. That's why Griffin was so confident. Because they had already decided for her.

Her blood ran cold and Violet staggered back, horrified.

"You planned this..."

Alaric and Griffin exchanged looks.

Violet's stomach dropped.

Oh, gods. They had.

"I'm sorry, but I can't do this." Violet said, having made up her mind.

She turned to leave, but Alaric grabbed her wrist, stopping her. His touch burned through her like a brand, making her stomach twist with emotions she wasn't ready to confront.

"Wait," Alaric said, urgently "Didn't you tell me you liked Griffin? "

Violet's breath hitched. She clenched her jaw, eyes shutting against the silent pain clawing at her chest.

"Don't you get it?" she whispered, "It's not about liking Griffin."

Her gaze met his, raw with anguish.

"This is what Asher wants!"

Chapter 159: Let Her Go

"What do you mean by that?" Alaric tightened his grip on Violet's wrist, a deep, gnawing fear settling in his gut.

He didn't want to let go, not when Violet looked like she might slip away forever. Alaric didn't know what this encounter would mean for them—for their relationship—and he was scared to find out.

Violet squeezed her eyes shut, her breathing shaky as she tried to calm herself. The panic was clawing at her throat again, and she was holding on by a thread.

And then she looked him dead in the eyes, she said, "Days ago, when Asher and I hung out, he told me straight to the face, 'You, my purple queen, will take Elsie's place.'"

Her lips parted with a humorless laugh. "What do you think he meant by that, Alaric? I'm his rebellion against the Alpha King. And he wants all of you in it. What better way to make that happen than through me?"

Almost immediately, a hollow laugh escaped her lips, one of bitter understanding. "Lila was right. Asher's a fucking puppet master. This whole time, you thought you were winning, but look where we are. Both of you, vying for my attention, and he never even had to lift a damn finger."

"Fuck." Violet cursed, her hands tangling into her hair, tugging as if she could yank out the thoughts that had latched onto her mind.

"What if this attraction I feel for all of you isn't real? What if it's his manipulation? Oh, god—" Her voice cracked as horror spread across her face.

"Is he in my head? I thought he promised!" Her frantic gaze darted back to Alaric, wide and desperate, searching for answers he couldn't give her. One that left her disappointed.

Violet's breath was coming too fast, too shallow. Her chest heaved violently, her vision tunneling, her world crashing down.

"Alaric," Griffin warned, his voice edged with concern. "She's losing it."

Alaric swore under his breath, his eyes now wide with realization. "Fuck."

He moved swiftly, grasping her cheeks, forcing her to focus on him.

"Alright, Violet," he said seriously. "I need you to calm down."

But Violet shook her head, stubborn and frantic. "No, I'm fine. I just—I just need to see Asher. I need to know what he did to me."

Violet didn't even realize that she was in the middle of a breakdown.

But Alaric did.

He tilted his head slightly, his ears twitching as his wolf senses honed in on her heartbeat. It was racing faster than it should be. Wild and erratic.

"Violet, I can hear your heart pounding. You are not okay."

A racing heart in a panic response meant a dangerous spike in adrenaline, and with her stress levels this high, her body was running on overdrive. If this continued, she'd collapse, or worse, send herself into shock.

But Violet was being her stubborn self.

"No, I'm good," she insisted, desperate to get away. The walls were closing in. The air was too thick. She needed to breathe, to move.

She turned sharply, but Alaric stepped in her path.

"I think I can help you," he said. "I need to calm you down first, and then we can talk."

Alaric reached for her chest, fingers brushing lightly over her sternum, ready to channel his power to steady her frenzied heartbeat.

But to Violet who was already drowning in panic, she saw the move as a hindrance. A threat.

Her instincts took over and in a blur of motion, her hand shot out as she karate chopped him on the throat.

Alaric jerked back immediately, coughing hard, his body recoiling from the sudden hit.

"What the fuck?" He wheezed, the pain stinging hot.

Violet didn't wait to see the aftermath because she was already on the move.

"Get her!" Alaric choked out, his hand still grasping his throat. Even as a werewolf with fast healing, that hurt like a bitch. Where does she learn all that moves?

Griffin chased after her immediately.

Violet was fast, but Griffin was faster. Like a Fangball player on a mission, he barreled straight into her, taking her down hard. They hit the dirt hard, a sharp oof escaping her as the air rushed from her lungs.

But she didn't go down easy. Violet kicked, twisted, fought with everything she had.

"Violet!" Griffin roared, using his Alpha command. "Calm down! We're only trying to help you!"

For a brief second, her body stilled, her breathing slowing. Griffin thought it worked and she had submitted. Except he was wrong.

Without warning, Violet's knee shot up, ramming straight into the one place no man wanted to be hit.

Griffin's eyes went wide as pain exploded

through his lower half. Even with all his strength, it goes without saying that particular spot was soft and full of meat.

He doubled over with a strangled groan, his hands flying to his junk as he collapsed beside her.

Holy fuck.

Violet kned him while trying to get her to date him. His mother would absolutely love Violet if she ever heard this story.

But Griffin had bigger problems. He had given her an Alpha command. And she had resisted it.

No one resisted an Alpha command. Not unless they were an Alpha themselves.

Or someone with a power equal to a Cardinal Alpha. What the fuck was she?

But that unsettling discovery barely had time to settle before Violet was running again. But

Alaric wasn't going to let her escape this time.

He tackled her next, but unlike Griffin, he had learned from the mistake. He pinned her fast, making sure she had no leverage to knee him where it hurt. His grip was like iron, his body caging hers beneath him.

"Let me go!" She struggled with him.

A crackle of electricity rippled from his fingertips, not enough to harm her, but enough to send a gentle pulse of energy against her skin. It was enough to slow her racing heart and to pull her back from the edge.

Alaric focused, careful not to use too much power, and push her body into overload.

Gradually, he heard the erratic drum of her heartbeat slowing, settling, and evening out into a steady rhythm.

Violet slumped beneath him, tired.

Alaric exhaled in relief just as Griffin, who had recovered from the attack, came beside him to check on her. It worked.

But the damage was done.

A lone tear slipped from Violet's lashes, trailing down her cheek. She met Griffin's gaze, and in that moment, he knew.

This was it.

Her voice cracked, raw and full of quiet devastation. "I'm sorry, but I can't do this."

Griffin went still.

"This isn't who I am. I can't live like this. I like you, Griffin, but I'm not like you guys. I'm human. I don't belong in this... this way of life."

Her voice wavered, but her gaze remained firm. "If I do this, people will see me as nothing more than a whore. They'll say I'm like her. Like Nancy. I can't—" her breath hitched. "I won't be like her."

Griffin felt his chest tighten, disappointed.

Alaric's stomach dropped too, but then, this was a possibility they saw coming. But somehow, he had hoped.....

Violet wasn't done.

"And even if I did..." she inhaled sharply. "I don't know if what I feel is real. What if this is all Asher's doing? What if none of these feelings belong to me? I can't handle it."

Silence stretched between them. Long. Painful. Final.

Finally, after what felt like a lifetime, Griffin exhaled. There was only one thing he could say.

His voice was soft. Resigned.

"...Okay."

And he let her go.

Chapter 160: It Was Time

~ Alaric and Griffin ~

The party carried on as if nothing had happened. Laughter rang through the bonfire clearing with students drinking freely, and the rhythmic pulse of the music keeping the energy alive.

Violet was back with her friends, enjoying the rest of the party — or so they he believed. Nonetheless, everyone was cool and it was almost as if the earlier tension had never existed.

Griffin and Alaric sat hunched over at one of the tables, slightly apart from the crowd, their drinks in hand as they brooded over their failed attempt at wooing the lady of their choice.

"Perhaps we came on too strong," Alaric muttered before downing his drink in one go.

"Perhaps," Griffin said dryly, tilting his head back and swallowing his own drink with unnecessary force.

The alcohol burned on the way down, but it wasn't enough to drown out the sting of rejection. Not even close.

Their faster metabolism tore through human liquor like air, leaving them only with the memory of the burn, not the intoxication. And right now, Griffin wished more than anything that he could get drunk.

Unfortunately, tonight was the night of the initiation, so he couldn't get drunk either way. He needed to be fast on his feet seeing this was a tradition, he especially as a cardinal alpha, couldn't ignore. The fate of the new pack members—and apparently, Violet—would be decided tonight.

Her name alone made his chest tighten.

Griffin didn't hate her for rejecting him. He respected her choice. But that didn't mean it didn't hurt.

For the second time in his life, a girl he had sincerely liked had turned him down. At least Violet had been polite. Not like Elsie, who had shredded his heart and stomped on the remains as if they were nothing.

Alaric's voice cut through his thoughts. "Don't tell me you're giving up." His eyes were scrutinizing him.

Griffin let out a scoff. "You heard the lady. She doesn't want to be disturbed."

"You also heard the lady," Alaric countered smoothly, leaning forward. "She doesn't know our way. She needs time. Time to be convinced. Time to be taught." His lips curled into something almost wicked. "Time to be seduced."

Griffin met his gaze, a heavy and unspoken emotion flickering in his own eyes before he looked away.

Alaric smirked, sensing his hesitation. "I didn't take you for a quitter, Griffin. The Ironlady would be disappointed." He mimicked his mother's voice with a mocking lilt.

Griffin growled in warning, but Alaric pressed on.

"The fact that she's struggling with her feelings about you, about us, proves she's not like Lucille. it confirms that Asher doesn't have control over her mind."

He leaned back in his seat, swirling his drink. "Think about it. Lucille didn't give a damn about anyone as long as she got what she wanted. Asher could've slaughtered us in front of her, and she wouldn't have blinked."

Griffin exhaled sharply through his nose. "So Asher doesn't control her, and she's not Lucille. But just like she said, Asher Nightshade is still winning. He wants us all chasing after her. Maybe Violet did good by rejecting me...." His voice hardened as he took another sip. "...because I'm not in the mood to be anyone's pawn."

"And you won't be," Alaric assured him. "We'll deal with Asher while Violet comes around."

Griffin huffed, "I don't know about that. But at least your relationship is safe."

Alaric let out a relieved breath. Despite everything, Violet hadn't fully shut him out. She was furious, sure, but she hadn't given up on him. Just... not on them. She couldn't handle both of them.

"It'll work out in the end," Alaric said with conviction.

Griffin hummed, half-convinced, as he took another drink.

Then, a sudden commotion pulled their attention. They both turned in time to see Violet's roommates giggling as they dragged her toward the dance floor.

Griffin and Alaric could tell Violet resisted at first with her stiff and reluctant posture, but it was obvious her roommates weren't taking no for an answer.

Coincidence or not, the upbeat music changed into something slow, and sensual, the bassline thrumming through the air. It was a sultry and magnetic rhythm made for bodies to move together.

At first, Violet's movements were hesitant, rigid, as if she was painfully self-conscious of the eyes on her. But then something in her shifted and she let go.

Her hips began to sway, slow and smooth, matching the rhythm effortlessly. She rolled her body in a fluid motion, her arms lifting as she spun, her hair whipping behind her.

Her roommates joined in, pressing against her, moving as one. They laughed, feeding off each other's energy, with their hands grazing one another, and bodies brushing as they teased without meaning to, seducing without intent.

And yet, even among them, Violet stood out. She wasn't trying to draw attention. But she did.

Her movements became bolder, more enticing. She arched her back, tilting her head as she let the music guide her.

Then, as if sensing their gaze, Violet's eyes locked onto Alaric and Griffin.

They expected her to look away, to avoid them after what had happened. But she didn't.

Instead, her lips curled into the smallest, knowing smirk. Then, slowly, deliberately, she ran her hands down her body, her fingertips grazing her curves before she turned, rolling her hips in a move so devastatingly sensual and so sinful, it was almost obscene.

Heat surged through them both like a strike of lightning.

"Fuck," Alaric cursed under his breath. His fingers tightened around his drink as he glanced down, only to see a very noticeable problem forming in his trousers.

He looked up in time just to see Griffin glancing at his own lap and their eyes met. He knew at once.

Griffin's expression darkened. "Not a word."

Alaric, the bastard, burst into laughter, unable to help it. It was going to be very fun watching Griffin try to stay away from her.

But the laughter was short-lived because a sudden horn blared in the distance.

It was not just them, but every conversation in the party, laughter halted instantaneously. Including the music.

Both Alaric and Griffin's gazes met again and this time, there was no humor.

The meaning was clear.

It was time.