

Defy 221

Chapter 221: A Lone Alpha

Alaric stormed away through the woods, anger practically sizzling off of him. "Alaric!" Griffin called, but he didn't stop.

"Alaric, listen to me!" he tried again, finally grabbing him by the arm. But the moment Alaric turned, fire burned in his eyes.

"No! Don't you dare touch me!" he spat, jerking away. His voice was sharp and laced with raw pain. "This was all your idea, and look how it turned out!"

"Alaric—" Griffin tried to speak, but Alaric cut him off.

"At least if I had settled with the fact that she had chosen to be cut from me, it would have been better than being left with that... that—" His voice broke, his breath shuddering.

Alaric couldn't even say the word. His fists were clenched so tightly his knuckles turned white.

"With that memory!" he finally spat bitterly, his entire body shaking. Tears burned at the corners of his eyes, but he refused to let them fall. He would not cry, not for her. Instead, he would let the heavens hear his cry.

Griffin gave him a sympathetic look, placing a careful hand on his shoulder. "It might not be what you're thinking—"

But Alaric flinched away from his touch like it burned.

"And what exactly is it, then?" His voice was keen with accusation. His hands trembled at his sides, his breathing ragged. "Don't act coy, Griffin. You too saw exactly what happened. She and Roman were fucking kissing. This was why she rejected the houses because she wanted to be with fucking Roman!"

Griffin clenched his jaw, shaking his head as if he didn't want to believe it.

"No, it can't be. I know Violet to an extent and she hates Roman's fucking ass. Perhaps, she might have an explanation for this and you of all people know how Roman can —"

Alaric let out a hollow, bitter laughter. "What reason could that be?" He shook his head apologetically, "I'm sorry, but I'm not like you who always try to see good in everyone even when they don't deserve it.

His voice was raw and heavy with betrayal as he continued. "Violet knew exactly what she was doing. She played me. Just like Julia They're all the same." His eyes turned cold. "And I'm done with Violet Purple's games."

A mournful sound left Griffin's throat. "Alaric..."

"Don't. Follow. Me." Alaric warned, his eyes sparking with electricity

Griffin let out a low wolf-whine. Both of them might be Alphas, but Alaric was his friend, and werewolves were pack creatures. Right now, Griffin could feel Alaric's pain, and wanted to fix it but the North Alpha unfortunately didn't want comfort.

So Griffin stayed frozen, watching as his friend disappeared into the darkness of the woods. And not long after, the sky split apart.

A violent crack of thunder shook the forest, and seconds later, rain poured down in sheets, soaking through Griffin's clothes in an instant.

Griffin stood there, unmoving, rain streaming down his face, mixing with the sweat and anger simmering beneath his skin. Then his nose flared as rage rose inside of him. He turned, using his wolf senses to track down Roman.

When he finally found him, Roman whipped around in surprise, glancing back toward the shack not too far off. His lip curved.

"Have you come to sample the Rogue Queen as well?" Roman asked, his tone laden with mockery. "I have to applaud Violet. Making all four Cardinal Alphas lose their heads over her..." He chuckled, "Her cunt must really be magical —"

He didn't get to finish. Griffin slugged him with a solid punch that knocked him to the ground.

Instantly, Griffin followed, yanking Roman up just enough to pummel him again. "Do you realize what you've done?"

His voice was a snarl, raw with fury.

Roman grunted at the force, blood trailing from his split lip, but before he could react, he was met with another punch. Then another.

"Must you ruin Alaric?" Griffin roared.

Even as he beat him down, Roman looked confused, his dazed eyes trying to process the accusation.

Griffin raged on, "You kissed her, knowing full well what she meant to him, and yet you snatched her away like you always do. Why do you enjoy wrecking other people's lives?"

Oh. So that was it?

Something snapped inside of Roman and

In a sudden burst of strength, he shoved Griffin off, the force sending him slipping on the wet soil. Griffin fell, cursing as he hit the ground. Before he could get up, Roman was on him, pinning him down.

And then he started punching his turn.

"Think the worst of me," Roman snarled between hits, his knuckles cracking against Griffin's jaw. "But I saved his life! Violet is trouble!"

Griffin flipped him over in one swift motion, reversing their positions, his fist slamming down next.

"Fucking hypocrite!" Griffin bellowed, his voice raw. "Trouble, you say? A trouble you can't help but put your lips on?"

Roman growled, his wolf flashing to the surface, and he flipped Griffin back, landing a single punch before spitting out, "I had my reasons."

Both men broke apart at once, stumbling to their feet. They crouched low, their muscles tensed, and eyes locked, letting out dangerous growls that reverberated through the stormy night. Griffin and Roman were panting heavily, their bodies covered in mud.

Roman let out a breath and suddenly laughed.

"Look at us." His voice was dry, bitter. "Aren't we pathetic? Fighting over a girl we can't have?"

Griffin wiped the blood from his mouth, hissing. "I'll have her if I want to."

Roman's smirk disappeared.

"It won't happen," his voice rose, "Elijah wants us fighting over Elsie, not Violet Purple. And all of you are fucking putting the girl in danger."

Griffin snorted. "One would think you actually cared about Violet if I didn't suspect you're only after something else." His gaze darkened. "Stay away from Violet."

Roman's jaw tightened, but his voice remained resolute. "I'm not head over heels in love with her like the rest of you. Unlike you guys, I know what I want, and I go for it."

Griffin took a step forward, but this time, it wasn't to attack. He stopped at a distance that wasn't threatening, and spat out the words like a curse.

"Keep on with your tricks and ambitions, and one day you might find yourself truly alone."

With that, Griffin turned and stomped off, anger brimming in his stride.

Roman stood in the pounding rain, watching him leave. Suddenly, the cold, impassive mask on his face slipped and was replaced by stark sadness.

"I'm alone already." He muttered.

Chapter 222: Her Life Before

~ Asher ~

District One was the slums. The lowest rung of human society. The place was a cesspool of crime, and filth, left to rot in the aftermath of the human-werewolf war.

It was the district forgotten by both the government and the werewolves, a place abandoned to the rule of gangs, corrupt enforcers, and hopeless civilians barely surviving day by day.

This was Violet's home district.

It explained everything about her harsh upbringing, her survival instincts, the way she distrusted authority, and the fire in her eyes that made her different from the others at Lunar Academy.

The cityscape was a mess of cracked roads, flickering streetlights, and buildings that looked like they were one storm away from collapsing. The smell of sweat, and a foul smell lingered in the air, mixing with the distant scent of smoke from burning trash.

Yet, nothing about District One scared Asher Nightshade as he strode through the streets.

Asher blended in as best as he could, his black jacket, shirt, and pants making him just another shadow among the desperate souls of this place. But his presence was still felt. People unconsciously moved out of his way, and from the way their eyes flickered toward him, only to quickly avert it, it was clear that even without knowing what he was, they could somehow sense it.

He was danger. A predator.

He had no business being here. But he came anyway.

The night business was thriving, and the streets were lined with women wearing scraps of fabric that barely passed as clothing. They leaned against crumbling brick walls, their painted lips forming smiles meant to lure men into their arms for the night.

Asher's sharp hearing picked up the telltale sounds of grunts and moans from the dark alleyways where some had already sealed their transactions. His lip curled in disgust.

If it wasn't for the fact that Asher knew his Purple Queen was untouched, he would have been devastated to think that any of these men could have been the one to have her.

Some of the women took notice of him, their keen eyes trailing over his tall frame, the sharp angles of his face, and his dressing. They sensed he had money on him and like vultures on a carcass, a few approached, their voices honeyed with seduction.

But all it took was one cold look to send them back to their business. Asher didn't give them a second glance. His body belonged to one person alone. His purple queen.

And she was the reason he was here.

The next street he entered was far livelier. Merchants lined the sidewalks, shouting over each other to sell their spices, meats, questionable trinkets — and stolen items from richer districts. The air was thick with the scent of cooking food, burning incense, and sweat.

But it didn't take long for something else to catch his attention. There was a commotion and Asher's gaze landed on a group of thugs surrounding a small stall, their aggressive voices cutting through the market noise.

A middle-aged merchant pleaded with them, his hands shaking as he clutched a few Cede bills. "I—I swear, I haven't made enough tonight! Just give me more time—"

One of the thugs grabbed the man by the collar and yanked him over his own table, sending a pile of dried herbs and spices crashing onto the ground.

"You think we care?" the leader sneered before slamming his fist into the man's gut, making him wheeze in pain.

Another thug laughed as he began destroying the stall, kicking over baskets, shattering jars, and whatever little the man had.

The merchant coughed, his face twisted in agony as he gasped, "Please—!"

Asher's hands instinctively curled into fists. He wasn't a busybody and definitely didn't want to involve himself in things that weren't his problem. But as an Alpha, there were few things he despised more than watching the strong prey on the weak.

For a moment, he debated interfering. But then, this was District One. Getting involved in gang business wasn't just dangerous. It was simply reckless. And right now, Asher had a purpose for being here. So he hardened his heart and walked away.

It wasn't long before Asher found Rustwood Park, the sprawling patch of land that housed hundreds of trailers. It was barely livable, with cracked pavement and streetlamps casting eerie shadows. Most of the trailers were rusted, their paint peeling, and their windows covered with makeshift curtains.

Asher asked around for Violet's trailer, but the looks he got in response told him everything. They thought he was here for Nancy's services.

His teeth clenched.

Ignoring the judgment, he followed the directions given and soon found himself standing before a weathered white trailer.

It was pathetic. To think that his purple Queen had been forced to live here made his stomach coil with both anger and disgust.

Asher decided right at that moment Violet wouldn't be returning here for the holidays. No. He would make sure of it.

Asher knocked but there was silence. So he used his wolf senses and was able to find out that there was no heartbeat inside. Nor movement.

Nancy wasn't here.

Glancing around to ensure no one was watching, he grabbed the door handle and forced it open, making a mental note to leave money behind for the damage.

Inside, the stench of cheap alcohol, cigarette smoke, and rotting food assaulted his nose. He scowled at the mess of empty beer cans, ash-filled trays, half-eaten meals left to rot.

What kind of fucking mother was Nancy? It was just weeks since Violet left and she couldn't make the place livable? Who knew what had been their living condition before his little human left?

Asher walked further in, his nose picking up scents. Nancy hadn't been here for days.

Disgust curled in his chest, but he pushed past it and stepped into the small room Violet and Nancy had clearly shared. The bed was lumpy, the blankets barely more than rags. How could someone live here?

Then, on a small nightstand, his eyes landed on a photo. It was the picture of a younger Violet sitting on a swing and scowling right at the camera as if the world provoked her.

It was cute nonetheless and without hesitation, Asher took it and slipped it into his pocket. This was going to be compensation for this little trip.

But then, a sudden sound made him freeze. He waited, listening as the door creaked open and someone came in.

Good, she was back.

Asher went after her immediately, except his eyes locked with a stranger. The man was thin, scruffy, reeking of cheap booze and sweat. His eyes widened the moment he saw Asher, his mouth opening slightly in realization.

Then he bolted.

And Asher chased after him.

Chapter 223: Red Dragon Gang

The man was fast. Desperately fast like one who knew his life was on the line and intended to fight against fate. But Asher was faster.

The chase took them through the grimy, twisting alleys of Rustwood Park, a maze of trailers, sheds, and scattered debris. The stench of damp asphalt, rotting food, and the metallic tang of urban decay filled the air, mingling with the adrenaline thrumming in Asher's veins.

Up ahead, the man threw a metal trash bin into his path in a desperate bid to slow him down, the garbage clattering and spilling across the narrow path. But Asher bounded over it in a single, effortless leap, not even a grunt leaving his lips.

The sight of that made the stranger's eyes widen in terror. "Fucking hell!" He cursed, heart thundering as he ran deeper into the maze of narrow alleyways.

The faint sputter of dying street lamps occasionally illuminated the twisting corners, enabling him to wove between the clustered trailers, but Asher was closing in, the gap between them shrinking with every second.

Asher could have ended this already and taken the man down in an instant, but the bastard knew the backstreets well, twisting through its paths with the instincts of a rat scurrying through its burrow. But then, no matter how well he knew the terrain, no human could outrun a wolf.

At first, some of the trailer residents had been outside, smoking, drinking, talking in loud voices and cracking jokes; simply enjoying the night. But the instant they saw the chase, every single one of them vanished.

With lightning speed, they slammed their doors close with the locks clicking into place. Curtains snapped shut as wary eyes watched from behind glass. Clearly, scenes like this were commonplace here, and no one wanted to become involved.

The man rounded a corner past another row of trailers and hesitated, momentarily unsure of the path ahead. That single heartbeat of indecision gave Asher the opening he needed to surge forward, boots pounding on the cracked pavement like a dark storm approaching.

The man spotted him coming, and yelped in alarm, his panic sending him stumbling into a stack of old wooden pallets leaning against a shed. The entire pile came crashing down, directly into Asher's path.

Asher twisted sideways to dodge the tumbling pile, and though he managed to keep his balance, he lost a precious second, enough for the man to reach a rusted, partially damaged chain-link fence. Scrambling, he climbed, his limbs moving with the desperate agility of a street survivor.

Asher came to a stop, watching as the man swung his leg over the top and landed on the other side, panting. But instead of running now he had the chance, the man turned back nervously and watched him. Why wasn't Asher chasing him?

Except he got his answer the moment Asher took several steps back to gain momentum.

"Oh fuck," the man whispered, dread sinking into his gut.

Asher launched himself up and over the fence in an impossible leap, landing in front of him with a thud that shook the ground beneath him.

The man fell back onto the dirt, his mouth parting in terror as realization dawned on him. He was dealing with a werewolf.

There were rarely any werewolves in District One. None of them liked this crime-ridden wasteland and once the epicenter of the great war.

Before the man could finish that thought, Asher was already on him, gripping him by the throat and slamming him back against a tree. They were in a neglected patch of woods now—ironic, given that this was the last place anyone should try to outrun a wolf.

The man gasped, his fingers clawing at Asher's grip as he stammered, "No, no—please! Don't kill me! You have her already!"

Asher paused, his brows knitting together.

The fuck?

His grip tightened. "What do you mean 'I have her already'? What were you doing in Nancy's trailer?"

The man flinched, his hands lifting in defense, bracing for a hit. But when no strike came, he hesitantly lowered them.

Then, with a cautious frown, he asked, "Aren't you with the Red Dragon gang?"

Asher's eyes narrowed. "Red Dragon gang?"

His patience snapped.

Gripping the man's collar, Asher yanked him forward roughly. "Tell me what you know right now! Where is Nancy?"

"O-okay, okay!" the man choked, his body trembling. "I'll tell you!"

Asher released him instantly, letting him slump to the ground. But the moment the man caught his breath, he scrambled back to his feet, sensing the dangerous impatience radiating from Asher.

With visible hesitation, he finally spoke. "I was—" The man swallowed hard, looking away in shame. "I was Nancy's old customer. And a... friend. We had just finished business—"

Asher wrinkled his nose in revulsion, having a pretty good idea what this so-called "business" was.

The man continued, voice quick and anxious, "We were just talking after, and then these two guys barged into the trailer and took Nancy."

Asher's expression darkened.

"I tried to stop them, I swear! But—" The man gestured to himself with a weak chuckle. "The other guy beat the shit out of me."

Asher snorted. That part wasn't hard to believe.

The man hurriedly went on, "Since then, I've been stalking the trailer, hoping she'd return. So when I saw the door open, I thought maybe, just maybe, Nancy had come back."

His hands curled into fists as he exhaled. "But then, when I saw you, I ran."

Asher assessed him with a dark, thoughtful stare. "So you thought I was one of them?"

The man nodded, then hesitated. "Or another."

Asher's eyes narrowed. "Another?"

The man rubbed his bruised jaw. "The guys that took Nancy are the Red Dragon gang. Nancy sometimes did business with them. If you weren't with the Red Dragon..." His lips pressed into a thin line. "I thought you were from another gang coming for her. Nancy deals with the lots of them."

Asher watched him closely, his sharp eyes assessing. With his wolf senses, he could tell the man was telling the truth. He had lost his shield during the chase, but there was no need for it. He would be needing his wonderful ability at a time like this.

Just like that, his goal of avoiding gang business had just disintegrated. His mother-in-law has been kidnapped. The fate of District One had pulled him in whether he liked it or not.

Asher took a step forward and the man swallowed, instinctively bracing himself, certain he was about to die.

"Do tell, where can I find the Red Dragon?"

Chapter 224: Ignis

In the dead of the night, stood a certain warehouse which had once been a place of honest work, but now, was nothing more than a den of sin.

Some of the fence around it had fallen while rusted, slightly ajar gate barred the entrance with a battered "Keep Off" sign hung there. The main gate's lock consisted only of a chain looped through holes, that anyone with half a brain could undo. But that was the point because only fools or dead men tried to trespass.

This was Red Dragon territory.

Two monstrous dogs with foaming maws and gleaming teeth prowled the perimeter, their low growls meant to ward off any wanderer.

Inside, naked fluorescent tubes buzzed overhead, illuminating the sorry sight of men, women, and even children stripped down to their underwear, bagging and packing precious white powder into sealed pouches.

A handful of tough-looking enforcers patrolled with weapons in hand, ensuring no one stole so much as a pinch of their merchandise.

But the real business took place in a separate room, its door guarded by two mean-eyed thugs. Samuel sat at the head of a long metal table, his fingers idly tapping against the surface. He was the underboss of Red Dragon. Second only to their Don, Titan.

On the opposite side of the table sat their guest, Umal, a brown-skinned man with neatly trimmed beards, and ruffled brown hair that somehow made him look more dangerous than unkempt.

Two of Samuel's armed men stood on either side of him, rifles in hand. But Umal wasn't intimidated. His own two guards flanked him just as confidently, each armed to the teeth.

Samuel rapped a knuckle on the table. "Where is it?"

Umal signaled one of his cronies, who stepped up carrying a brushed-steel briefcase. He set it down gently. When Umal flicked the latches, it opened to

rows of small, delicate bottles, each filled with a milky-white liquid, nestled neatly into their cushioned compartments.

Umal lifted one between his fingers, rolling it in the light before finally speaking.

"We call it Ignis. That is Fire." He smiled, the word rolling off his tongue with satisfaction. "Because once it's in the bloodstream, it burns explosively, unlike anything else before it."

The upper gang members seated at the sides of the table exchanged wary glances.

Umal continued, his voice smooth and honeyed with greed. "Just one taste, and the victim is hooked." His fingers tightened around the bottle.

"Then comes the real beauty of it, the power." He chuckled, dark and knowing. "For five minutes, they will feel limitless. Strength beyond human means. Speed to match a wolf's. A high unlike any other childish drug on the market."

Then he set the bottle down and leaned forward.

"And once they come down from that high?" His smile widened, cruel and serpentine. "The withdrawal is five times worse. That's what makes it so profitable. The addict will do anything, and I mean, anything, to get another taste."

He leaned back, self-assured. "I see a promising partnership here."

There was silence in the meeting room.

Samuel glanced at the other ranking members seated around the table. Their gazes met in silent conversation.

Finally, Samuel spoke. "And how do we know your claims about these powers are true?"

Umal's eyes glimmered with anticipation. "I thought you'd ask for a demonstration."

He motioned to his men and one stepped forward, grabbed a bottle, and extracted its contents with a needle.

Umal's voice was as smooth as a salesman closing a devilish deal. "We'll need... an experiment. "

Samuel nodded to one of his own. The man slipped out and returned shortly after, dragging a pitifully emaciated figure inside. The man was no other than their tester and his eyes lit up feverishly at the sight of the injection.

"Give me!" he begged, already reaching desperately for the syringe.

Samuel gave a small nod. Umal's henchman moved in, jabbing the syringe into the tester's scrawny arm. Everyone watched intently. At first, nothing. Then the man groaned, dropping to his knees as though in agony, clutching his head and snarling like a beast.

A moment later, his agonized groan twisted into a maniacal laughter. His head snapped up, and his wide, dilated eyes gleamed with a sick, unnatural euphoria.

"It feels so good," he whispered, almost reverently. "It's so good. I've never felt anything like this before."

Umal stood before the tester, "How do you feel?" he asked.

The tester stared at his own hands, eyes wide with awe. "Powerful. Like I can do anything."

Umal smiled like a proud father. He turned to Samuel. "Now, we're on a time limit. So let's test it out in a rather... productive way, shall we?"

Samuel's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean?"

"Let's say, perhaps there's someone at this table you've been meaning to eliminate."

The air in the room shifted and Samuel's men stiffened.

Umal continued, his tone almost amused. "Maybe someone's been stealing from you. This might be the perfect time to make an example."

A cold chill settled over the room. No one dared to breathe.

Then, Samuel spoke. "Xander."

A ripple of shock followed. Xander's eyes snapped up, fear etched in them. "Boss, please... it was just once—!"

But Samuel's face was like stone. That was when Xander realized there'd be no forgiveness.

"Shit!" he swore, leaping from his seat in a last-ditch attempt to flee.

But it was too late.

With terrifying speed, the drugged tester went after him, eyes shining with twisted excitement.

Xander sprinted for the exit, but before he made it three steps, the tester lunged, grabbing him by the neck.

The room watched in horrified silence as the tester lifted Xander effortlessly into the air. A sickening crunch was heard as he slammed his skull into the closest wall, smashing it like an overripe melon. Brain matter splattered down the floor in a gruesome display.

The tester dropped him like a piece of garbage, panting heavily, then let out a triumphant laugh so wild, it sent a chill through even the most hardened men in the room.

Umal turned back to Samuel, smirking.

"Shall we discuss numbers now?"

Chapter 225: Secret War

"There will be no discussion of numbers."

Samuel's words fell like a thunderclap in the room.

For the first time that night, Umal's face went slack, the smug curl of his lips vanishing in an instant. The way his expression shifted from self-assured to rattled was nearly comical.

"What are you talking about?" he demanded, his voice dropping in dangerous disbelief.

Samuel simply nodded toward Xander's horrifying remains on the floor. His skull lay cracked open, the blood pooled thickly beneath his corpse.

"Someone just died because of your product."

Umal scoffed. "That's the point," he countered, regaining his composure. "Besides, you were the one who provided the victim."

Samuel, still staring at Xander's body, clenched his jaw. The sickening and haunting sound of his death still echoed in his ears, playing in a repeat in his head. He had seen killings before—he had even ordered them—but this? This was

beyond a simple execution, it was inhuman.

Samuel gestured toward the tester, who was still in his euphoric, frenzied high. "That thing isn't a man anymore, but a beast."

Umal only smiled, a knowing, dangerous look.

But Samuel wasn't finished.

"Even in the underworld, there are limits. If this is what Ignis turns a man into, then anyone who touches it could go on a rampage and harm innocent bystanders, my men, and turn District One into a war zone."

"Moreover, just because the government has given up on District One doesn't mean they don't still watch. A drug that grants superhuman strength and causes near-instant addiction?" He scoffed. "That's an open invitation for both the authorities and the Alpha King to crack down on us. And do you know what that means for us?"

He didn't wait for Umal to answer. He did it himself.

"It means total destruction of the Red Dragon gang. We've survived this long by keeping our heads down. I'd like it to continue that way."

Although his words left no room for argument, Umal offered a thin, unruffled smile. "No road to greatness is easy. There'll be casualties along the way, but what matters is who stands victorious at the end."

He leaned back in his chair, completely at ease despite the growing hostility in the room. "I'm not just here to sell you a drug, Samuel." His voice lowered, almost seductive in its persuasion. "I'm here to offer you power. One that could change the entire fate of District One, if not the whole world."

Samuel's expression remained unreadable, but his fingers tapped the table contemplatively. Umal took his silence as an invitation to continue.

"This is the first batch of production. Perhaps with a little more modification, we could reduce the violent outbursts."

"That's a joke," One of Samuel's men scoffed. "There's no such thing as modification, a drug's a drug. All it needs is the slightest nudge, and your so-called super-users unleash their baser instincts."

Umal waved off the complaint. "Then we sell to those who can control their baser instincts. We don't push this onto commoners, they're too unpredictable. Instead, we market it to those in power. The rich. The elite. Those who have everything to lose if they lose control."

He continued. "Imagine these wealthy men, business moguls, politicians, even officers getting their hands on this. They have a public image to maintain, meaning they can't afford to cut loose and show their darker urges in view. Not when it would destroy their carefully built empires. So we'd keep Ignis off the open market at first and pick the clientele carefully."

Samuel scoffed, unimpressed. "Yes, and when the government catches a whiff, have you forgotten that part?" His voice dripped with sarcasm.

"And did you forget what I just said?" Umal's own voice rose in challenge. "I said richer districts. With withdrawals so severe, addicts will do anything for another fix, including offering you protection, and even killing your enemies. And by the time the government realizes what's happening, you'll have built a drug empire so powerful, they'll have no choice but to tread carefully."

Like a war general with a map, Umal pressed on, pointing at the tabletop for emphasis. "That's how you avoid scrutiny of District One. Let the other districts take the hits, while you funnel Ignis in from behind the scenes. No other supplier has it, so you monopolize the market. Demand explodes, your coffers runneth over, and by the time any government or Alpha king tries to push back, you'll be too strong to dislodge."

Samuel's men looked at one another and while some showed cautious, intrigued looks, others were still repulsed by the memory of Xander's slaughter. It was a room divided, that much was clear.

Finally, Samuel spoke.

"You make a fair argument," he admitted. "But what about my safety? Titan's safety?" His eyes darkened. "You're conveniently ignoring what might happen if my own men get bright ideas, like doping themselves with this stuff for some power grab. A scenario like that spells internal chaos. Anyone with a shot of Ignis might think they can overthrow me. I'd have factions at war in my own house."

Umal's lips pressed into a thin line.

"I told you the supply would be strictly controlled."

"And how the hell do I enforce that?" Samuel challenged, voice rough with anger. "A single crate goes missing or a middleman strikes a side deal, and suddenly, half my foot soldiers are hopped up on your rocket fuel. And aside from the gruesome display you just gave us, you haven't even mentioned the other side effects."

Samuel told him. "I've seen plenty of drugs in my time. And anything that grants this much power is unnatural. There's always a price. Yes, the brutal withdrawal fosters dependence but it can also kill users before they even become profitable repeat customers."

Samuel shook his head, "A dead clientele is not a loyal clientele. Ignis would damage our reputation. It would ruin any chance at long-term revenue. And I intend to do long term."

He then stood up, saying with a tone of finality. "Ignis might bring a huge profit, but it's not worth the trouble. The wolves fought the government once and lost. I won't give them or the authorities a reason to bring that fight to my doorstep." He paused, voice dropping to a lethal whisper. "I see through you and whoever's pulling your strings. We won't be pawns for your secret war."

Umal's eyes burned with offense, his pride wounded. "Red Dragon isn't the only gang in District One," he said, a sneer tugging at his lips. "I only came to you because you control the largest territory, but if you're too cowardly, the others will jump at this."

Samuel barked a mocking laugh. "Then let them. Only fools leap at a ticking bomb...." He trailed off.

Suddenly, Samuel glanced aside at one of his men when a persisting noise from the background became too much.

"Phillip, go shut those damned dogs up."

Indeed, for the past few minutes, the guard dogs outside had been barking incessantly, growing steadily louder with each passing second.

"Yes, boss." Phillip slipped out, leaving the tension in the room thick as blood.

Chapter 226: Dance Of Bullets

Even before Asher reached the warehouse, the dogs had sensed him from afar and began to bark. So when he came closer, the noise became more frantic.

With a simple push, Asher undid the flimsy chain holding the gate shut and strode inside, the dogs now in full alarm mode.

The dogs growled, low and guttural, displaying their sharp teeth, their bodies tensed as if about to attack.

And yet they didn't move.

Not when their instincts screamed that the real predator had arrived.

Asher casually walked over, his glowing slitted eyes settling on the snarling beasts. In a commanding tone, he said, "Quiet."

His authority as an Alpha washed over them and at once, both dogs went docile, ears drooping in submission, releasing whimpers like scolded puppies.

Asher knelt and scratched one behind the ear, the big beast pressing against him like a domesticated pet. The second dog, not to be left out, nudged his hand with its snout, demanding attention.

Asher chuckled. "Good boys. But I'm afraid you've just made my entrance very, very obvious." he murmured, hearing footsteps approaching from behind.

Nonetheless, everything was right on time.

A man with a firearm stepped into view, frowning deeply at the sight of some stranger petting the vicious guard dogs. "Who's there?"

Asher rose slowly, arms raised in a mock gesture of surrender. "I come in peace," he said. Except not even he believed those words.

Then the armed man—Philip, apparently—locked eyes with him, and that was all the West Alpha needed. His pupils dilated, his stance wavering as his mind became snared in Asher's compulsion.

"Lead the way, would you?"

Philip nodded as if in a trance, promptly escorting Asher toward the warehouse entrance. Along the way, a few other Red Dragon lookouts saw them and one of them called out, "Who's that?"

Philip answered swiftly, "Samuel's important guest."

Nobody thought to question further. They certainly didn't recognize the cardinal alpha, after all, none of them had ever seen him in person. Even if they somehow recognize him from watching the news, none of them would ever expect a werewolf of his rank to set foot here in District One, let alone on Red Dragon turf.

Wolves had no business here.

Asher's gaze took in the warehouse floor as he passed through and the place was a hive of illicit activity as expected. Men, women, children even, were busy filling small packets with white powder. Asher's nose wrinkled at the sight of kids forced into the drug trade.

But he kept moving, letting the men patrolling with guns glance over him briefly. They seemed more curious than aggressive, it was Philip leading him around, after all, hence there was no cause for panic.

He moved past them, arriving at the main door, the one guarded by two armed men.

Before they could even utter a question, Asher's eyes flashed, and compulsion overtook them instantly. They parted, stepping aside like puppets with cut strings. Asher paused in the threshold, turning back.

"Should any commotion arise inside..." he said in a voice dripping with power, "shoot anyone who tries to come inside. Then set the men, women, and children free and forget they existed. Like ever."

He pumped extra force into the final command, watching them shiver as their eyes dilated in robotic compliance.

"Yes..." they droned in unison.

Satisfied, Asher faced the room of waiting prey with anticipation. Dramatically, he pushed the doors open and all heads turned towards him.

Samuel's face twisted with irritation. "Who the fuck is this?" he snapped, shooting a glare at Umal. "Is he one of yours?"

Umal whirled to face Asher, and froze. He instantly recognized him, fear spreading across his features. He hissed in a low tone to his nearest guard, "Don't look him in the eyes."

The guard stiffened, catching the urgency in Umal's voice. This was trouble on a scale they hadn't anticipated. It was time to abort this mission.

Before Umal could answer, Asher spoke as he strode forward. "I see you're in the middle of something important. Apologies for the interruption, but my business is important too."

Samuel's expression darkened. In his line of work, he had seen daring men, but none as stupid as this one. Perhaps the young man was suicidal, he thought. Fine, he'd grant him the small mercy.

"Get rid of him." He ordered one of his men.

The guard raised his gun only to freeze mid-motion. His face contorted in confusion, muscles locked in place, and unable to move no matter how hard he tried.

Unknown to him, Asher had compelled and using his body against him.

There was confusion and other Red Dragon guards swiftly aimed their guns at Asher, but he chuckled darkly. "I wouldn't do that if I were you," he warned, scanning the room with eerie calm.

But his wolf senses picked up one among them who was bold—or stupid—enough to subtly pull a trigger.

His smile widened.

Perfect. A demonstration, then.

As the man fired, Asher ducked, the bullet whizzing past him. Then there was a bang as the first guard he had compelled shot the idiot who fired. The guard collapsed, blood splattering against the floor.

And just like that, the puppet master started some macabre dance of bullets.

Another guard shot the first guy who had fired, his own nerves getting the best of him.

But before the new shooter knew it, Asher's gaze snapped to him and now he was compelled.

Bang! Another body hit the ground.

More gunfire erupted, but it was no longer directed at Asher. Like a twisted game of chess, Asher moved the pieces, compelling one man to shoot another, forcing another to turn on his comrade.

They fell one by one, their faces wracked with confusion as their own bodies rebelled against them.

Asher merely stood in a safe corner, watching as members of the Red Dragon inside the room tore each other apart like it was some entertainment.

He could have easily compelled them all to kneel, but then, where was the fun in that?

Chapter 227: Dance A Little More

The final gunfire echoed and the dance of bullets finally ended.

There was nothing but silence.

The air was thick with smoke and the acrid stench of gunpowder, corpses and spent cartridges littering the room.

However, outside the door were muffled screams and sporadic gunshots as Philip and the compelled guards carried out Asher's earlier instruction to keep the rest of Red Dragon's members from barging in.

In the room itself, Asher stepped out from the side he'd used for cover, dusting off stray bits of debris as though this deadly scuffle had been nothing more than a minor nuisance.

At the same time Samuel crawled out from under the table, pale and shaken but unscathed. Across from him, Umal and his two remaining guards emerged from the same table, their eyes wide with horror when they saw the aftermath.

All of Samuel's capos—his highest-ranking men, those who had commanded their own factions, and reported directly to him and Titan— and his guards, all lay dead.

Samuel's breath hitched, his face torn between disbelief and grief as his eyes raked over the carnage. This was a catastrophic loss for Red Dragon, the kind that could destabilize everything.

Samuel bowed his head, hands balling into fists, his body tight with fury and mourning. He whispered bitterly, "You're that wolf, the one that can do stuff with his mind."

His dark gaze snapped up to Asher, his expression now steeled with acceptance and resentment.

"What do you want?" His voice was edged with exhaustion and wariness. "Your kind doesn't travel this far for nothing."

"I'm sorry for your loss." Asher's tone sounded sympathetic, yet lacked real warmth.

He let his gaze drift over the bodies, then back to Samuel. "But it's not on me, I did warn them."

Samuel's jaw tightened. He wanted to avenge his men, but he could not defeat Asher. Not to mention the wolves were involved now. This matter was now beyond him.

Asher continued, stepping forward. "And you're right, I did come here with purpose. You see—"

He abruptly stopped, his keen senses picking up the faintest click behind him. His slitted eyes snapped to Umal, whose hand subtly rested on the lock of a briefcase.

His eyes narrowed at once. Now that Asher thought about it, something about the man's demeanor rang alarm bells in his mind. There was something off about the man.

Unlike the Red Dragon members, who were clueless to his powers, Umal had known from the start to avoid eye contact. That singled him out as someone more dangerous or better informed. That wasn't normal. It wasn't a coincidence either.

Asher's eyes pierced through him, analyzing. "What's in that briefcase?"

The way Umal stiffened confirmed it might be a question with lethal consequences. It was all Asher needed.

Knowing he has been exposed, Umal snatched the briefcase and barked out a command at the tester. "Kill him!" Then he turned, backing away toward the exit.

At once, a feral roar erupted from the side of the room. The tester, who had been lurking during the commotion, slammed his fists against his chest as though to hype himself up. His wild, dilated eyes locked onto Asher.

It was a challenge and Asher lifted an unimpressed brow. All he could see was a severely emaciated man asking for death. So he remained in his spot, his stance lazy, and his muscles relaxed.

And when the tester lunged, Asher caught him by the head in a humiliating hold and a show of his werewolf strength.

The sheer disparity in power should have been enough to end the fight right there except the tester thrust his fist straight into his chest and Asher was sent flying, slamming to the ground meters away. The air left his lungs in a rush, and he actually coughed blood, eyes wide with shock. How the hell?

He'd scented this guy as human. There was zero reason for him to pack such insane strength. It was impossible.

However, Asher was smart and his gaze rushed back to Umal, who was retreating toward the door— the briefcase. Something about it unsettled him and to think Umal was trying to leave with it.

Not happening.

As if the gods were on his side, one of Umal's guards flanking him glanced toward him, probably just out of curiosity. But that was enough.

Asher seized his mind. The guard stiffened, then grabbed Umal from behind and hurled him back.

Umal crashed to the floor, the briefcase flying from his grip and bursting open. Some of the small bottles tumbled free, rolling across the blood-streaked floor.

His eyes widened in horror. No, no, no.

Then he bellowed at his other guard who was confused by what was happening, "Quick! Kill him before he ends us!" he pointed at the enthralled one.

While the two men grappled fiercely, Umal lunged forward in desperation, frantically scrambling for the contents of the briefcase. There were ten vials in total, but after the first test, there should have been nine left.

Unfortunately, two shattered upon impact and Umal snatched up what bottles he could, which was only five; two were missing. His face twisted in frustration. Where was it?

But there was no time to dwell. His remaining guard was losing the fight against the one Asher had compelled. If he didn't leave now, his life would end in this wretched place.

With a snarl of frustration, Umal closed the briefcase and bolted.

Meanwhile, Asher and the drugged tester circled each other. Asher could have compelled the man and ended this quickly.

But he didn't. Instead, Asher studied him. He wanted to know how a frail junkie could hit him so hard. It was possibly the same substance in those bottles and he intended to find out just how effective it was.

The tester, fueled by mania, lunged again.

He was fast— faster than a human should be.

But Asher was ready.

And this time?

He wasn't going to hold back.

Chapter 228: Not Two Questions

Asher and the tester converged at the center of the blood-splattered floor, and the brutal fight began.

The tester was the first to lash out, hurling a vicious punch toward Asher's face. But Asher dodged with ease and retaliated instantly, his fist hammering into the man's face with enough force to send two of his teeth flying.

Yet unbelievably, the man hardly seemed to register the pain. He didn't even stagger. If anything, he let out a guttural snarl, looking very much deranged as he lunged again.

Asher met him head-on, this time driving his fist straight into his gut. A dull, heavy sound echoed through the warehouse as the impact lifted the man off his feet and sent him crashing backward.

He rolled across the floor, dust and blood mingling in the air. And then like a predictable zombie, he got up to his feet

Again.

Unlike Asher who had trained all through his life, the tester had no form, nor discipline. There was no skill behind his movements, just the reckless aggression of a man high on power. He fought like a wild animal — all instinct, and no technique.

And Asher exploited it.

Each time the tester charged, Asher would countered it and let his fists meet his flesh with punishing accuracy : A strike to the ribs. A hit to the side of his head. A crushing blow to his collarbone.

Yet no matter how hard Asher hit him, the fool kept coming back. And finally, his unrelenting aggression paid off. The tester managed to slip in one brutal hit to Asher's chest.

Asher spat blood onto the floor, his eyes flashing with an unknown emotion. It seems he was getting rustic. He exhaled slowly, rolling his shoulders. Then he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. And continued.

This time around, Asher showed the idiot no mercy, no opening for him to slip a blow. He beat him up as if he was an unruly child. Not that an unruly child could ever be beaten like this.

Even amid the fight — beating, was a much better term — Asher was watching and studying. Whatever drug they fed this man gave him near-werewolf strength and speed. Unfortunately, If this drug were to spread unchecked, it would topple everything and tear the society apart. It won't just be a war between humans and werewolves anymore, it would be for survival.

But then, every drug had an expiration date, something Asher found that out next. The tester threw a punch, but there was no strength behind it. Asher barely had to move or dodge it. The hit brushed against his cheek weakly, almost as if someone just petted him.

The mania in his eyes had vanished, replaced by growing confusion and pain. His breathing became ragged, body slowing, and his limbs trembling violently.

His face contorted in agony and he doubled over, screaming as his body crashed from the drug's effects. Asher snorted as he realized what was happening.

Of course. The fool had been too high to realize that he wasn't actually invincible.

His body had endured the beating, but now that the Ignis had worn off, his nerves had caught up to the damage.

The tester fell to his knees, his hands scrabbling at the floor, his breath coming in sharp, broken gasps. The pain was coming in from every side and all at once. He needed relief. Except there was none.

The tester looked up at Asher, his bloodied face twisting with fear especially when he saw the dark smile on the Alpha's face.

"Tired now, are we?" Asher murmured, his voice mockingly soft.

Then he grabbed him by the neck and hauled him upright. The man groaned, his hands weakly gripping Asher's wrist, but he had no strength left to fight back.

Asher drove his fist into his face again and again. He didn't stop. Not even when the man's nose shattered, when his cheekbone cracked, not even when the flesh around his eyes swelled shut. He let out every ounce of frustration, disgust, and rage on him.

By the time he was done, the tester's features were battered beyond recognition. Asher let go, watching as the tester slumped against the floor, barely breathing.

There was no doubt he'd suffer a drawn-out agony from internal bleeding and organ damage, assuming he even clung to life for more than a few moments.

Good. Let him die a painful death, Asher thought, stepping over the fool and leaving him to fate.

Asher's attention shifted to Samuel, still standing at the head of the table, wearing an expression equal parts horror and shock. At least the underboss had possessed enough common sense not to attack him. Instead, he kept perfectly still, awaiting Asher's next move.

Taking just a step, Asher's foot nudged something small, sending it skittering a few inches on the blood-slick floor. Frowning, he glanced down and realized that it was one of the drugs Umal had tried to escape with.

"Small mercies," he muttered under his breath as he crouched to pick it up.

That was when Asher spotted another vial, half-embedded in a slick of congealed blood near a corpse. It seemed Umal had missed it in his hurry. He snagged both bottles, rose to his feet, and strode over to Samuel.

Samuel's gaze was locked on him, unblinking, as though bracing for whatever came next. Reaching the table, Asher dropped the drugs onto its surface with a clink.

"Initially, I came here with just one question," he said in a voice gone cold and razor-sharp. "Now it's two." He locked eyes with Samuel. "Start talking."

"What is your question?" Samuel went straight to the point, knowing his life was at stake here.

"Where can I find your boss, Titan and kill him? He has my mother-in-law hostage. I intend to take back a head for display to please my purple queen."

He added immediately, "Secondly, what is this drug? What can it do? Above all, where did it come from? And who was that man?"

That was more than two questions.

Chapter 229: First Bleed

Titan, the leader of the Red Dragon, was 'busy'. The air in his room reeked of sweat, musk, and cheap perfume while his ragged grunts mingled with the creaking of the bed each time he thrust into the woman beneath him.

The woman was no other than Nancy and Titan was on top of her, his face twisted in pleasure. However, while the formidable Don of the Red Dragon gang seemed lost in the bliss, the same couldn't be said for Nancy.

Nancy's eyes were fixed on the ceiling, her expression detached, and vacant like a porcelain doll being played with. Her arms loosely circled Titan's broad back, her nails lightly grazing his skin, but there was no passion in her touch, no real response to his thrusts other than the occasional jerk of her body from the force of his movements.

But Titan was lost in it, his body slick with sweat, muscles flexing as he drove himself into her, faster and harder, his grunts turning into heavy groans.

Nancy felt every inch of him inside her, but it meant nothing. There was no pleasure. She was only doing this because she had no choice.

And Titan was nearly finished. She could already feel the telltale tension in his muscles with the way his movements became shaky, and his thrusts erratic.

Nancy swallowed, knowing what she had to do. If she didn't stroke his ego, he'd make her night even worse. So she faked it like she had a hundred times before in the course of her trade.

Nancy arched her back and moaned loudly, her voice breathy and exaggerated. "Oh, fuck.. yes, Titan!" Her fingers clawed into his back, her body trembling just enough to sell the illusion.

And just like that, Titan shuddered violently, his head rolling back in pleasure as his orgasm hit him like a boulder. With a deep, guttural growl, he buried himself inside her, filling her with his release.

Nancy exhaled quietly, relief washing over her. Thank God it was over. Or so she thought.

She was just about to move when Titan collapsed on top of her, his full weight crushing her against the mattress.

Goddess help her, Nancy gasped, her ribs protesting in discomfort. She was filled with panic because for a brief, terrifying moment, she thought he had passed out. Then she'd be stuck under his dead weight, suffocating beneath the bastard who had just used her like a disposable thing.

But then, Titan let out a deep, satisfied groan, his breath hot and heavy against her skin. Nancy forced herself to smile, despite the disgust curdling in her stomach.

With her arms still draped around him, Nancy gave him a soft squeeze, pretending to bask in post-coital bliss, when all she really wanted to do was shove him off and run to the bathroom to scrub herself raw.

But she had no choice but to hold him, and let him bask in his pleasure. Because men like Titan liked to believe they were gods in the bedroom. And gods didn't like to feel unwanted.

"You've lost your touch," Titan said, pulling out and getting off her with a grunt.

The previous Nancy—the younger, more prideful version of herself—would have been offended at such an insult to her skill. But this Nancy—the one who had learned and matured over the years —was just relieved at his weight leaving her.

Titan sat up with a dissatisfied grumble, "Your daughter would've felt a lot better, if not for your audacity in sending her away." He shot Nancy a glare.

Although anger flared hot inside her, Nancy kept her expression neutral. But her nails secretly dug into her palms, pressing hard enough to leave crescent-shaped marks.

This was why Titan had dragged her back to pay for her deceit. Because she had stolen something from him. It was not just her body, no, she was an old, worn-out game to him. What Titan wanted was Violet.

For some twisted, disgusting reason, the man had always had an unnatural fixation on her daughter, Violet.

Then again, it wasn't just him. It was all of them.

Violet was beautiful. Strong-willed. And with such exotic hair, she attracted curious eyes. She was a perfect prey for predators in a place like District One. Men liked women who challenged them, women they could delight in breaking.

Nancy had seen it happen a thousand times before. And she had done the only thing she could to protect her child.

She had made a deal with the devil.

Years ago, Nancy had begged, bargained, and ultimately struck a deal with Titan.

No one. Not his men, not any other gang, not any predator lurking in the filth of District One, would lay a hand on Violet.

In exchange, Titan would own her first bleed.

"Small mercies," Nancy had thought at the time. One night, and it would be over. Convinced she was doing the right thing, Nancy hadn't realized how deep she was sinking until she saw Titan's nature and the cold, cruel truth stared her in the face.

A man like Titan never settled for just "once." There was no debt repaid. No contracts honored. She had sold her daughter to a monster, and monsters don't let go of their prey.

Nancy might not show it, but she cared for Violet deeply and wanted to keep her away from a life like hers. But this was the only trade Nancy knew, and any hope for the future seemed bleak at best.

She'd delayed the outcome long past Violet's birthday, offering flimsy excuses

about preparing her, educating her, ensuring her daughter would be the best experience he could ever have. Titan, too arrogant to suspect her true intentions, had played along.

Fortunately, Titan left on a business trip abroad. Then, miraculously, the Lunar Academy form arrived. And Violet was gone. Nancy had won, even if

she was paying dearly for it now.

Her fingers absently drifted to her side, pressing against the bruises Titan had left there, his kicks and punches still fresh. It wasn't just that spot, her body ached all over. But the pain didn't matter. Violet had escaped. That gave her more joy even in her suffering.

Titan stood, heading to the bathroom across from the room to clean up, but his voice still boomed, echoing in the walls.

"You promised me Violet," he growled. "Your virgin daughter. And yet you deceived me, and now you give me your used cunt." He cussed.

Nancy's jaw tightened, but she said nothing. As Titan kept ranting, the door suddenly opened. Nancy's eyes went wide at the sight of a stranger stepping inside.

Chapter 230: Savior Or Executioner?

As the Don of the Red Dragon gang, Titan had many guards, stationed at every possible entry point, so Nancy wasn't familiar with all of them. Yet something about this particular young man standing there with blood on his clothes and his eerie eyes unnerved her completely.

Instantly, Nancy covered her exposed body, a scream building in her throat. But before she could release it, the young man simply lifted a finger to his lips. "Shh," He demanded silence.

Nancy's heart pounded violently. To be honest, she wanted to run, but she couldn't. There was something about the way the young man looked at her that made her instinctively obey. Instead, she cautiously reached for the bedsheet, drawing it over herself while her mind spun with questions.

Who was he? Where did he come from? He looked no older than nineteen, maybe twenty, but there was something old and vicious lurking beneath that youthful face.

What was he doing here? And more importantly, how did he get past Titan's guards? If there had been a fight, they would have heard it. The walls weren't thin, but gunfire was loud enough to shake the entire building.

But there had been none, which could only mean he had slipped through undetected. Or worse, he had eliminated them before they could make a sound.

Nancy's blood ran cold.

At this point, she had no idea whether this man was a savior or executioner.

She turned to the bathroom, where Titan was still talking, completely unaware of the uninvited guest in the room with them.

"I mean, if I had Violet," he said with a coarse laugh, "and you wanted to join in, then no problem."

Nancy's stomach churned violently as Titan's laughter filled the room, as if enjoying the vile fantasy playing in his head.

"The virgin daughter and the experienced mother to satisfy me? That's every man's wet dream." He relished the thought.

Those words made Nancy's cheeks burn with shame. Her fingernails dug into her palms, the humiliation, the self-hatred sinking into her like poison.

Her eyes flicked to the young stranger, desperate to gauge his reaction. He must be disgusted with her right now. She had failed as a mother after all.

But what she found instead startled her.

The young man was still. So utterly motionless he almost resembled a statue. Even from that distance, Nancy felt the tension from his body. It was raw and palpable, like a storm gathering in his chest, and ready to explode.

For a moment, he wore a look of disbelief, as though he couldn't believe what he was hearing. Then his face darkened with a blinding, seething, all-consuming rage.

God. Nancy's throat went dry and she knew at that moment, Titan wasn't leaving that bathroom alive. And perhaps, she wouldn't either.

Realizing the room had gone unusually silent, Titan's voice rang out from behind the bathroom door. "Why aren't you talking anymore?" he called.

The flush of water sounded, and then he stepped out, still half-drying his hands.

"What? Are you jealous?" Titan teased, glancing at Nancy, mistaking her rigid silence for resentment.

"You don't like the idea of sharing me with your daughter—" He trailed off at once when he spotted Asher standing there.

"Who is this?" Titan asked dismissively, initially assuming the stranger was just one of his men, here on some minor errand.

He opened his mouth to scold him for entering without permission, only to stop short when he got a clearer look at Asher's bloodstained attire. In an instant, alarm flared in his eyes.

He whipped toward the bed in a frantic bid for the nearest weapon, but before he managed a single step, a single word left Asher's mouth. "Sit."

Titan froze, then, to his horror, found himself walking toward the bed. "What the—?! Huh?! What is going on?" he sputtered, his voice rising in hysteria.

His fingers twitched, his body fighting to stop, but nothing obeyed him. "Why am I listening to him?!" Titan roared, his face twisting in rage and fear.

Nancy, who had been watching the bizarre sight, suddenly felt her own heartbeat spike in terror. This was her best chance to escape. She didn't know who this monster was, but this was a nightmare waiting to happen.

With one quick breath, she leapt to her feet, intending to make a run for the door, only for Asher's cool command to pin her in place as well. "Sit too, Mother."

Nancy's entire body seized up.

A strange force wrapped around her, dragging her down until she was back on the bed. But above all, the word 'mother' on his lips sent her heart skittering.

Since when did she have a son? If she had one, she would have known — and prevented it. Violet was in enough trouble already.

"Mother...?" she murmured, trying to understand where that was coming from.

Asher made an attempt to smile at her. Or at least, it was supposed to be a smile. Instead, it looked terrifying.

"Apologies that we have to meet this way," he murmured. "But introductions can wait, right?"

Nancy was too stunned to respond. What in the name of the lord was going on here?

"For now, I'm sure you'd like this part better." She barely registered the words before Asher turned his gaze to Titan again.

His expression darkened, all traces of warmth he had for Nancy vanishing in Titan's case.

"I heard something interesting about you, Titan." Asher said, his voice almost gentle. Almost.

"Something about taking Violet's virginity." A short, breathy chuckle escaped Asher, as if the words themselves were so absurd they were laughable.

"Please tell me that's not true."

Unfortunately, Titan didn't seem to understand the danger he was in. Instead, his rage took over his fear, his ego refusing to break.

His lip curled, and he spat out threats like venom. "Whatever trick this is, I'll have you die horribly for it! Whatever gang sent you, they're dead! Over!" he bellowed.

Asher let out a long, tired sigh. Why was the man so loud? Titan's ranting was a headache he couldn't be bothered to deal with right now.

So without a word, he reached behind his back. "I planned to bring your head back for my Violent Queen," he said, "but it seems I'll be taking something better instead."

Asher pulled out a knife. He twirled it lazily between his fingers before dropping it onto the bed. The blade landed between Titan's legs, the steel glinting menacingly in the light.

"Take it off," Asher ordered, his voice like ice.