

Defy 281

Chapter 281: Cursed Day

Alaric Storm, strangely enough, had slept well throughout last night, his body feeling oddly refreshed. With his sharp nose, he picked up Violet's scent saturating the room. It was soothing, like warm velvet wrapping around him, and it was no wonder he stretched out like a satisfied cat, turning to the other side of the bed, ready to drift back into sweet sleep.

Suddenly, there was a low groaning from above. But Alaric didn't think much of it. Or rather, he ignored it, assuming it was nothing.

And that was when the crash happened.

A whole chunk of plaster, complete with crumbling beams and a suspiciously heavy wooden plank, detached itself from the rafters and made a beeline for his regal face.

WHUMP!

Alaric jolted awake, instantly buried in white dust and what looked like the ghost of ceiling past. Paint flakes fluttered around him like snowflakes, the dust clogging his nose and making his eyes water.

He hacked like an old man on his deathbed, clutching the sheet like a lifeline—only to slam his head against the bed frame mid-cough, letting out a string of colorful curses.

"Goddess help me!" Alaric shouted, spitting out what might have been a piece of old cobweb, and possibly a dead insect. Fuck his life. What kind of bad luck was this, this early in the morning?

There were no fatal injuries — small mercies — but he could definitely feel a bruise blooming under one eye, maybe a split lip where the plaster had smacked him too lovingly. As if that was not enough, a tiny cut ran down his temple, just enough to sting annoyingly.

He managed to crawl out from beneath the ruin and staggered to his feet like a drunk, only for the floorboard to snap beneath his feet and he flung face-first into the wall with a very undignified thud. Another layer of dust rained down from above like the shack itself was mocking his very existence.

"Why... is this place a death trap?!" he wheezed, rising to his feet. And more importantly, why was he even here? His memory was blank. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't recall how he ended up sleeping in this nightmare of a shack.

And where the hell was Violet?

Even through the chaos, he could smell her scent, but it wasn't strong as if she hadn't spent the night here at all.

Covered in chalky white dust that had gotten into his eyes, Alaric found what looked like Violet's bathroom (though it barely deserved the name) and limped toward it—yes, he could now feel a new throbbing pain at the spot.

He went in and tried to rinse his face in the sink, only for brown water to spurt out instead and splash directly into his mouth.

Eww.

Choking, Alaric stumbled back and knocked over a hanging shelf, which crashed down and smashed the toilet.

God, no!

At this point, Alaric didn't know whether to cry, scream, or demand a refund from the moon goddess herself for waking him up today. One thing was certain, today didn't seem to be a good day.

By the time he limped out of the bathroom, Violet's roommates were already there. Lila—the one who usually looked at him like she'd happily murder him with a spoon—gave him an accusing look as her gaze took in the damage in the room.

"I swear to the gods, I didn't do this," Alaric said quickly, hand raised in surrender.

"What in the fates happened here then?" Ivy was stunned.

"I was awoken by the screech of a collapsing ceiling. It's a miracle it missed my head by inches."

At once, all three girls exchanged a loaded look that made Alaric feel like he was missing something very important.

Then Lila stepped forward, taunting him. "But now you're covered in fine white powder and look like a marshmallow rolled in despair."

But the nerdy one, Daisy, he recalled, cut in. "I think we're missing the most important thing here: Where's Violet?"

They all turned to him like he was the answer to their question.

Alaric stared right back. "I don't understand. Why are you asking me that?"

"Well, because Violet was last seen with you in this room last night," Lila shot back, "and we woke up this morning to find the entrance door half open with no sign of her anywhere."

"Well, I don't know where she is," he replied, irritated. "Not when I don't have a recollection of the rest of last night's events after whatever you fed me." His eyes flashed as he glared at Lila. "She obviously didn't sleep here last night. Otherwise, it would be both of us looking like a marshmallow rolled in despair."

"Thankfully, she didn't," Lila spat, glaring right back at him.

"Urm, guys..." Ivy suddenly said, eyes locked on her phone. "I think I know where Violet is."

"What?!" Both Lila and Alaric exclaimed at the same time, whipping their heads in her direction.

Lila and Daisy rushed to Ivy's side to peek at the screen. Lila let out a horrified, "She's with Asher?!"

"Why is she at the West House?!" Daisy shrieked. "Is she freaking out of her mind?!"

At the mention of Asher, Alaric's eyes widened in surprise. Did she leave him for Asher?

Desperate to see for himself, Alaric patted around frantically for his phone only to realize it wasn't on him. Where the hell did he put it?

Unable to bear the suspense, Alaric looked up at the girls. "Let me see."

He took a step toward them, but unbeknownst to him, Violet's bed sheet was conveniently pooled on the floor. Alaric spectacularly tripped over it, his body sprawling face-first to the floor with a groan of pain and humiliation.

The girls stared down at him, stunned. Then actual pity appeared across their faces.

Maybe they'd gone a little too hard on the curse. Maybe it should've been an hour, not a full day. Because if this was just the start of Alaric's morning, they didn't even want to imagine how the rest of the day would go.

Face still smooshed into the ground, Alaric reached out a hand. Wordlessly, the girls handed him the phone.

Chapter 282: Villains And Second Chances

Violet expected a thousand questions from Jeremiah, but he didn't utter a word. Not until he brought her safely back to the Rogue house. Then, like a soldier who had completed his mission perfectly, he simply turned and left with style.

However, Violet barely stepped into the shack before her roommates descended on her like hounds.

"Where have you been?! Do you know how worried I've been? I almost thought something had happened and I might have failed in protecting the princess!" Lila peppered her with questions, rapid-fire.

Then her gaze dragged down the length of Violet's body and locked on the oversize shirt she wore. Without a seer to tell her, she knew instantly that it was Asher's shirt. Violet might as well have walked in with a neon sign flashing "Slept with the enemy."

Ivy added sternly before Lila could explode, "You have a lot of explaining to do, young lady."

Violet didn't flinch under their scrutiny. Instead, she calmly smoothed the hem of the shirt and asked, "I'll explain later. Where's Alaric?"

Lila's mouth pressed into a thin line. "He left."

"Shit!" Violet cursed, dragging a hand through her tangled hair. She had hoped to catch him before he stormed off, to explain, or at least ease whatever chaotic assumptions were brewing in his head.

"That's not all," Lila said.

Violet turned to her, brow arching. "What do you mean, that's not all?"

And moments later, Violet got her answer.

She stood frozen outside her bedroom door, her jaw slightly unhinged, and her eyes sweeping across the wreckage before her.

"What the actual fuck happened here?" she demanded, whirling toward Lila with a look that screamed 'explain this carnage'.

Chunks of ceiling littered the floor and the bed looked like it had survived a war and lost while dust still hung in the air like smoke from an explosion.

"Apparently," Lila said dryly, "the curse was stronger than I thought."

Violet blinked, stunned. "Stronger than—Lila, that could've killed him!"

Daisy, leaning in the doorway rolled her eyes. "Injure him, maybe. But kill a werewolf? Please. You don't give them enough credit."

Violet scowled. Of course she knew that. But seeing this ruin and knowing Alaric had been in the middle of it sent a fresh stab of guilt through her chest. She had wanted him to be punished a little, not possible concussions and curse-induced PTSD.

She turned to Lila, voice tight. "Is there a way to reduce it? Cancel the curse early?"

Lila winced. "Too late. He absorbed the whole thing. It's following him now like a shadow. He has to live it out."

Seeing the worry in Violet's eyes, Lila added quickly, "But don't worry. The curse wasn't meant to kill him. Just torment him. It won't go too far."

Violet didn't know what to say neither could she blame Lila. They were in this together. But one look at the state of her room and she could already tell Alaric Storm was in for hell today. And damn it, she was really, truly sorry.

"Well, now that this drama's over..." Daisy drawled, "why don't you tell us where the hell you've been?"

"Indeed," Ivy nodded in agreement. "Seriously. We were this close to thinking something horrible happened. Like maybe Elsie finally snapped and kidnapped you to murder you in secret while we were asleep."

Violet let out a sigh, rubbing her temple. "Well, thankfully nothing like that happened but you might want to sit down for this."

The three girls exchanged glances, then shuffled into the living room with anticipation. Once they settled and the room quieted, Violet began.

"I sleepwalked last night," she started slowly. "And ended up at the West House."

Lila shot to her feet so fast the chair creaked in protest. "I knew it! That manipulative bastard compelled you again, didn't he?! I thought he promised not to get into your head again!"

"Lila," Violet cut her off sharply, her voice slicing through the air. "Would you let me finish?"

Lila pressed her lips together, clearly fuming but respecting Violet enough to sit back down and listen.

So Violet told them everything, leaving nothing out. She narrated the abuse Asher suffered in Henry's hands. She painted the story just the same way she had seen in the memories. And finally finished with the death of his mother — the incident that had broken the young Asher.

By the time Violet finished, the silence was deafening.

"Fuck," Daisy muttered, her voice raspy. "That's messed up. I always knew something had to have happened to make Asher the way he is. But what you just told us? Henry deserves to rot in the deepest pit of hell."

"I know," Violet concurred, her hands clenching into fist. "And he will. One day. I'll make sure of it."

Ivy sniffled, wiping the tears from under her eyes with her sleeve. "How could his father do that to him? How could anyone treat a child like that? It's so... it's so heartbreaking."

But Lila narrowed her eyes. "I sympathize with him, Violet. I really do. But what now? Do we just toss the plan aside? Forget everything? We've come too far to fold now."

Violet shook her head slowly, her expression unreadable. "No. We won't give up."

The girls straightened.

"But I need you all to understand," she continued, her voice gentler now, and her eyes glinting fiercely. "Asher Nightshade is not who we thought he was. Yes, he's dangerous. Yes, he's unpredictable. But I saw the boy behind the power. I felt his pain. And if we're fighting for justice, then we should remember that even villains deserve second chances too."

The room stayed silent for a heartbeat longer until Daisy clapped her hands together with a wicked grin. "Speaking of villains..."

Her eyes sparkled.

"I guess it's Elsie's turn now."

Violet's golden eyes lit up. She nodded once.

"It's time Elsie learned what karma tastes like."

She turned to Lila, "How's our plan going?"

Lila smirked. "About that..."

Chapter 283: Diseased Queen

Parents Own It

Parents' Week has always been the highlight for the old-timers—showcases, academy tours, and oh yes, the glorious catwalk of proud Alphas parading their lineages. I speak from experience when I say it's half spectacle, half comedic masterpiece. And this year? Hoo, boy. My spidey-sense says it'll be an absolute doozy.

Elsie with Roman or Roman with Violet?!

Yes, yes, I was so certain not too long ago that Queen Bee Elsie had Roman Draven neatly tucked into her prim little pocket. But oh, how the tides shift. Did we—or did we not—see a certain foxlike Alpha skulk out of the ladies' restroom with our lovely Rogue Queen? And rumor has it (hello, hallway watchers) that the two of them got suspiciously close in there.

A fresh wave of scandal? Count me in.

Now, does this mean Roman has officially hopped over to Team Violet? Possibly. But I'm not stamping any membership cards just yet.

But Will That Be Enough?

While it seems like Violet's building a harem hotter than a Phoenix fire pit, let's not forget the battlefield we're walking into. Parents' Week is not just about showcasing power—it's about showcasing "propriety" . And here's the tea, sugar cubes:

Violet might be the wave of fresh breeze Lunaris desperately needs, but she's also the kind of girl the old-school families would sooner lock in a tower than introduce to Aunt Mildred over brunch.

Meanwhile, dear Elsie is everything they want: Legacy. Groomed. Polished. She's the kind of girl who curtsies without wrinkling her dress and knows exactly which fork to use for dessert.

She's the girl "made" for the cardinal Alphas, and Parents' Week is her runway.

But hey, miracles happen if you believe in them, right? Violet always seems to shock us at every turn. Maybe she'll pull yet another card from her sleeve. Or sink. Or swim. Only Time will tell.

Roman Draven's Meltdown

Speaking of that foxy Alpha, you can't have missed the fiasco on the lawn. I swear the trees are still recovering from the way he ripped into them.

Someone give that man a scratcher, because apparently Roman "World's Sexiest Alpha" Draven has now become... drum rolls....

Alpha Scratch Post.

Darling, I know. The horror. I, too, snorted milkshake out of my nose at the nickname.

There's no denying that the trees need protection from Roman. And yes, we saw it all with our own eyes. Many thanks to you phone-wielding sleuths out there. I'll say no more, except I can't remember the last time Lunaris had such a dramatic meltdown in broad daylight.

Counting Down to the Parents' Week Showdown

Needless to say, with all these telenovela-level events, this Parents' Week might just go down in the record books.

Elsie, darling, you'd better up your game if you want to keep your crown in front of the high-and-mighty moms and dads. Because from where I'm perched, our Rogue Queen might be staging a takeover, and your star Alpha, Roman, is suspiciously missing from your corner.

Who else is on the edge of their seat, munching popcorn in anticipation? I know I am. Because the next few days could be the most spectacular (and possibly humiliating) ones yet.

So stay tuned, my lovelies. As always, I'll be watching (and sipping tea) to bring you the juiciest updates. Until next time, keep your claws sharp and your secrets sharper.

The Oracle

"Miracles, my butt!" Elsie said with venom as soon as she was done going through the Oracle's article for the day.

Although she was still annoyed with the Oracle's tone toward her, today's post was an eye-opener, and should be enough to remind and put Violet back in her place.

Perhaps she had been worried over nothing. Violet was labeled as "Rogue," and that was hardly the kind of pedigree the boys would want to present to their dear old parents. Asher especially. He knew exactly what Henry was capable of.

A delighted smile crossed Elsie's features as she went under the Oracle's post and typed in the comment section:

QueenElsie:

"Roman used to be such a vision of health and charm... until someone dragged him into their purple storm. No wonder he had a scratching fit yesterday. Hope he's not catching anything... contagious vibes can be so hard to shake. Just an observation."

The implication was clear as day, but Elsie didn't say it outright, instead, choosing a subtle, passive-aggressive move, her words like venom wrapped in silk ribbon. And just like that, she lit the match and waited for the explosion.

And it wasn't long before the comments began to pour in, echoing the exact words she had so masterfully implied.

@FangirlCentral♥: I said it! Violet totally gave Roman an infection! That meltdown? Complete textbook symptoms. After all, she's been bouncing between Alphas like a cursed tennis ball! #WhoreBehaviour

@howlqueen_xoxo: OMG YES! I've been thinking the same thing! Roman's not the type to just lose it. I knew something was off with that scratch-post moment. Infection confirmed. #RogueQueen or #STDQueen

@PackLeader101 🐱:Soooo are we just gonna ignore that he started scratching after he got with Violet? Coincidence? I think not. #AlphaScratchPost #ScratchHistory #RootCause

@AmandaRaynes: Chlamydia.

@Sharon: LMAO not you just dropping that like a mic. But honestly? I believe it. #STDQueenMustGoViral

@TeamElsie🦁:The timeline adds up. Roman was totally normal until that girl happened. I bet he's not even the only one. #LoyalToElsie

@Felix Chan: The Rogue Queen? More like Rogue Pathogen. Y'all better get tested after hugging her.

@HowlItUp🐺:They always warned us about rogues. This is why we don't fraternize outside your House. This is why! #RoguesAreDiseased

@alpha_King: Imagine explaining that to your parents during Parents Week: "Hey Mom, meet Violet. Also, I might have chlamydia now." #JusticeForRoman

@Moonbae_Felicia: Poor Roman. Guy went from Alpha Heartthrob to Patient Zero in one semester. #IAmmaBeThatDoctorForRoman

Like the evil queen she was, Elsie's lips curved into a bigger smile as the replies kept pouring in. That was enough for now.

She rose with style and headed for school. She had a magnificent Parents' Week event to plan, after all.

Elsie left, completely unaware of the eyes watching her from the shadows.

Chapter 284: Moonfeed War

Violet was late to school, but she couldn't care less since there were no classes today anyway. The academy had cleared its schedule, giving room for creativity as students threw themselves into prepping for the grand event that was Parents' Week.

Above all, Violet was pleased about the fact her plan was going smoothly. Just a few minutes ago, she'd received a message from Lila confirming that the bug camera had been carefully and strategically planted in Elsie's room. Daisy, as expected, would handle the loose ends and keep an eye on whatever juicy information the bug managed to uncover.

She and Ivy had come to school not because they wanted to, but because skipping would've drawn unnecessary attention to their absence. Rogues were outcasts anyway, it wasn't like they belonged to any club or society. They had nothing to offer, and no one was exactly lining up to associate with them. So yes, they practically had nothing to do.

But that wasn't all. They needed to keep an eye on things, just in case any incriminating information dropped that could help with their grand plan—and more importantly, to keep an eye on Alaric. That part was Violet's idea though. One she hadn't voiced aloud for fear of earning a few judgmental stares from her friends.

Although the girls followed her loyalty, she knew they didn't fully approve of her entanglements with not just one, but all four of the cardinal alphas. Truth be told, even Violet wasn't entirely sure what she was doing. She hadn't quite wrapped her head around it herself, so she could only imagine how it looked from the outside.

Still, Violet was determined to make them see what she saw in the boys, especially Asher and Roman. Alaric had been forgiven, or at least given a pass after the disaster they'd just put him through. Hopefully, he survived it.

But her girls had sworn a Fae pact never to speak of what they'd learned about Asher's past.

Not that they needed reminding.

Asher might spare her because she was his "Purple Queen," but if the others even whispered a syllable of his secret, Violet knew without doubt he would compell them to their death.

Something was wrong. Violet snapped out of her thoughts, a sudden chill crawling up her spine. She could feel the weight of a thousand eyes boring into her.

Not that it was unusual for students to stare at her like some walking soap opera. Being the Rogue Queen came with its brand of daily drama. But this time was different.

This wasn't the usual curious and gossip-hungry stares. No, this one was cold, condescending and downright hateful. The air was tight as if she had walked into a room where everyone had been whispering about her and stopped the moment she entered.

Violet's instincts told her something must have gone down and clearly, she hadn't gotten the damn memo.

Without a word, she grabbed Ivy's hand and veered toward the closest classroom, hoping to hide for a moment and piece things together what was going on. But the moment Violet opened the door, she knew she'd miscalculated.

The room was full, packed to the brim with students and they all turned to look at her. In eerie unison, their expressions hardened, their disgust so palpable it slammed into Violet like a punch to the gut.

Violet froze. She swallowed hard and took an instinctive step back.

Fuck.

They looked like they wanted to murder her.

Even Ivy felt it and was the one who grabbed Violet's hand this time, pulling her out of the room.

"I think something's happened," Ivy said quickly as they walked down the hallway, the student's eyes following their every move.

"Exactly," Violet agreed, the wheels already turning in her head. Then it hit her. "Have you checked the Oracle's article today?"

"Not exactly," Ivy replied. "It popped up on my feed, but we were too busy searching for you after your mysterious disappearance. And then when you came back, it was all about the plan. So there was no chance to look into it."

"Well, we better look into it now," Violet said just as she spotted an empty classroom. The two of them slipped inside, pulling out their phones.

It wasn't hard to find the Oracle's post. For some students, it was basically scripture. The kind of thing they read before even brushing their teeth. So of course, notifications were always on.

Violet scrolled through it with growing interest.

"I don't see anything strong enough to cause this kind of reaction. I'm not wife material, so what?" She frowned. "They can't possibly be mad at the idea of the cardinal alphas introducing me to their parents. It's not like I'm dying to meet them anyway."

"Fuck," Ivy suddenly muttered. "Check the comment section. Elsie Lancaster lit a firestorm under your name."

Violet frowned. Now that she was looking, the comments were tripled. Maybe even quadrupled. These days, she hardly checked the comments anymore. What was the point when most of them hated her?

"That bitch..." Violet's face twisted in disbelief as her eyes scanned the comments. She looked at Ivy in exasperation. "What do they mean, chlamydia?! Roman and I just messed around yesterday. How does an infection even spread that fast?"

"Well," Ivy smirked, "some people have things to say about that. I'd say you're starting to build a fanbase, Rogue Queen."

"What?" Violet blinked, confused.

Then Ivy stepped closer and tilted her screen, and Violet saw exactly what she meant.

@Mira: Okay, can we all use our brains for like two seconds? Violet and Roman literally just got together like YESTERDAY. How does she give him an STD overnight? Y'all need to calm your infected imaginations.

@Packbabe (replying to @Mira): Shut up. You don't know how long they've actually been sneaking around. It could've been months. You think they'd tell us?

@silverAngel (replying to @Packbabe): More like Roman infected her. Everyone knows he's put his little pecker in every punani from East House to the North House.

@Packbabe (replying to silverAngel):

Oh please, don't spread lies about the size. We've all seen Roman's baby maker and it sure as hell isn't little. Respectfully.

@Mira (replying to @Packbabe): No wonder, your brain is as dirty as your manners.

@IneedMoney (replying to @Packbabe): Can we not make Roman's dick a community topic again? I'm eating.

@BettyGirl: Whether or not there's chlamydia flying around, y'all do realize STDs don't cause emotional breakdowns, right? That boy's got deeper issues than bacteria.

@Packbabe (replying to @IneedMoney) : Fuck away, poor ass.

@IneedMoney (replying to @Packbabe): Why don't you stop hiding behind your fake account and come face me man to man.

@Packbabe (replying to @IneedMoney): I'm a lady, you illiterate.

@Yennifer :Honestly, if anyone's infected, it's the Oracle, with drama fever. But I'm still here for it.#SizzlingHot OracleOnFire

@Abigail :Violet gets blamed for everything. If the sky fell, someone would say she dropped it.#loyalToV

@Sassybabe: Anyway, if Violet did give him something, good. Maybe it'll slow him down before he starts flirting with the Parent Council too. #HurtsToBeAManwhore

@Quinn : You people are insane. I'm staying off Moon Feed before someone blames Violet for global warming.

"What the...." Violet was utterly dumbfounded by the time she finished reading just a few of the comments Ivy had shown her. And there were still so many left. Apparently, it was a full-blown war in there.

However, the doors to the classroom suddenly burst open, and standing there was a face neither of them expected to see.

"There you are," Elsie said with a twisted smile. "I was beginning to think the rogues were shying away from Parents' Week preparation."

Chapter 285: The Mean Queen

If Violet ever doubted Elsie Lancaster's creativity, today officially cleared that up.

The girl had successfully cornered them in the classroom like a hunter stalking her quarry, her eyes glinting with triumph.

In the mean queenbee's words, every student was expected to play a role in Parents Week. Not even rogues were spared from that responsibility. They had to make themselves useful one way or another. And she had just found the perfect use for them.

"Why are we even doing this?" Ivy grumbled.

Alongside the other girls they met along the way, they were herded towards one of the halls for the meeting, just as Elsie had said.

"You know this is bullshit. If we don't want to do a thing, she can't force us to. We're not pushovers," Ivy protested.

"Rebellion is what Elsie expects from us. That would give her a reason to strike at us. We won't give her that pleasure.

Moreover..." Violet leaned in to whisper into her ear, cautious of the girls around them. "If we're to learn our enemy's secrets, what better way to do it than to get close enough?"

Ivy looked up at Violet, impressed. "You are good at this."

Violet shrugged it off. She owed all her lessons to life itself. It might have been hard, but it made her who she was. Not to mention, this was a fight against Elsie, she had to be smart enough to see through her nasty strategies.

Violet had already texted Lila and Daisy, and they would join them soon. All hands had to be on deck. Not to mention, they were stronger together.

Violet knew the moment she walked into that meeting place that it was not her thing at all. She was met with the sight of elite students who were all lined up like swans, ignoring the school uniform and instead wearing pale lavender blouses with lemon-cream skirts that screamed polished pedigree. Every strand of hair was curled in the same style, and every smiling, glossy lip was painted the same shade.

It was obvious what this was. As elites, they were putting on a performance for them—reminding them of the leagues between them. But even at that, the students looked genuinely excited to be there.

Of course, Violet was not one bit thrilled.

She knew the moment she walked into this hall that this was humiliation gift-wrapped in chiffon and coated in fake kindness from Elsie. A special little punishment, tailored just for her.

"What is going on here?"

Violet turned to the side to see that Daisy and Lila had finally arrived, successfully locating them.

"Geez, is this a sorority audition or what?" Lila commented dryly.

"Well, you're right on time," Violet said, her gaze following Elsie who walked up to the line of perfect-looking elites, who now took their place as her backup as she stood in front to address the students.

"Welcome, ladies and gentlemen," Elsie said in a sweet voice as she faced them. "Some of you are here of your own accord, while some of you were specially chosen to assist us with the Legacy Luncheon preparations. It's a very special event for our alumni families. In that case, only the best students should represent Lunaris, and you're so lucky to be included."

Lucky? Violet scoffed beneath her breath. The entitlement mentality of these elites. She would rather stab her own eyes than be here. But of course, the overly eager wannabe "elite" students cheered Elsie vigorously.

She didn't miss the way Elsie's gaze lingered on her. Smug. Superior. Triumphant. As if this little "assignment" was her crown jewel in the revenge department.

"Your roles..." Violet did not miss the way Elsie's gaze rested on her as she continued, "will be simple. You'll serve as our hands. Some of you will fetch drinks, pass around floral options, arrange name tags, and ensure everything runs like a dream. In one word, you'll be shadowing us, the actual coordinators, of course."

She smiled wider. "And tissues. Yes, some would discreetly hand out tissues should any guests spill something. Or sweat. Or cry. Trust me, it's a very important job."

Violet blinked. Cry? From what? The boredom?

"Wait a minute," Lila interrupted, hands raised in question and drawing everyone's attention. "So let me get this correctly, you're making us into waitresses?"

"Oh no, sweetie," Elsie said, all faux innocence. "That would be degrading. You're hostesses-in-training. It's an honor, really."

Without missing a beat, Elsie snapped her fingers, and another group of equally dressed elite girls approached with folders, each one detailing seating plans. Violet was handed one with gold cursive on the front: Legacy Luncheon: Power & Placement.

Curious, she skimmed through the pages, only to frown the next minute.

"This can't be real," Ivy whispered beside her, flipping through her own binder. "They're ranking parents."

"Oh, it's very real," Violet muttered grimly.

The seating chart was a masterpiece in pretentious social engineering. Names were listed according to family history, supernatural creature, House affiliation, and general "legacy" appeal. It wasn't just about placing people—it was about matchmaking. Status meets bloodline. Alpha heir meets legacy daughter. It was a damn supernatural-human dating auction disguised as brunch.

"So you see," Elsie said in a sugary tone that almost burned Violet's ears, "the cardinal families will be in the front seats, of course, with lesser families arranged behind, so we don't overshadow the truly important guests. You'll each memorize the seat placements so no one's confused. Understood?"

"Yes, Elsie!" the foolish students answered.

Were they blind or what? Every student at Lunaris had the chance to secure a werewolf mate for themselves, but the elites and legacy students were hoarding the opportunity for themselves.

Violet was pissed off, but then she couldn't exactly blame them. Not when it worked the same way in reality. The rich took the best and left the crumbs for the poor.

By the time they got to the part about napkin colors and whose spiritual aura matched which floral centerpiece, Violet was ready to fling herself through the nearest glass window.

Somehow, she caught Elsie's eye from across the room, and the girl gave her a small wave, showing off her glittery nails and vindictive glee.

Elsie was punishing her and it was not the physical kind, but the psychological warfare. The slow torture of being made to serve the very table she would never sit at.

Chapter 286: Hair Fetish

Violet decided she hated the Elites. Not because they were headed by her nemesis Elsie Lancaster but because they were all vain and fake.

Everything about the Luncheon revolved around position, appearance, and who got seated where to maximize matchmaking potential. No discussion about legacy values. No talk about leadership, vision, or growth.

Just which girl best matched which alpha's bloodline like this was a goddamn dress fitting.

As if that wasn't already enough, they were soon grouped into their roles, and of course, Violet and her friends were assigned as waitresses.

How predictable.

Now they stood through a long-winded lecture on how to serve, present, smile, speak politely—blah, blah, blah. All of it made Violet's stomach churn so hard she genuinely considered vomiting. This wasn't her scene. It was suffocating, nauseating, and downright insulting.

Violet couldn't take it anymore. She broke away from the group and stormed off—not even when Penelope, their supposedly elite leader, called after her. She needed air, and no one was going to stop her.

And no one did. Not with that murderous scowl on her face.

Violet had no idea where to go. Everywhere she turned, students were gawking at her. It made her uncomfortable. For once, she just wanted to be invisible.

So she kept walking until she reached the back of the school building. Thankfully, nobody was there. She leaned against the wall and closed her eyes, breathing in deeply.

Violet Purple was obviously stressed. She was planning a Queen Bee's downfall and juggling four Alpha males. It was bound to take a toll on her.

So she stood there, taking deep breaths in and out until she felt a little better. Everything would work out. It had to go according to plan. There was nothing to worry about.

Steady now, Violet decided to leave, except the moment she turned the corner, she bumped into someone. The force nearly knocked her to the ground, if not for the strong arms that wrapped around her waist.

Griffin Hale.

Violet wasn't just surprised to have bumped into the East House Alpha, no, she was rendered speechless for three very obvious reasons:

1. Griffin Hale was shirtless, putting all those heavily muscled abs and chiseled glory on display.
2. He was sweating, and not delicately either. He looked like he'd just finished some serious training. Now the sweat slicked across his skin like oil, making him ripe for the taking.
3. His hair was down. That rich, healthy, perfectly red mane fell around his shoulders, making him look every inch like her hot, sexy Viking warrior.

Dear moon goddess.

This guy was her forbidden fruit.

Violet's fingers began to itch again—like some kind of damned addict—as the urge to run her hand through Griffin's hair overtook her once more. She grimaced inwardly.

Yep. She definitely had a hair fetish.

Immediately, she stepped back before she did something stupid, already missing the heat of his body.

"Sorry about that," Violet said, her voice a little breathy, her pulse quickening by the second.

"No, it's nothing," Griffin replied smoothly. "You're actually the one I was looking for."

"Huh?" Violet blinked in confusion.

Then Griffin ran his hand through that glorious hair and said, "I need your help, actually. Can you help me put my hair into a top knot?"

"Eeh?" Violet nearly shouted, startled.

Realizing how unlady-like that was, she cleared her throat quickly. "Excuse me?"

"You heard me right. I need you to tie my hair." Griffin's voice was firm now, and his gaze locked onto hers.

Violet was stunned.

Nah. Nope. No way. This had to be a trap. A test. Some alpha prank waiting to be played. She wasn't going to fall for that!

"I think I have to go." Violet pointed behind her awkwardly and turned to leave, but Griffin grabbed her and pulled her flush against him.

Her breath hitched.

"Griffin...?" Violet had no idea what to think anymore.

But Griffin growled. The sound vibrated through her, curling heat low in her belly. She was thoroughly, completely fucked.

"Don't you want me like the others?" he asked, his voice soft but pained.

"W-what?"

"I thought you liked my hair. Don't you want me? Or is it just the others that do it for you and not me? You don't want me in your harem, is that it?"

Dear Creator.

Griffin Hale actually wanted this? Wanted her to touch his hair? Wasn't that gesture intimate for people of the East or something? And yet, he was asking her? Violet's mind spun.

Unaware of her inner crisis, Griffin sighed, defeated. "Maybe Asher was wrong about this after all. It's not like I expected you to want me anyway. It's always the others. I'm the default one. No one ever wants—mmmh."

Violet silenced his nonsense with a kiss. Griffin made a surprised sound in the back of his throat before kissing her back.

He tasted like sunlight and smelled like the earth, and he felt like strength. Violet had never felt safer in anyone's arms.

When they finally broke apart for air, Violet warned him, "Don't you ever say that again! I mean, who wouldn't want you? You're nice, kind, strong, hot and—"

"You think I'm hot?" Griffin asked, grinning now.

Violet rolled her eyes. "Don't get cocky." Then added, "And maybe next time you guys are planning my harem behind my back, you could actually invite me to the meeting. You don't get to make decisions for me."

"Sooo..." Griffin asked tentatively, "do you agree to date all four of us or not?"

"Well..." Violet said thoughtfully, "I'll give my answer after Parents Week." That is, if they still want her after her little revenge.

She added, "But I can never say no to a test run."

Griffin smiled. "A test run, huh? That's what you think of us?"

Violet smirked. "I have to know my goodies are in good working condition before I commit to the full purchase."

"Mmhmm." Griffin laughed heartily, then kissed her—slow and deep, like he wanted to savor her.

But most importantly, Violet pulled back just enough to ask, "Am I still tying your knot?"

Griffin burst into laughter.

Alaric Storm was having a bad day.

It had started the moment he woke up only to discover that Violet was missing from his side. She had left him for Asher. Then, to make matters worse, he nearly brought down their dilapidated rogue shack with a series of weird, borderline tragic incidents.

Alaric had blamed it on poor infrastructure, nothing more. He didn't think too much of it and left, brushing the whole thing off.

But the moment he trudged through his front door, his mood already sour from the morning's misadventures, that was when he realized the worst of the worst had only been lying in wait.

Alaric Storm didn't know how it happened. One moment he was storming into the bathroom, the next—WHACK. He stubbed his toe hard on the threshold, the sharp, jarring pain shooting up his leg. He winced and clutched at the wall with a snarl.

What the fuck was all this bad luck today?!

Already annoyed, he gritted his teeth, endured the pain, and dragged himself into the bathroom to clean up. After all, he couldn't forget the looks his pack members gave him when he returned to the North House covered in dust, bruises, and pure misery. Yeah. He caught their expressions.

He would've given himself the same look.

Standing naked in the bathroom, Alaric Storm reached for the tap and twisted it, expecting hot, satisfying water to come cascading down his god-like body.

But there was nothing. Not a single drop of water.

Alaric blinked, twisting it harder, but there was still nothing. God damn it! Had they used up the water and left nothing for him? It wasn't impossible.

Annoyed, he stepped out, grabbing the nearest towel and slinging it across his hips. He'd just order someone to get the damn tanks refilled. Simple.

Except, as he strode into his room, he caught the sound of running water. And his sharp hearing didn't lie.

Alaric spun around and marched straight back into the bathroom, except the sound stopped just seconds before he got there.

The shower was off completely, but the floor was wet. Like soaking wet, as if someone had just bathed in there.

What the heck? Was this a joke?... Or curse?

But Alaric shut the thought up before it could breathe. There was no such thing as a curse. He refused to believe that. This had to be bad plumbing.

From overnight? his inner voice chided. But Alaric squashed it with sheer will. He would not be made to believe he was cursed today or something.

He turned again and went back to his room. But just like the first time, there was the sound of water running again.

Alaric came back faster this time, his heart thudding, only to meet the same scene.

His jaw ticked.

"Alright. Who's doing this?" he asked, just in case someone was secretly playing a prank on him. But there was only dead silence.

He scanned the room. Empty.

The air had the faint scent of ozone as his powers reacted to his mood, but Alaric clamped it down before sparks flew. He wasn't in control, and near a water source? He'd end up electrocuting himself.

"Alright," he growled, speaking to the invisible menace messing with him, "You want games? Let's play."

This time, he didn't leave completely. He hid just behind the bathroom wall, counting the seconds like a predator waiting to pounce.

He waited ten seconds. Fifteen. Then swooped in. But nothing happened. There was no sound of water running, and the ground was as wet as before.

Alaric Storm knew at that moment he was officially being fucked with.

But he waited patiently. Repeating the same move. Once. Twice. Four goddamn times. And each time, nothing happened.

Alaric finally blew out a frustrated breath and dragged his hand down his face. Fuck. He needed to stop imagining shit.

Then he stormed out, determined to handle the water crisis once and for all. But barely had he stepped out of earshot when—SSHHHHHHHHH. The sound of running water echoed through the bathroom like mocking laughter.

Alaric snarled. "Are you fucking kidding me?! Who the fuck do you think you're playing with?!"

He stomped back in, ready to rip the damn showerhead off the wall and fling it across the building.

But misfortune, it seemed, was ready for him.

Alaric forgot the water on the floor, and the moment his foot hit the slick tile, he slipped. And it was the full-on, legs-in-the-air, towel-abandoning, back-breaking slip.

And just when one would think it was over, it wasn't. Because the moment his bare back kissed the floor with the breath knocked out of him and the shower came alive. Full blast, icy water poured down on him with all the gentleness of a monsoon. Note the sarcasm.

"FUUUUUCKKK!" Alaric howled, sputtering, gurgling, slipping again as he tried to crawl away like a newborn deer on ice.

When Alaric finally managed to turn off the possessed shower by what he could only describe as sheer dumb luck, it was safe to say he was officially on the brink of madness.

He stood there, dripping wet, lips blue from the cold, muscles trembling, not from fear, but from unfiltered, white-hot rage.

So he stormed into his room, naked and fuming.

"FUCK THIS DAY!"

He barely finished the scream before a lightning bolt shot from his palm, striking the innocent decorative pillow on his couch.

BOOM.

The pillow caught fire immediately, flames licking greedily through the fabric.

Alaric's eyes widened. "Oh no..."

He rushed to smother it, but instead of dying down, the fire spread. In the twinkle of an eye, the curtains caught, the rug followed, and suddenly his room was turning into a live barbecue.

"Oh fuck oh fuck oh fuuuuuuck!"

Panic now firmly overriding his pride, Alaric did the one thing he never thought he'd do.

He ran out stark naked.

Storming down the hallway like a madman, he shouted, "SOMEONE GET WATER! FIRE! IT'S A FUCKING FIRE!"

It was instant chaos. His pack members stormed in seconds later, putting out the blaze with bucket of waters while carefully pretending not to look at their very naked, very unhinged Alpha.

By the time the smoke cleared and the flames died, Alaric stood in the middle of the mess with hollow eyes.

And finally, Alaric Storm believed he was cursed.

Chapter 288: The Seer

Mary jolted upright with a loud scream, her chest heaving as the vision snapped away like glass shattering. Sweat clung to her skin, her eyes were wild, and she looked like she might jump from her bed, until Adele's arms were around her, holding her still.

"Shhh, don't worry. You're safe now," Adele murmured, her voice soothing enough to ground her.

She held Mary close. The young girl was shaking like a frozen leaf in winter. Adele had brought her to her place in the Staff lodge. It was much more comfortable and away from the disturbances of the annoying students.

Moreover, she refused to let Mary stay in the infirmary, not when it was so close to that wretched hospital ward. Not that the school lounge was ironclad safe, but it was better. Here, Mary would find peace.

The panic slowly faded from Mary's eyes, but they quickly watered again. Soon the tears spilled as her lips trembled and she sobbed, "I don't want this! I don't want to be like this!"

Adele said nothing. She simply pulled her closer, holding the girl tighter, resting her chin gently on her head as the sobs grew louder, more guttural.

"Shhh, it's alright," she whispered. "You'll get used to it."

But those words only made Mary cry harder because she didn't want to get used to it. She hadn't asked the moon goddess for this. All she wanted was to be normal again.

Mary and Adele were never particularly close.

The girl was the school's best student guide, easygoing and responsible, while Adele, on the other hand, was the reclusive healer—the one they called in for complicated emergencies when things went beyond what the hospital could handle. Their relationship had always been casual, professional at best. They existed in the same school, orbiting different spheres.

But right now, Adele saw a kindred spirit in her. Mary reminded her of her younger self — shaken, afraid, and carrying more than she ever asked for.

Mary had calmed down some, her breathing more even, her sobs now hiccupped silence. That was when Adele spoke, her hand rubbing gently at the girl's shoulder.

"Powers like ours are never for ourselves. They were gifted by the moon goddess to serve. To help her children. But human nature is insatiable. They'll only take and take until there's nearly nothing left to give."

Adele pulled back slightly, her eyes meeting Mary's firmly.

"This is why you must be strong. You can no longer hide what you are. Heck, I think you might be the strongest seer we've had so far. You've been sprouting prophecies like you're reading poems."

Mary's cheeks colored at what sounded like a compliment, but her voice came out hesitant and uncertain. "I... I don't remember saying those words. The dreams I do remember a bit, but the rest just fizzles away. Or doesn't make sense."

"Visions," Adele corrected gently. "You are one hundred percent a seer, Mary. Not even your dreams are to be taken for granted. And that is why you need to train. You need to be able to remember, to wield them. The power you hold, many people would kill to have it."

"Then let them have it," Mary snapped. "I don't want this. I didn't ask for this. I just want to be a normal teenager in my final year. Not a freak—"

"You are not a freak!" Adele said suddenly, with an intensity that startled them both.

Mary flinched.

Adele exhaled slowly, realizing she'd come on too strong. She softened her tone, eyes sincere. "Your power is a gift. You are the eyes of the goddess. And our people worship seers. The East especially. They would commit a holy war in your name if you told them it was the will of the gods. That's just how powerful seers are."

Mary swallowed thickly, the weight of the revelation crashing down on her. That was more than she expected.

"So..." she asked tentatively, "how do I control my powers? Would you teach me?"

But Adele let out a snort. "I'm a healer, not a seer. While some principles might work the same, our powers are different. You need your own teacher. The East can provide that."

She sat back, her expression turning practical now.

"First, you'll be presented to the Alpha King Elijah. Then the rest of your family will be tested. If there's more wolf blood in your line, trust me, we're claiming them. We've already lost enough of our kind. We're not leaving anyone behind, full-blooded or not."

Mary blinked, trying to keep up.

"There's going to be lots of paperwork," Adele continued, almost with a grimace. "Thanks to the Human-Werewolf Relations laws, which I'm sure you've already been taught and know. Since you're still in school, your schedule will be reworked to accommodate your new seer ability and training. I think that's pretty much it."

Mary just sat there, stunned.

Adele reached over and took her hand, saying, "I know it seems like much. Overwhelming. But trust me, you'll get used to it."

She asked her, "So... I'll belong to a pack?"

"Supposedly," Adele answered. "The East Pack will likely claim you. They're the ones with the resources to groom you into the powerful seer I know you're going to be. Good thing there's Parents' Week around the corner. You'll meet Alpha Irene. She's a really impressive woman." Adele smirked, as if relishing a memory exclusive to her alone.

However, the once curious expression on Mary's face had turned to horror.

She said quickly, "I can't tour the parents. What if I fall into a vision and embarrass myself?"

"You are not embarrassing yourself, Mary. You are only not in control of your powers. But don't worry, you'll learn."

But Mary spat, "Until then, I'll make a fool out of myself. And this time in front of hundreds of parents."

"Mary, no—" Adele began, only to be interrupted by a knock on the door. She ignored it.

"Listen, Mary, you—"

The knock came again, louder now, more persistent, until Adele let out a groan of frustration.

"We are so not done with this conversation."

She rose and went to open the door. And it turned out to be Alaric except her jaw dropped at the sight of him.

"Alaric? What the fuck happened to you?!"

Chapter 289: Hexes And Visions

Alaric showed up at Adele's residence at the staff lodge, and to say she was shocked at his appearance would be an understatement.

After the fire incident at his apartment, Alaric had managed to dress up—half-hoping, half-believing—that if he just left the house, maybe the disasters would stop. He thought he'd be safe outside.

Except the universe had other plans.

The moment he stepped outside, a flock of birds decided he was their personal toilet. And not just one or two, but an entire sky-squadron bombed him, and him alone. Of course, nearby students had caught the whole unbelievable scene, and it was probably trending on Moonfeed by now.

Unfortunately for Alaric, while he was trying to take cover from the aerial bombing, he disturbed a wasps' nest. The little monsters chased him down with vengeance in their buzzing souls, and a few even managed to sting him. Successfully.

Ouch. It hurts.

Then, as if choreographed by the devil himself, Alaric slipped on a banana peel —because why the hell not? — and fell straight into a puddle of actual shit. Wolf shit, to be precise. Some idiot must have shifted and relieved themselves like a savage.

God, it stunk.

That was when Alaric knew he needed to see Adele.

On his way to the staff lodge, the sprinklers activated without warning and sprayed him clean. Well, at least it washed the shit off his face.

And now, here he was. Drenched like a church rat dragged from the depths of some subterranean pit, breathless and wild-eyed, after summarizing his entire cursed day to Adele in a single breath.

Adele blinked at him, her mouth slightly ajar. "Wow. That is quite a lot to process." She opened the door wider, trying to usher him in. "Come inside then. You need to wash up and—"

But Alaric shook his head violently, his expression alarmed and frantic.

"Haven't you learned anything from the story I just told you?!" he burst out. "I'm cursed! And the longer I stay here, the higher the chances that your whole house might be destroyed very soon. I'm a walking disaster right now!"

As if to prove his point, the bulb above loosened from its holder and crashed down, missing his head by literal inches.

Adele jumped, startled, her eyes darting from the shattered glass to Alaric's dead-serious expression. She looked back up at him, finally believing him.

"Okay. You're not cursed, Alaric," she said carefully, walking him toward the living room. "You've been hexed."

"Hexed?" Alaric repeated, stunned.

"You and Roman going through some weird-ass experiences within less than a day apart? I think our neighborhood not-so-friendly witch might be at it again." She looked at him carefully. "Alaric Storm, can you remember the people you've been in contact with over the last twenty-four hours?"

Alaric shook his head, trying to think. He has been with so many people he could not exactly remember.... No way!

His eyes widened in realization.

"Oh fuck... I think I know who our witch is," he said with an ominous voice, his eyes already glinting with vengeance.

"You know?" Adele looked surprised.

"Lila Meadows!" he slapped his thigh. "I should've known. She fed me something and I don't remember anything after that. Plus, she was all up in Roman's business yesterday. Close enough to pull something on him too."

Adele raised a hand. "Okay, hold up, Lightning Prince. We're gonna need more solid evidence before we accuse someone of witchcraft. We don't want to go down the same road history took. But for now, let's focus on breaking the hex."

"You can remove it?" Alaric asked hopefully.

"Yes and no. It depends on how long the hex is meant to last. Let's hope our dear little witch was kind enough to make it temporary. But to be safe, we're taking the rest of the day off."

"Rest of the day off?" Alaric asked in confusion.

Adele explained, "Hexes take effect in the waking world. That's why no matter what you do, the misfortunes keep happening. You can't outrun it. So in one word, I need to put you to sleep, Alaric Storm. While you're asleep, you're caught between the living and the dead. The hex doesn't have full

access to you there. " She added immediately, "Kind of. Let's hope it wasn't actually designed that way as well."

But Alaric didn't care, not when there was a chance to cure him of this misfortune. "What are you waiting for then? Please, help me. Put me to sleep."

Sure, he had things to do, but they could all go to hell for now. He'd been through enough already. Right now, his only priority was breaking this curse and reclaiming his sanity. Finn could handle things in his absence.

"Wait here then," Adele said, narrowing her eyes at him. "And do not move, no matter what happens. Hopefully, the hex isn't strong enough to stop me from helping you."

And with that, she turned and disappeared into the next room.

Alaric Storm sat as still as a rock, half obeying Adele's instructions and half bracing himself for whatever new disaster might come his way. His entire body was tense, like a wound-up string ready to snap.

He had never been a religious person, not even as a creature who technically existed beyond the bounds of normal myth. But sitting there—drenched, humiliated, and one disaster away from full breakdown—he found himself remembering the way Griffin used to pray.

So Alaric did it, not in a loud or dramatic way. Just a simple, sincere plea whispered in the back of his mind.

"Please. Just help me. Forgive me. Have mercy this once."

The sound of footsteps stirred him from his internal bargaining and he opened his eyes with relief as Adele reentered.

"Lucky you," she said, holding a filled syringe in hand. "The gods must be on your side."

Alaric didn't even argue. He was just too tired for it. So Adele leaned forward and injected the medicine immediately.

"Don't fight it," she said, standing to dispose of the syringe. "It won't be long now. You'll be asleep."

She left.

Alaric relaxed into the couch, letting his body sink deeper into the cushions. His vision began to double, eyelids growing heavier with each blink. Everything felt far away now, like he was slipping underwater.

But just before the darkness pulled him completely under, he saw her. That tour girl. What was her name again? His brain was a fog, his thoughts sluggish and sticky.

She knelt down in front of him, her eyes filled with guilt and fear. It made his heart stutter. What was wrong?

"Adele says my dreams are visions," she whispered with a trembling voice. "But what do I do, Alaric? I think... I think I saw you die in my dream."

His eyes flew open wide, adrenaline jolting through his system. Alaric tried to speak, to reach for her, but it was too late.

Darkness wrapped its fingers around him and claimed him.

Chapter 290: Elsie's Secret

School had ended for the day and night had fallen.

Violet and her girls were gathered in the living room, huddled around Daisy as they watched the footage from Elsie's bugged room playing on her laptop. Apparently, Elsie and the elites were throwing some kind of post-party celebration, likely in anticipation of what they already assumed would be tomorrow's successful Legacy Luncheon.

It was happening right there in Elsie's room and, as expected of a party, there was a lot of drinking. Except, unlike the cheap beer most kids sipped at parties, these girls were clinking crystal glasses filled with obviously expensive wine. They were really living the life most people dreamed of. If only they weren't so damn vain, even Violet might've felt a tinge of envy.

And of course, as expected of a party, there were lots of conversations aka gossip. Not that any of it was useful to Violet. It was the usual shallow chatter about who slept with who, and yes, her name came up more times than she could count. And the things they said about her? Nasty didn't even begin to cover it.

Not that Violet cared. In fact, she considered it an honor to be that famous as she practically took up sixty percent of their conversation. But gossip wasn't what Violet wanted. She was hoping someone would say something incriminating about Elsie. Or even give her a hint of the big secret.

But no. No one exposed anything. Not while they were in her damn sanctum. They obviously had to keep face.

So instead, Violet turned her attention to Natalie Avax.

The girl smiled and made small talk whenever approached by the others, but she was clearly alone. Detached. And at one point, Violet could've sworn Natalie stared straight into the camera while sipping her wine calmly, like she knew exactly where it had been hidden.

"I don't know about you, but this girl gives me the creeps. She's too smart for my liking," Daisy muttered, witnessing the same eerie moment.

"Or maybe," Ivy said casually, "you're just jealous she might be smarter than you."

Daisy turned and glared so hard it could've peeled paint off the walls. If looks could kill, Ivy would have dropped dead.

Violet said nothing. Even if Natalie turned out to be a bigger obstacle in the future, for now, an enemy's enemy was still a friend.

They watched as Natalie stood up and dropped her empty glass. Then she bid Elsie goodnight, even though the queen bee had been talking to another one of the elite girls. Elsie acknowledged it with a polite smile, and Natalie took her leave.

As soon as she vanished, the conversation turned against her at once.

"Just look at her, acting all high and mighty like she owns the school." one of the girls sneered now Natalie was gone.

Sharon let out a mocking laugh. "Please. All she has going for her is Avax's family name. Without it, she'd be nothing. And yet she thinks she's better than us."

She flipped her glossy hair like she was starring in her own shampoo commercial. "She's not even that pretty."

From her seat, Violet snorted. That was where they were dead wrong.

Natalie Avax was hot, and she knew it. The girl flaunted it with zero shame, walking like she knew every head would turn and didn't care either way.

"I bet she had a nose job done. That nose can't be real," another girl chimed in, wrinkling her own nose like she could sniff out the cosmetic surgery.

"Or her boobs," added another, clutching her drink.

"But her legs though. I love them. They're perfect," one girl sighed dreamily, causing the conversation to break off.

Two of the girls turned to her like she'd just announced she was switching sides mid-war.

Realizing her slip, the girl rushed to save herself. "I—I mean, I heard rumors she might even be gay."

"Damn," Lila whispered beside Violet, eyes on the screen. "I'd never join that clique even if the invitation came with a free car. They're so fake and toxic."

Violet smiled slightly at Lila's words, but then her phone beeped with a message.

She pulled it out absentmindedly, only for her eyes to widen at the name on the screen.

"Asher Fucking Nightshade."

As she saved it.

Her head shot up in mild panic, scanning to see if anyone had seen it. But the girls were too engrossed in the digital cattiness unfolding on Daisy's laptop.

"Be right back," Violet murmured, already on her feet.

She stepped into the hallway and leaned against the cool wall before finally clicking the message open.

[Wish everyday could be like this.]

And attached to it was a file.

Violet tapped it, and the breath whooshed out of her lungs. It was a photo. One he'd clearly taken earlier that morning.

She was curled into him, fast asleep, her purple hair spread across them like silk, and Asher had the most peaceful, satisfied look on his face. Like for once, the world had stopped trying to break him.

The picture was stunning, intimate and beautiful. Violet stared at it, her lips forming a smile until she caught herself.

Damn it girl. She was so screwed.

And yet Violet typed right back to him :

[If this is how you look after one night with me, I can't wait to see your face after two. Or three. Also, ten out of ten, your chest makes a great pillow.]

That was silly but whatever. She pressed the "send" button.

And it was not even up to a minute, Violet got a response from him immediately.

[Just say the word, baby girl and I'll bring the body.]

Damn, Violet whistled. The guy was good.

Unfortunately, while it was nice to get lost in that warm, dizzying feeling that Asher's message stirred inside her, Violet knew she had to rein herself back. She had a mission today and that meant no distractions. No matter how delicious the temptation was.

Violet returned to her girls. She didn't sit back in her previous spot. Instead, she remained standing behind the sofa, arms crossed, her eyes trained on the laptop screen.

Daisy sighed and shook her head. "At this rate, we're not gonna get anything substantial," she then added with a rare softness, "It just isn't working, V." She used Violet's nickname, a sign of how worried she was. "I'm afraid this might all be for nothing."

Violet didn't respond immediately. She knew Daisy was right, at least, based on what they had seen so far. The conversation had been surface-level trash talk and shallow drama, nothing actionable. Nothing useful.

But Violet couldn't give up. She wouldn't.

Then a wicked idea sparked in her brain.

Quietly, she picked up her phone and sent the photo Asher had sent her—the one of them wrapped up together in bed—to one person and one person only: Elsie Lancaster.

She didn't have to wait long.

From the laptop screen, she saw it. Elsie was sipping from her wineglass, mid-laugh, when her phone buzzed. She picked it up, tapped the screen, and —bam!

Her expression fell. Just like that.

Violet's lips curved into a pleased smirk.

One of the elites leaned in. "Are you okay?"

Elsie quickly angled the phone away, scowling at the girl. "I'm good," she said flatly, brushing her off and detaching from the group entirely.

Violet had to give her credit. After that initial gut punch, Elsie bounced back fast. She partied harder, drinking more like a woman possessed. Must be good to be a werewolf with a fast metabolism. But even through the screen, Violet could see the cracks forming beneath her mask.

Still, the night dragged on.

Eventually, it became too much to watch. The party was loud, obnoxious, and going absolutely nowhere. Violet and her girls gave up, one by one, sprawling across different areas in the living room. But not Daisy.

Daisy stayed glued to the laptop, earphones in, brows furrowed with determination as she watched the video.

Just when Violet was beginning to doze off, a sharp intake of breath cut through the silence.

"You have got to be kidding me," Daisy hissed.

In seconds, Violet was on her feet, rushing to her side with Ivy and Lila scrambling after her.

Violet closed the distance just as Daisy turned the screen toward them.

And the moment Violet's eyes landed on what was playing, the words tumbled out of her mouth before she could stop them.

"What the fuck..."