

## Defy 381

Chapter 381: The Alpha King's Desire

Beatrice swore she was going to kill this man one day. And perhaps, just maybe, Elijah knew that which was why he kept tempting her to try.

The silence in the meeting room had stretched so thin it snapped at the edges like a wire ready to whip. No one moved, nor dared to speak. The king's public humiliation of his own Luna was so blatant and intentional, yet everyone in the room pretended to be caught in polite, deafening ignorance.

Beatrice slowly peeled her fingers from their death grip on the table and turned to face her husband. Her smile was icy, and her voice sugarcoated with steel when she said, "I see. The great Alpha King can't bear to let his beloved wife finish her sentence without marking his territory. How very... savage of you."

She chuckled callously like someone used to the antics of her husband and turned to her audience, announcing, "But don't worry, he doesn't last— as you can see— so we can move on."

Damn! Irene nearly cursed out. Not to mention, she might have peed a little in her panties trying to hold back her laughter.

Where in the world had Beatrice been hiding her claws all this while? It definitely looked banging on her!

Elijah laughed loudly, as if to hide away the embarrassment. Then he brushed his lips against her ear. "You started a war, wife. Don't pout when the blood spills on your dress."

"Then pray I don't wear red next time," she murmured back, eyes still on the rest of the table. "That way, no one will notice how much of your blood I spill."

Even with those whispers, they were werewolves with sharp hearing and caught every one of their exchanges. A few gasps rippled quietly among the parents.

Henry coughed. Caspian suddenly found the inside of his palm fascinating. Leon Draven muttered a quick prayer to whichever deity gave him the sense not to marry a firebrand like Beatrice. As for Irene, she looked proud of the woman.

The Alphas at the table all looked at each other, unsure. This was the first time they were caught between the Alpha king's love squat, they mean, Beatrice never got herself involved in political talks and now they didn't know how to deal with her involvement. Or what this meant for them.

Luna Beatrice turned back to the table, utterly composed once more. Her voice reclaimed its steady, authoritative tone. "President Roy believes that if Lunaris Academy wishes to remain open and not face sanction from the global council, or worse, revolt from within, then inclusion is non-negotiable. The fifth house will be a symbol of peace and compensation for the humans." She was not giving them a choice here. Everyone could see that.

"And what about the backlash from us? Do you think we'd let this stand?" Henry challenged.

Beatrice answered him boldly. "Houses can be removed just as easily as they were made." The subtle threat was loud and clear.

She continued. "And do you forget I too was once a member of Lunaris Academy, and from my memory, the four houses didn't exist then. It wasn't until my husband's marvelous reign that he decided to give relevance to all four dominant packs." Beatrice reminded them, looking them all in the face one after the other.

Then she smiled sweetly through the threat. "So yes, traditions can be made and also adjusted. Make your choice, carefully."

"And who would be superheading this house? I hope it's not the purple head. It's just proof that all of this was superheaded by our sons to get Elsie out of the way and do whatever they wanted. And I seem to have a clue whose son is good at plotting and manipulating people in his games," Zara said pointedly, glaring at Henry.

"You should mind the way you run that mouth, Zara Storm, because you'll find out that I'm not like your husband Caspian that you can easily control," Henry snapped.

"Ooh," was all Irene said, enjoying this now. All she was missing was popcorn, beer, and pillow support around her neck to enjoy the show properly.

"This is going to shit," Leon muttered. He could see the divide this was causing between them.

"Enough!" Beatrice barked, looking at them furiously. "I'm so sick and tired of your constant back and forth!" She looked Zara dead in the eye. "Whoever superheads the fifth house is none of your business. You don't make the decision here, my husband and I do." Then her gaze flicked to the others. "Now that will be all for now. You may take your leave."

All at once, the Alphas began to rise.

"Well," Leon commented, exhaling slowly. "Looks like Lunaris Academy is about to become a battlefield."

"It's always been a battlefield," Irene replied. "Now it's just out in the open. If there's any battle about to erupt, it should be between our power couple." She subtly tilted her head toward the husband and wife duo, Elijah and Beatrice, who were still seated as if everything was all right between them.

"This should be fun," Irene said dryly, and left.

As soon as the room was emptied, all hell broke loose. Elijah grabbed Beatrice and in a blur, she found herself on the table, Elijah's hand around her neck.

"I should kill you right now," he fumed.

But to his surprise, Beatrice began to laugh, her voice a rasp, "Sure, go ahead. I have a conference later. I'm sure the public would be interested to know why the Luna Queen didn't show up. Or why she has such marks around her neck."

At once, Elijah's hands loosened but didn't leave her neck. He looked into her eyes, searching for an answer. "Why are you suddenly like this?"

Beatrice laughed. "Maybe I've just realized how toxic this relationship is, and decided instead of hiding away like a coward, we might as well burn in hell." She answered, looking him in the eyes with challenge.

"Or," she continued, "I want to make sure you don't breed a replacement that torments his own Luna for satisfaction!"

And just like that, as if something snapped between them, they were kissing each other with urgency, their hands roaming over each other with feverish heat.

In a flash, Elijah was inside her, and Beatrice moaned, her back lifting off the table. This wasn't lovemaking. It was just pure, unbridled, angry, hate sex. They fucked wild and savage like animals. And when Beatrice came, Elijah came too, grunting like the beast he was as he released inside her.

Then he collapsed on top of her, breathing heavily. While Elijah was trying to catch his breath, Beatrice reached out and clasped his face, tears in her eyes as she said, "I'm sorry that I cannot give you the heir you so much desire. I'm sorry that you turned out this way and have to live with this unending hatred inside of you."

Elijah's eyes widened, as if he couldn't believe she could see through him. But then his expression hardened almost immediately. He pulled out of her, made himself decent, and stormed out, leaving her behind.

#### Chapter 382: Nightmarish Day

Violet Purple found herself back at the club. The music was loud again, the bass pounding in her bones, while the lights strobed in disorienting reds and blacks.

Right now she was on Asher's lap, riding him like she was an addict and he was the high she chased. Asher's head was tipped back against the plush couch, his jaw clenched and mouth slack in ecstasy, while his hands gripped her hips tightly.

His slitted pupils were blown wide, devouring her as she moaned, grinding harder, and harder like nothing else mattered. That was until blood tickled from his nose.

"What the fuck?" Asher mumbled, lifting his hand to wipe it away.

Violet saw it and didn't care. Even when his body suddenly jerked beneath her, spasming uncontrollably, she didn't stop. Her hips kept moving with feverish want.

Asher's hands slipped from her waist as he convulsed, veins bulging grotesquely on his neck. His eyes rolled to the back of his head. Still, Violet rode him, her own head falling back, her lips parted in some sick, twisted rapture. A breathless, euphoric laugh tumbled from her throat.

Violet blinked and looked up when the first sticky drop hit her shoulder. And then she saw it, or rather, them.

Suspended from the ceiling, like marionettes held up by barbed wire, were Roman, Alaric, and Griffin strung in nightmarish contortions. Their bodies were slashed open in places where no one should be touched, their limbs twisted in angles that defied anatomy. Hollow, gaping sockets stared down at her, mouths frozen in eternal screams.

And from their mutilated forms, the blood dripped onto her and Asher.

The blood smeared down her thighs, streaked her stomach, and painted her breasts. But instead of screaming in terror, Violet lifted her hands and began to laugh.

She laughed like it was the sweetest rain she'd ever known, and bathed in it. She rubbed the blood onto her skin, licking her fingers with a moan.

Asher's body beneath her had gone cold, his head lolled to the side. His dead eyes stared up at her, mouth still ajar in that last twisted moment of pleasure.

Eyes that seemed to accuse her for killing him.

Violet shot up in bed with a gasp, hand on her chest. She was covered in sweat and her heart pounded like a caged animal. She looked down and to her relief, her hands were clean.

There was no blood. No bodies on the roof and thankfully, she was not in any club.

Violet groaned, running her clammy hands down her face. What kind of twisted nightmare was that?

She hated this.

Violet tapped her phone beside her and the glow from the phone's screen showed that it was 3:07 AM.

"Dear God." she muttered with frustration.

Couldn't morning come any quicker? Violet was eager to see Lila and get the answers she needed.

With a sigh, she climbed out of bed and padded barefoot to the kitchen to get some water to drink. The house was so quiet that if one dropped a pin, it would echo.

Violet opened the fridge, grabbed a bottle, and tipped it up. Cold water rushed down her throat and she drank to her full. God, that was refreshing.

Violet was just about to close the fridge when she froze.

Something felt off.

The air was suddenly too still. A prickling dread crawled down her spine and Violet had long since learned to trust that feeling. Her instincts never lied.

She turned, lips parting to scream Griffin's name when a hand clamped around her throat, cutting off the sound before it could form.

"Don't make a sound," a rough voice rasped against her ear, breath hot and sour.

Her body stiffened, heart hammering against her ribs. Violet wanted to panic. She was fast, but not fast enough to escape a grip like this. She could barely breathe, let alone move.

Then came the sound of a door slamming open, followed by a animalistic growl that reverberated through the house.

Griffin.

He was here. He'd sensed it. Thank the moon!

In a blur, Griffin stormed into the kitchen, his chest rising and falling in fury. But he stopped cold when he saw her.

His gaze flicked from Violet's wide eyes to the claws pressed dangerously against her throat.

His nostrils flared in disgust at the scent permeating the air. "Rogue! You've got some nerve!"

Rogue? As in the wild werewolves without a pack she'd heard about over and over again. Oh lord. Violet's stomach dropped.

There was not just one because two more figures emerged from the shadows right on cue.

This was a coordinated ambush.

The rogue leader bared his teeth in a grin. "Make a move, Alpha, and I'll slit her pretty little throat." To emphasize his threat, his claws nicked her skin, a thin line of blood blooming along her neck.

Griffin snarled, muscles bunching, but he didn't advance.

"Good," the rogue hissed. "Now be a good boy and put these on. I'm not taking such a risk with a cardinal alpha."

One of the others stepped forward, holding out a pair of strange cuffs.

Griffin's expression darkened. "You don't know what you're playing with."

"Do it now." The leader pressed his claw deeper into Violet's collarbone this time and she cried out in pain.

Griffin raised his hands. "Stop! I'll do it. Just don't touch her again."

"No, Griffin. Don't let them—!"

But he was already reaching out and the cuffs snapped shut around his wrists. The cuff activated, glowing a harsh blue, while Griffin gritted his teeth as power bled from him.

"What now?" Griffin growled, his voice strained.

The rogue leader chuckled. "Now we disappear."

"No!" Violet shouted. "Griffin, look —!"

But her warning came too late as one of the rogues drove a needle into Griffin's neck. His roar of rage filled the kitchen, shaking the walls. His body jerked, then he dropped to one knee as whatever they'd injected began to take hold.

Violet screamed, fighting like a wildcat but the leader slammed her head against the counter and white-hot pain exploded behind her eyes.

Darkness swallowed her whole.

## Chapter 383: Confession

Asher felt peace like never before. As if the world's burdens were off his shoulders and he could finally rest. But even in the middle of such a glorious transition, there was this deep gnawing inside him, like he was leaving something important behind. Something he couldn't let go of. Not yet.

Then his eyes finally opened, the steady beeping of the heart monitor in his ears, alongside two very annoying familiar voices.

"You know, I still can't believe we nearly lost him last night," Roman said.

He and Alaric stood side by side, staring out the window as the morning sun rose over the horizon.

Alaric answered, "Yeah. This is going to sound weird, but I've gotten used to the idea of the four of us. Suddenly being three rubs me off unnaturally. So yeah, I'd rather endure the annoying asshole than never see him again for eternity," he muttered.

Roman lifted a brow. "So that means you like me now?"

Alaric gave him a deadpan look. "Don't push your luck, Roman. Just let it be."

But of course, conversations like these often stirred up Roman's playful nature, and it was no surprise he turned to Alaric with a glint in his eyes.

"So between Asher and me, who do you like best?"

"Asher. We have more use for his brain than your dick," Alaric said unapologetically.

Roman mock-gasped, hand on his chest. "Really, Alaric? You'd give up my precious dick—my blessing to the female generation—over that robot called Asher? You're not a smart businessman."

Then a small groan came from Asher's throat, and both Alaric and Roman's eyes snapped to the bed.

"...If I die for real next time," Asher rasped, voice hoarse, "my eulogy better not be read by that bastard."

Roman's eyes lit up at once. "Aww, someone's a sunshine this morning."

"Go fuck yourself, Roman."

"You mean with my dick around your mouth?" he retorted with a smirk.

"I take it you're fine if you have time to banter with him. Nonetheless, I'll still call Adele. Welcome back to the land of the living, Asher Nightshade," Alaric said before leaving to fetch the healer.

It was just Asher and Roman now. The green-haired Alpha stepped closer to the bed with that wolfish grin plastered on his face.

"You know, you really are a romantic, Asher. Because nothing says 'I love you' like a seizure beneath our girl," he teased. "It'll make a great story to tell the kids one day."

"Roman," Asher called him wearily, "I just returned from the dead. Don't send me back."

"Sure, sure," Roman said, lifting his hands in surrender.

However, the silence barely lasted a minute before Roman was asking, "How was the experience, though? Did you reach heaven's gate? Although with a heart like yours, hell's gate feels more accurate. Or did the goddess welcome you into her bosom?" He enunciated the word "bosom" on purpose.

"Dear Lord," Asher groaned, turning the other way.

But that was when he looked around and realized his purple queen wasn't there. "Where's Violet?"

"I sent her back to your place with Griffin," Roman replied. "She looked like she was a breath away from collapsing after yesterday's traumatic experience. Dude, you scared the hell out of all of us. What the hell happened?"

At that question, Asher's throat bobbed. He knew exactly what had happened. He'd known the risk from the start, and he'd taken it. And he'd take it again. But Violet would never forgive herself if it happened again.

Fuck his life. He had to come clean.

"Asher Nightshade," came Adele's voice as she strode in at that exact moment, with Alaric right behind her. "You are one hard nut to kill, aren't you?"

Asher slumped back with a sigh. So it was going this way, then.

Adele continued, "This has to be the toughest job I've ever kept, and I fully intend to make Elijah raise my pay. The trouble you four bring me is just too damn much."

She walked over to him confidently.

"I've spoken to the doctor," Adele began, her voice calm and professional. "I'll treat you first and if there are still lingering issues, then the werewolf doctor can step in. But for now, it's just me and you. I know how you get with doctors, so I figured you'd prefer a familiar face."

"Better," Asher said with a clipped tone.

Without asking, Adele climbed gently onto the hospital bed, positioning herself so she could cradle the back of his head. Her hands glowed with a soft greenish hue, spreading warmth like a cocoon across his temples. It pulsed softly with healing magic, soothing some of the ache that throbbed just behind his eyes.

As Adele worked, she talked. "While I was with your attending, he mentioned the aneurysm. He thinks it was triggered rather than spontaneous."

Her fingers slowed their movement slightly. "Violet gave us her version of what happened, but we need to hear it from you. What really happened, Asher?"

Roman, leaning lazily against the wall with arms crossed, chimed in. "Yeah, tell us what happened, pretty boy."

Asher shot him a glare, but that was all. Then he returned his attention back to Adele, the look in his eyes darkening with a heavy emotion.

"Can I trust you?" His voice was suddenly serious. "Can I trust you not to repeat anything you hear in this room to anyone? Not even the Alpha King. If the answer is no, then don't bother asking me anything at all."

For a minute there was silence. Adele didn't blink, rather she held his stare unwaveringly.

"Fine. I promise you, Asher." There was no hesitation in her answer. She added quickly. "And if my word isn't enough, you can compel me and make sure this never leaves this room. I'm giving you full permission."

Asher's jaw twitched.

"About that..." he grimaced, "I'm not even sure you'd want me anywhere near your mind after you find out what I did."

"Excuse me?" Adele asked, her tone suddenly sharp.

Even the usual mirth faded from Roman's demeanor as tension took hold. He pushed away from the wall, now standing straighter, his eyes locked on Asher. Same thing with Alaric.

"What did you do, Asher?" Roman asked, no longer playful.

Asher exhaled slowly, then confessed to Adele.

"I stole a memory from you."

Chapter 384: About Her Blood

"You did what?!" Adele shot to her feet, her eyes blazing with betrayal.

"Oh no," Roman muttered, already bracing himself. "This is about to get ugly."

"I had no choice," Asher said firmly, though guilt flashed in his eyes.

"Classic dick move to dodge responsibility," Alaric commented from where he stood, arms crossed.

Asher's head snapped toward him, eyes filled with anger. "Adele was team Elijah, and she found out something huge about Violet's blood. What did you expect me to do? Let her run straight to him?"

"Maybe you could have started by trusting us," Roman growled, jaw tight. "We could've figured something out together."

Asher scoffed. "Last I checked, you hated Violet's guts. And Alaric?" He turned to the other Alpha. "You and I weren't even close. So forgive me if I didn't feel like trusting either of you with her

"And that justifies invading my mind?" Adele's voice rose with fury. "You didn't even give me a choice, Asher! You stole that from me!"

"I know," he said quietly, remorse settling into his voice. "I know I had no right. But if I hadn't done it, you would've gone to Elijah. You're loyal to him, and back then, you didn't know Violet like we do now. He would've sent Patrick after her in a heartbeat."

His voice dropped, and for once, there was only sincerity. "You've seen what they do to people like us. What they did to us. Violet would've been taken. Dissected. Or worse. I couldn't let that happen. So I made the call. I don't regret protecting her, but I regret what I did to you."

A heavy silence fell in the room.

Even Adele, still fuming, couldn't deny the truth in his words. She would have reported it because that was her job. Her loyalty had always been with Elijah, until Violet entered the picture and she'd seen what the girl meant to the boys. What she meant to Asher, especially. The girl had turned this monster into a less terrible person.

Her shoulders sagged slightly, the fire in her eyes dimming just enough for her to speak through the pain. "What was the memory? What did you take away from me?"

Not just Asher, but Roman and Alaric let out a breath of relief. With the way things had escalated, they'd expected this conversation to end in disaster, marking the beginning of a strained rift with Adele.

The three of them weren't exactly friends with the healer, at least not in the traditional sense, but she had become the closest thing to a guardian they'd known. For years, Adele had kept them alive even when close to heaven's gate. Initially, she was their planted spy meant to watch them. But somewhere along the line, she had grown on them.

Asher finally opened his mouth and told everyone the truth. He explained everything they'd uncovered that day and how the tests had exposed something terrifying in Violet's blood, and finally, how he had taken the memory from Adele to protect Violet. By the time he finished, the room had fallen into stunned silence.

Roman blinked slowly, clearly rattled. "I... I don't understand," he said. "Violet's blood is supposed to kill us?"

Alaric followed up, voice rough with disbelief. "Is that what happened to you?" He swallowed hard. "Did Violet try to kill you?"

Asher shook his head wearily. "That's where it gets complicated. Violet was a virgin. I'm sure of it. The blood on the sheets after that night confirmed it. I knew the risk. I'd seen the test in the lab. But when nothing happened afterwards, I thought maybe... maybe it was a mistake. Or a miracle."

He looked up at them, eyes darkened with the memory.

"But then yesterday happened. Everything was fine until I saw her eyes glow, and the next second, it felt like I was dying from the inside out. That's all I remember."

Everyone was shell-shocked.

Roman broke the silence, frowning. "So let me get this straight, Violet's blood does kill us? Just not instantly?"

"No," Alaric said slowly, his brows furrowing. "What if we're looking at this the wrong way? What if her blood isn't some toxic acid that dissolves ours on contact? What if what Asher saw in the lab was just a visual representation of her powers react to us on a deeper level."

Adele's eyes lit up. "You mean like how she withstood your lightning, Alaric? Everyone thought she was immune, but in reality, she was resisting and fighting it back without realizing?"

"And since Asher has mental abilities—" Alaric began.

"She nearly melted his brain from the inside out," Roman finished. "How romantic."

"Thank you, Roman," Asher muttered with a roll of his eyes.

But then he softened. "Still... I know Violet. She would never hurt me on purpose."

"She already has," Adele said firmly. "Whether intentional or not, yesterday proves that when she loses control, you pay the price. Whatever Violet is, she was made to break you, mind, body, magic, and until there's nothing left."

"So what," Roman muttered, "she's a curse now?"

"Curses don't walk and talk like that," Adele replied. "Violet isn't a monster. But she's not ordinary either. She's a counterbalance. A reset button that someone created to undo you all."

"No way..." Alaric whispered, the blood draining from his face. "You think Violet was sent to kill us?"

"All evidence points that way," Adele shrugged.

Asher shook his head. "No. I was the one who brought Violet into Lunaris. I made that choice."

"And maybe someone made sure you did," Adele told him. "I admire your mind, Asher. But even puppet masters can be manipulated. The way I see it, too many things lined up too perfectly. Violet didn't just stumble into your lives, she was guided there."

"So I can't be with Violet?" Roman's voice cracked slightly, disbelief clouding his expression.

"I don't know," Adele admitted. "But if we figure out what Violet really is, we might finally understand why this is happening. Knowing that could be the difference between saving her or losing anyone of you to the grave."

"Fine. Make the call."

Chapter 385: Taken

While Alaric was placing a call to Violet, Asher, Roman, and Adele remained deep in conversation.

"There's something I don't understand," Roman shook his head. "Who would create Violet to harm us?"

"Probably someone who hates all of your asses," Adele replied dryly.

"Alpha King Elijah," Asher said, and the words struck the room like a judge's final verdict.

"No way," Alaric muttered, having heard him even while on the call.

Asher said to them. "When I went to District One, I discovered that Violet's supposed father had been sending her messages since she was a child. Not that Violet knows, Nancy kept them hidden from her because of how disturbing they were."

"Messages like what?" Alaric asked, still holding the line.

Asher found his phone beside him and quickly unlocked it. "Something like this," he muttered, handing it over to Roman.

Roman took the phone, eyes narrowing as he read aloud:

"My beloved purple heir,

You are the best thing that ever happened to me. My gift from the goddess. I sowed you in patience, watered you with silence, fed you with purpose, and soon, I will reap in abundance. The world will tremble when you take your rightful place by my side. You were never meant to be ordinary. You were forged for me. For war. For glory. For the reckoning to come. And soon, the world will know that."

Roman's voice trailed off into silence.

"Holy shit." He said when he recovered from the shock, "Elijah has an heir? How the hell is that possible? I thought he was sterile?" He turned to his cardinal brothers, eyes full of questions. "Then what does that make us?"

Asher's face was grim. "Adele was right, I've been played. Elijah has been using us all along. He has been feeding us hope, with the intention of destroying us in the long run. With us out of the way, his daughter Violet would then be crowned and our people would have no choice but to accept her."

Roman muttered a curse and ran a hand through his hair.

Alaric said, "Not trying to ruin the moment of truth or something, but I've been trying to reach Violet with no answer. Do you think she's asleep or something?"

"Try Griffin," Roman snapped, trying to hold in his temper. "They left together yesterday."

"I did," Alaric said. " His line's not connecting either."

At the announcement, Asher stiffened immediately. "What do you mean none of their lines are going through?"

"You heard me, right. I've tried both Griffin and Violet but neither of them is picking up. There's no connection."

Without another word, Asher snatched his phone and called both numbers. First Violet's and then Griffin's. But just as Alaric said, there was no answer. He tried again and again and there was still nothing.

This time around, panic flashed in his eyes which he tried to contain. He asked Roman. "When you sent Violet back with Griffin yesterday, who else did you send with them?"

"Who else? Of course, no one. Griffin's a cardinal Alpha and he's more than capable of protecting Violet. Sending anyone else would've drawn attention, we're trying to keep this whole thing quiet, remember?"

"You could've sent Jeremiah!" Asher barked, furious.

Adele stepped in, trying to de-escalate. "Asher, calm down. For all we know, they might be in bed or something."

Asher's eyes darkened. "What kind of sleep would make Griffin ignore a ringing phone? With his werewolf hearing? That's not normal."

Without hesitation, Asher yanked out the IVs, tearing the wires off his body as monitors began to beep in protest.

"Asher Nightshade! What the hell do you think you're doing?" Adele shouted, shocked.

"I'm going to find Violet myself!" he growled, already swinging his legs off the bed.

"You are in no condition to move!"

"I'm not sitting still if something's happened to her," Asher snarled. "And none of you are stopping me." He threw a warning glance at Alaric and Roman, daring them to try and stop him.

But neither of them moved. Seeing what was going on, Adele told him. "And what if Violet is behind this? We just discovered she's Elijah's heir. For all we know, she could've done something to Griffin. If not, kill him? She tried to kill you too. Think about it."

Asher stopped in his tracks.

Adele added, "I care for your wellbeing, Asher. All of you."

Looking her dead in the eyes, Asher told her sternly. "Violet can be a lot of things, confused, reckless, dangerous. But she's not a liar and definitely not a killer."

Silence settled over the room for a moment before Alaric said to him. "Then let's go, brother."

He tossed the shirt from the night before. Asher caught it and threw it on without hesitation. "See you, Adele."

But as they made for the door, Adele shouted, "Wait! I'm coming with you."

Asher turned, eyebrows drawn in confusion. "Why?"

Adele met his gaze without flinching. "Because someone needs to make sure you don't pass out and crack your skull on the way. Whether Violet is Elijah's heir or not, if anything happens to you, it'll destabilize the entire pack, and I am not going to get between that mess."

Without another word, the four of them left the hospital and climbed into the car.

The drive to Asher's place was tense, every minute dragging like forever. As they pulled into the driveway, Roman leaned forward, nostrils flaring.

"I smell something off. There's an unfamiliar scent in your territory, Asher."

Asher slammed the brake down hard. Before the car had even rolled to a full stop, he was already out and running.

"Violet? Griffin?!" he shouted, bursting through the front door like a madman.

But the house was eerily silent, so he rushed toward the kitchen, where the scent was strongest.

The second he stepped inside, he saw the dry, dark blood smeared across the floor and his pulse thundered.

"They're gone," he breathed, chest heaving. "They've taken them."

Adele caught up, eyes sweeping the room. "Who's taken who?"

Asher, Alaric, and Roman answered together with a grim expression.

"Rogues."

## Chapter 386: Someone Wants Her

A low groan escaped from Violet's throat as consciousness slowly crept back in. Her head pounded like war drums, and her whole body ached all over as if she had been run over by a truck. Except if that was the case she wouldn't be alive. Right now, she was still breathing.

The first thing she saw when her eyes blinked open was a familiar face. Griffin Hale was hovering above her with warm brown eyes and a big, sad smile.

"Hello, beautiful," he said gently.

For a fleeting second, Violet smiled back, comforted by the familiar warmth in his gaze, until last night came crashing into her mind.

She bolted upright, gasping, but her muscles buckled beneath her, and she sank to the floor, palms slapping down to break the fall.

"What the...?" Violet muttered, her heart thundering. Then she looked down, and froze.

Thick, rusted shackles bound her ankles, the cold bite of metal digging into her skin.

"Was just about to get to that..." Griffin said wryly. The tease was there, but his smile didn't quite reach his eyes.

Violet scanned the room, only now realizing they weren't alone. They were in some kind of prison.

The walls were made of rotting concrete, thick with cracks and dark stains she didn't want to name. The air reeked of mildew, dried blood, sweat, and the stench of human waste. God, she wanted to throw up.

The only source of light came from a grimy, narrow window high on the wall that barely let in a sliver of daylight. The young women with them were silent and wide-eyed. Some were huddled together, while the others sat apart, all of them gaunt with fear etched into their faces.

Violet felt a chill crawl down her spine. Her stomach twisted violently and she had to swallow down the bile rising in her throat.

"What is this place?" she asked in a whisper, dread heavy in her voice.

Griffin exhaled, looking around. "It's probably a holding cell," he said. "Rogues don't belong to packs. That's what makes them different from us. They have no allegiance, no order and no rules."

He paused before continuing. "And because they're outcasts, most never get mates."

Violet's eyes moved to the girls again as a sick understanding hit her like a slap.

"Shit. They stole these girls from their homes," she finished for him with a hollow voice.

Griffin nodded once.

"They were probably taken from towns, and packs they attacked. Rogues are known to leave destruction behind them."

Violet could hardly breathe now.

Griffin must have noticed because he leaned in closer, bringing his cuffed hands up to gently brush the swelling at the side of her face with his knuckles. His touch was featherlight, but even that made her wince.

"Hey," he murmured, shushing her softly. "I'm sorry. That bastard didn't hold back. But I'll kill him. I swear, the second we get out of here, he's dead."

Violet tried to focus on his words, drawing strength from them, but her eyes dropped to the glowing cuffs on his wrists.

"Is that the reason you can't shift?" she asked.

Griffin gave her a nod. "They call them suppressors. Courtesy of Storm Enterprises."

Violet grimaced.

"They were designed to restrain werewolf criminals. It keeps the wolf buried, cutting off our strength, speed, and senses. Right now, I'm about as useful as a human locked in a zoo cage."

He lifted the glowing cuffs slightly, and Violet could see the faint hum of power thrumming beneath the surface. It was both fascinating as it was eerie.

"How did the rogues get their hands on it?"

"Don't know. Probably from the black market, or somehow. It's illegal to carry them around unless authorized. Either way, the rogues got better use for them now."

Violet stared down at the cold metal shackles around her ankles, and her blood turned to ice. They couldn't stay here like sitting ducks, waiting for the inevitable.

"We have to do something, Griffin. We can't just sit here and wait for them to—" Her voice caught in her throat. She couldn't bring herself to say it, so she swallowed hard instead.

She didn't know what the rogues planned to do to Griffin, but for her, the future was clear. The same grim fate that loomed over every woman in this cell. Her stomach churned.

Violet turned to look around. She didn't need words to know they were all thinking the same thing. The fear etched into their tired, hollow gazes confirmed it. None of them wanted to be next.

"Don't be hasty, Violet," Griffin warned her. "We're in rogue territory. It's an unfamiliar ground. You don't want to make things worse."

Her fists clenched. "So what do we do? Wait for them to come take me?"

"Nobody is taking you." Griffin's voice was a low growl, his eyes flashing briefly with wolf-light, then dimming again as the cuff drained his strength. Softer now, he said, "We wait for Asher and the others. They'll come."

"And if they don't get here in time?" Violet shot back. "The rogues aren't stupid. They know we're counting on rescue."

Before Griffin could answer, the iron door creaked open.

Their conversation stopped instantly and both turned toward the sound.

"Well, well," a voice said with mocking delight. "Isn't this our favorite little couple?"

The rogue stepped inside, swaggering confidently. As he came closer, Violet could make out his features and her stomach dropped.

It was him. The bastard who'd grabbed her last night. The one who knocked her out.

He clicked his tongue when he saw her injury. "Oof. That looks bad. My bad. I get a little carried away sometimes."

Without thinking, Violet lunged at him, rage fueling her.

But pain exploded in her stomach as he landed a brutal punch to her midsection. She crumpled, breath ripped from her lungs in a wheeze.

"Violet!" Griffin roared, stepping forward. But the rogue spun toward him in warning.

"Move again," he sneered, "and her punishment doubles."

Griffin froze. The wild fury in his eyes didn't waver, but he held himself back. The Rogue meant his words and he didn't want to make things for Violet.

His voice shook with restrained rage. "I swear to you, I will end you with my bare hands."

The rogue only laughed, unbothered. Then he crouched in front of Violet's bent form and grabbed her face roughly, forcing her to meet his eyes.

He tilted her head from side to side, studying her. "I don't get it," he muttered. "Why would anyone pay so much for you?"

Violet blinked through the haze of pain. "What...?"

Chapter 387: B&B - Betrayal And Bait

"Exactly," the rogue leader said. "I don't get it. What's so special about you, little feisty cat?"

Normally, Violet would have spat in his face just to provoke him. But someone out there had paid handsomely for her capture, and she needed to find out who. So, she dialed back the fire, and let her body go still, looking up at him with trembling lashes and tear-glossed eyes.

"I don't understand," she whispered. "Why would anyone want me? I've never done anything to deserve this."

He laughed, a throaty, mocking sound. "Oh no, princess. He doesn't want you dead."

Her heart dropped. "He?" she echoed, glancing at Griffin, who stared back at her with the same confusion she felt.

Seeing their confusion, the rogue puffed up with pride, delighted to know something they didn't.

"Yeah. He gave us your location, and I'm guessing he's some kind of doctor, considering he also gave us drugs strong enough to knock out a cardinal alpha. Anyway, he told us to target the West Alpha, but we got lucky instead. We caught the dumb one. Didn't even put up a fight." He mocked, glancing at Griffin.

Griffin snarled at him, but the Rogue just laughed.

Violet ignored their confrontation, sucking in the information and locked in. "The doctor, who is he?"

The rogue tutted. "Now, now, love. Client confidentiality." He winked.

Her stomach twisted. Did someone find out about her and wanted to use her for an experiment? No. She needed a plan to get out of here. Quickly.

"What's your name then?" she asked with curiosity.

The rogue Hazel's hazel eyes sharpened. To be honest, he was too handsome to be a villain. But evil didn't care about faces, all it needed was a willing vessel.

"I see what you're doing, smart girl." He chuckled. "But fine, I'll indulge you. It's not like you're getting out of here anyway. My name's Shane."

Violet committed it to memory. "So Shane, you chose this life or did it choose you?"

"I chose to be alone."

She raised a brow. "Really? Are you? Looks to me like you've got quite the group of twisted comrades here, abducting girls, and playing kings of filth. You're not a lone wolf, you're a coward, hiding behind others like you. Misfits who are too scared to build anything real."

His smile dropped. "You don't know anything about—"

"Wolves are meant to live in packs. It's in your blood. Humans crave family the same way. But you ran, and now you hurt people just to feel strong. That's not power. That's pathetic."

The punch came so fast that it slammed into her gut, knocking her breath out in one burst. Violet doubled over, gasping.

"Stop hurting her!" Griffin growled at him.

"Only because she won't keep her pretty mouth shut!" Shane snarled back.

"I thought your client wanted me alive?" Violet rasped, clutching her stomach.

"Alive doesn't mean undamaged," Shane sneered. "The doctor said nothing about the condition."

Violet forced herself to sit up, panting. "Good thing I don't break easily. In fact..." She leaned back, putting a teasing curl into her lips. "I've always had a thing for bad boys. Not to mention, you think I have a pretty mouth?"

"What?" Shane and Griffin were taken aback.

But Violet kept her eyes on Shane. "You might've heard it but I'm dating all four of them. The Cardinal Alphas, you know. But I've always been curious. What does a rogue feel like? Taste like? Before your doctor carts me away, maybe I want a taste. One last memory I could take with me."

Shane stared, dumbfounded. "You want to have sex with me?"

She shrugged. "Why not?"

His amusement died, and his grip snapped into her hair, yanking her close. "What game are you playing, bitch?"

"No game." Her voice shook. "You're a wolf. Listen to my heartbeat and know if I'm lying."

Shane narrowed his eyes and tilted his head. The room went quiet as he concentrated on her breathing alone.

"I'm not lying." Violet said once more as he listened in.

Shane found out her pulse was steady. There was no frantic racing, and no arrhythmic skips. Wolves could sense truth in the rhythm of a heartbeat and hers showed nothing.

His eyes lit up like he'd just found a rare treasure. "Why?"

Violet smiled, slow and chilling. "Do you know what they call me at Lunaris? The Rogue Queen. Because I refused to belong to any of their twisted pack systems. I walk alone, and somewhere along the line, I guess it changed me. Broke something in me. You can call it a fascination, or satisfying a long curiosity, but I want to have a rogue. Just once in my lifetime."

There was silence. No one could believe what was happening, especially not Griffin, whose expression was pure horror.

Then slowly, Shane leaned in, eyes gleaming with want. Violet licked her lips, baiting him further.

"No!" Griffin roared.

In a flash, he'd yanked Violet by the ankles to his side. "What the hell are you doing?" he barked at her.

But to his surprise, Violet began to scream and kick at him. "Get him off me! He's going to hurt me! He's a monster!"

"Get him off her," Shane snapped at his people outside.

The rogues burst into the cell, their fists flying. They tore Griffin off her and pummeled him into the ground while Violet sobbed in Shane's arms.

"He's mad. He's jealous because I chose you," Violet whispered tearfully.

Shane brushed a knuckle down her cheek. "You're safe with me now. You belong to me."

He kissed her and Violet let him.

But the sound that came from Griffin at the scene wasn't just rage, it was betrayal, agony, a wounded soul howling through clenched teeth.

Violet pulled back, voice shaking. "We need to get out of here. Now."

Shane couldn't agree more. He took her hand. "He won't hurt you again. I swear it."

"Thank you," she smiled sweetly at him.

Nor did Shane catch the glint in her eyes, or the wicked curve of her lips, curling in satisfaction.

#### Chapter 388: Escaped

A young werewolf lay face-down on the table while overhead, surgical lights glared down on him, white and blinding. His wrists and ankles were strapped tightly to the padded restraints.

He was barely conscious, his breath coming in shallow rasps, and his pupils sluggish from the sedative coursing through his system. His spine, however, remained fully exposed, a concise incision running along the lower vertebrae, held open by retractors.

Patrick hovered over the boy with such calm that could unnerve death itself.

"Vitals?" he asked without looking up.

"Stable. BP 112 over 74. Heart rate holding at 58," one of the assisting surgeons replied from the monitors.

"Good. Suction probe."

A second surgeon placed the long, narrow spinal aspirator into Patrick's gloved hand who held it like an artist cradling his finest brush. The tip was fine, needle-thin, designed to pierce the subarachnoid space without severing any critical nerve branches. One mistake, and the boy would seize, or worse, flatline. But he wasn't known for mistakes, having performed this procedure several times.

He leaned in closer, his eyes magnified through the loupe visor, the lens attached to the headlight rig strapped over his surgical cap. Every muscle in the room tensed with him as the aspirator descended toward the spinal canal.

The first puncture was clean with barely a bead of blood and the suction tube filled slowly, and steadily, with the pale fluid.

"Harvesting cerebrospinal sample," Patrick murmured, his voice mechanical.

This was Ignis in its rawest form.

The machine monitoring the werewolf vitals let out a warning beep as the heart rate spiked briefly before settling again. Through it all, Patrick barely blinked.

"Almost there..." he whispered, adjusting the suction dial by a hair's breadth.

But there was a bang and the door slammed open, the metal crashing against the wall with such force one of the retractors slipped slightly. The startled patient let out a muffled moan, still too drugged to thrash, but aware enough to feel it.

Patrick froze.

"Goddamn it!" one of the surgeons muttered under his breath.

Patrick didn't need to look to know who it was.

Only one person would dare interrupt him mid-harvest and expect to leave with their life intact.

Cynthia.

"We have a problem," she said breathlessly, her words rushed.

Patrick slowly pulled the aspirator free from the boy's spine, careful not to waste a single drop of fluid. He handed it off to the assistant without a word, then peeled off his gloves with a slick snap. The surgical mask came off next, and was followed by the visor.

Patrick turned to her with a cold expression. "If you were anyone else, you'd be waking up intubated."

"But I'm not," she said, stepping fully into the room, unbothered by the bloody surgical scene. "And I wouldn't be here if it could wait."

Patrick gave a curt nod to the team. "Close him up. Keep him sedated. Mark this one batch Omega-four-seven. I want it processed in the next hour."

"Yes, Doctor."

Patrick stripped off the gown, tossing it aside as he walked toward Cynthia, now in his black undershirt, a splash of the boy's blood still dotting the collar. His eyes were razor sharp as they left.

"Talk to me." Patrick said as they stepped into a private room.

She didn't hesitate. "They have captured the girl."

"And that isn't good news?"

"They have Griffin Hale too." Cynthia announced and Patrick halted at once.

For the first time, Patrick's composure faltered. He asked, body taut. "What did you just say?"

"They took Griffin," Cynthia repeated. "He was with Violet when the rogues made their move."

A vein pulsed at Patrick's temple.

"That's impossible. Asher was supposed to be with her!" he snapped. "And I gave a direct order, take the girl only! Goddamn it!"

Patrick ran a hand over his face, pacing, his teeth grinding. Had he known this would go down like this, he never would've made such a hasty move.

He had been watching Violet for a long time now. A girl like her didn't go unnoticed, especially not by him.

When he found out Asher had gone to District One, Patrick hadn't needed a psychic to figure it out. Asher's trip had everything to do with Violet Purple. Her name alone raised questions, but it was her appearance that sealed it. That purplish-black hair wasn't human. It wasn't normal.

He had files on nearly every student enrolled in Lunaris Academy. Their backgrounds, bloodlines and affiliations. But Violet was a black hole. Not to mention every attempt to get her DNA had been blocked either by Adele, or by those overprotective cardinal alphas.

But Patrick wasn't stupid. He knew how Asher Nightshade's brain worked.

Asher didn't attach himself to anything that wasn't valuable, or exceptional. And now, all four cardinal Alphas were circling around the same girl? That wasn't infatuation. That was instinct. If not power.

And he intended to find out just what it was.

So when the scandal rocked the academy and Violet disappeared with Asher, Patrick decided it was time to act. He couldn't use his own people. No, that would have raised too many red flags. Instead, he reached out to the one group reckless enough to do his bidding without asking questions.

The Rogues.

They were the right call at the time. Everything was planned to look like a random attack on the West Alpha and his girl. Everyone would believe it. After all, rogues had always stolen females. It was in their nature.

It would have been the perfect crime. But that was until they went and fucked everything up by taking a cardinal alpha.

They would draw attention to themselves and probably get discovered. Not to mention, Griffin of all people?! His beast wasn't tameable!

"Call that bastard right now!" Patrick snapped.

"Tried that already, he's not answering," Cynthia informed him.

Patrick closed his eyes and tried to think. This was not the time to get emotional.

When he opened them, he instructed her quickly. "If Griffin was taken, then it's not long before the others find them. I don't know how much time we have left, either way, we don't wait. Take a team and get the girl. Now. And get rid of the rogues while you're at it. All of them."

Cynthia nodded.

Then Patrick's voice dropped to a deadly murmur. "Even Griffin Hale. If possible."

Her eyes flicked up, holding his for a beat. "Understood."

"You know what's at stake."

"I do."

Cynthia pivoted, already on her way out the door when Patrick's voice called her back.

"If things get bad, and I mean bad, withdraw. At once. You hear me? I can't lose you too."

Cynthia paused in the doorway, casting one last look over her shoulder. "You won't lose me, Elias." Then she was gone, her heels clicking down the corridor.

Patrick let out a slow breath, trying to calm the inferno rising in his chest. He pinched the bridge of his nose, trying to catch his breath.

But then, there was a sharp buzz and the overhead fluorescents flickered, followed by a rapid beep-beep-beep. A crimson light began to flash across the control panel on the wall.

ALERT: CONTAINMENT BREACH – ROOM 4B.

Patrick's stomach dropped. "No... no, no, no..."

Cursing under his breath, he bolted from the hall and shoved through the double doors of the surgical suite he'd just left. But the sight stopped him cold.

There was blood everywhere. Stainless steel instruments were scattered across the floor, and one of the operating lights hung broken from the ceiling, swinging back and forth with a haunting creak.

The young werewolf patient have escaped.

Two of the surgeons he left earlier were on the ground. One lay slumped in a pool of his own blood, his abdomen torn open with his entrails dragged halfway across the tiles like he had tried to crawl for help before dying.

Patrick's boots slipped slightly in the blood as he knelt beside the second surgeon who was barely alive. The man's chest was caved in, the puncture wounds deep. Blood spilled from his lips as he gasped, his eyes going in and out of focus.

Patrick grabbed his shoulders. "What happened?!"

The surgeon coughed wetly, blood spurting against Patrick's scrubs.

"He... he shifted... halfway... he wasn't sedated enough.... "

Patrick's heart pounded in his chest. The anesthetic hadn't worked. His body must have gotten adjusted to the dosage and he was able to fight through it.

The doctor's words ended in a wet gurgle as blood filled his mouth. His body twitched once, then went still.

Patrick rose as three armed guards stormed in with their weapons drawn, and their faces pale.

"Sir! Emergency alert received."

Patrick barked, "Get the extraction unit ready. I want scent markers engaged! I want drones in the sky and dogs on the ground! Sweep the forest line! Sweep the tunnels! Sweep the goddamn ventilation shafts if you have to! Use everything. Find him!"

## Chapter 389: Summoned The Beast

If there was one thing Violet could depend on, it was the fact that men would always think with their dick.

Shane let her into the bathroom the moment she asked, right after they got into the room. He probably didn't think she'd find a weapon in there, and had not bothered to check or because he completely fell for her bullshit.

Idiot. As if she would leave her darling Griffin for a rogue like him.

For once, Violet had to thank Asher and his very unconventional ways of showing affection.

During one of their nights together, Asher had made her play a game. He'd ask her a question, and if she lied, he'd "punish" her. Of course, he used his damn wolf hearing to catch every tiny skip in her pulse. But thanks to him, she'd learned how to lie to a werewolf.

To make sure Shane did not hear what she was up to, Violet turned the sink on, letting the water run as she opened the cabinet beneath. It was practically empty, and the few items she stumbled upon were useless. That was until she found the cutting scissors.

Sweet Luna. This would serve just fine.

Violet looked at her reflection in the mirror. Dear God, she looked a mess. Her forehead was swollen and caked with dried blood. Her eyes were red-rimmed, and she still wore her pajamas from last night, and yes, she smelled.

There was not much time, so she washed her face quickly, then stared at her reflection, bracing herself for what she was about to do. She had no other choice. This was for her survival, and for the others.

"What's holding you in there? Don't keep me waiting, princess!" Shane shouted from inside.

Violet straightened at once. She tousled her hair in that way she undoubtedly knew was sexy. And then, with one last deep breath, she stepped out.

"Dear God!" Violet was startled out of her mind when she was welcomed to the sight of Shane on the bed stark naked. He was leaning back on his forearms like a king waiting to be served.

"What are you waiting for? Come to daddy." He spread his thighs further apart, invitingly.

Violet felt bile rise in her throat at the unadulterated visual, but she forced the disgust back down. Instead, she bit down on her lip, giving all the right signals, and began to walk toward him with a sway of her hips.

Shane, the unsuspecting fool, had a smile on his face the whole time, saying, "Yes, just like that, princess."

As soon as Violet climbed the bed, Shane spread his legs so she could get between them. But the second her knees touched the mattress, she brandished the scissors and stabbed his dick three times in quick succession.

"You fucking bitch!" Shane howled in pain, his legs snapping shut as he rolled to the side of the bed in agony.

Violet, intending to pounce again, barely got the chance before Shane kicked her hard in the chest, sending her flying off the bed.

She hit the ground with a sickening thud, the back of her head bouncing off the floor.

Violet swore she saw stars, and before she could recover, she heard the horrible, crackling sound. Oh shit. Shane was shifting.

This was not the way she planned this.

As if on cue, the second Violet managed to drag herself up to her feet, Shane had completed his shift. He was in his full wolf form and charged at her.

She dodged the first attack, but it only left her cornered and trapped. Violet saw it in his eyes, he was going in for the kill.

So when Shane lunged, all she could do was shield her face with one hand while the other held the scissors forward, praying for a miracle.

But the attack never came.

When Violet dared to open her eyes, Shane's wolf was frozen mid-motion. Not just frozen, he looked drained of life. Right there in front of her, what remained of Shane, or rather his wolf, crumpled to the ground and turned to dust.

What the heck?

Violet looked down at her hands, only to see them wreathed in tendrils of darkness. She screamed, jerking back in horror. But when she looked again, they were gone, and her hands were back to normal.

No, no, no. She had to be losing her mind. Did she just do that? Violet had hoped that something would happen, but it was definitely not turning Shane into a pile of dust? Kind of. That kind of death had not crossed her mind.

No. That was impossible. Absolutely impossible. And yet, the evidence was right in front of her.

Violet was close to a full-blown freak-out now. So she did the only thing she could think of, she slapped herself hard across the face.

"Violet Purple! Get a grip on yourself! We have to rescue Griffin!"

Yes. Griffin.

Hopefully, he'd forgive her for the stunt she pulled earlier. But she couldn't sit around waiting for the others to come rescue her. It could be too late by then.

Violet looked across the room and spotted Shane's abandoned clothes, and in the pocket were a bunch of keys. Hopefully, one of them would open those damned cuffs.

The only problem now was figuring out how to sneak past a hallway of rogue wolves, get Griffin out, and try not to get murdered in the process.

Violet was still thinking of what to do when a ferocious roar shattered her thoughts. It was so intense that it reverberated through the walls, shaking the entire structure to its very bones.

"What the hell..." Violet whispered, chills traveling up her spine.

The next minute, all she could hear was the sound of chaos.

Roars, grunts, panicked shouts, screams of pain, and the thuds of bodies hitting the wall filled the space. Something was tearing through them and it was heading her way.

Violet swallowed hard. Whatever that was, she didn't want to see it.

There was nowhere to go at this point. No back door. No hiding place. It was just her, a bloody pair of scissors, and a door that didn't look half as thick anymore.

Suddenly, there was silence. A dead, bone-chilling silence that didn't sit right with her.

Violet stood absolutely still, her eyes trained on the door like it might explode.

And then it did, literally.

The door didn't open, it was ripped clean off its hinges and flung aside like cardboard. Not just that, standing there, in the smoky aftermath, was Griffin. Or rather, what used to be him.

Griffin Hale was huge and easily over eight feet tall, hunched forward like his body couldn't contain itself. He had bulging muscles, his eyes that were once warm, and teasing eyes now filled with feral rage, and his mouth curled into a snarl that revealed teeth that definitely weren't human.

"Holy creator of the universe," Violet breathed with dread. She was standing in front of the beast.

The unholy, savage creature inside of Griffin that was only unleashed when he was pushed past the edge. Like earlier. She had summoned the beast and it had come for her.

He roared again. A deep, earth-shaking roar that slammed against her skin like a shockwave, sending her hair flying back and her knees trembling. Violet had to squeeze her eyes shut from the sheer force of it.

But when she opened them he hadn't moved, nor hurt her. The beast just stood there, breathing hard, his shoulders rising and falling.

Then, in a deep voice that didn't sound like Griffin at all he growled two words:

"Mate. Mine."

Before Violet could process what was happening, the Beast had already grabbed her, slung her over one shoulder like she weighed absolutely nothing, and took off at a sprint, barreling down the hallway.

"OH GOD! OH MY GOD! I AM GOING TO DIE!" Violet screamed from his back as she fumbled for purchase and finally managed to wrap her arms around his thick neck.

Walls blurred past them with smoke and ruin in every direction. Bodies littered the floor and Violet spotted the girls making their escape and relief like no other filled her. Thank God he did not harm them.

However, Violet did not deceive herself into thinking this was the Griffin who made her sweet cookies and delicious cocoa drink.

This was the beast. A creature who wanted blood, and right now, it wanted her.

#### Chapter 390: Creatures Of Myth

"Just got off the call with Irene," Alaric reported as he returned to Asher. "She's contacting her people and raising awareness."

"We don't have the time for that," Asher replied, a deep frown etched into his face. "Irene's far enough as it is. Violet doesn't have that much time. Perhaps it's some small comfort that they took Griffin along, but we don't know the situation at hand, and Griffin can't fend off everyone unless—"

"Unless what?" Alaric asked, studying his face.

Asher tilted his head, implying the answer without saying it. But Alaric understood.

"The Beast," he whispered.

"With the Beast, they have a better chance of surviving," Asher said, his jaw tight. "But the Beast is unreliable. And as much as I trust Violet's life with Griffin, the same can't be said with the Beast. I'll kill him with my bare hands if he lays a hand on her."

"The Beast and Griffin might be different beings," Adele added, "but they share the same psychology. Somewhere in there, Griffin might be able to reach him, and might be able to stop him from harming her."

"Let's hope so," Asher said tautly, his mind clearly made up.

"Any progress?" Alaric asked, turning to Roman, who was in his wolf form, spinning in agitated circles at the T-junction a few miles from Asher's property.

With his deep connection to his animal side, Roman was the best tracker among them all. But right now, something was off. His snout twitched erratically, confused and frustrated.

"I don't like the look of this," Asher muttered, just as Roman shifted back into his human form.

"They did something to throw off the scent," Roman said, voice taut with frustration. "I can't track anything beyond this perimeter."

"Wouldn't surprise me. They managed to kidnap a cardinal alpha, masking their scent wouldn't be a stretch."

Roman let out a strangled groan. This was his way of helping Violet and yet, now, he was useless.

He stormed off the road, heading toward the closest tree, and then began punching it, throwing all his rage into every blow.

"Oh great," Asher deadpanned. "The team's officially losing it."

Alaric quickly went after him. "Hey! Stop it!"

"No, leave me! I'm practically useless!"

Alaric grabbed him. "Who said you're useless?"

"I can't track her!" Roman snapped. "And that's the only thing I can do for her! I'm not as smart as you or Asher. I'm not as strong as Griffin. All I'm good at is making stupid, corny jokes that don't help anyone!" He slammed his fist into the tree again.

Alaric didn't hesitate, he yanked him into a hug and held the South Alpha tight, refusing to let go. Roman didn't fight it. He just leaned into him, exhausted.

"You are not useless, Roman," Alaric said, running a hand through his hair in a calming gesture. "We were caught off guard, that's all. And your jokes? They're not stupid. They're... kind of funny. Most times."

Roman lifted his head. "So you like them?"

Alaric immediately saw the trap. This was it. The price of reassurance was now eternal suffering through Roman's terrible jokes. But still, he nodded. "Yes, they're funny, Roman."

It happened too fast. Roman smooched him on the lips.

"That seals it, brother! We're united now! Not just by our bond to Violet, but by DNA!" he declared.

"You fucking bastard!" Alaric yelled in horror, lunging after Roman, who took off with a grin, knowing exactly what he'd done.

"A gentle reminder here," Adele called out dryly, "we still can't track your girlfriend, Violet!"

"At this point, just hire a fucking witch to do a location spell!" Roman yelled between peals of laughter, still dodging Alaric's wrath.

"Fuck! He's right!" Asher spun around, eyes lighting up. "A witch would find her faster. Roman, you genius."

Roman skidded to a stop just in time for Asher to reach him, grab him, and plant a quick kiss on his cheek.

Roman froze, completely blindsided. What the actual fuck just happened?

Did Asher just...?

They were all brothers now, united in DNA!

Even Alaric paused mid-chase, stunned at what he'd just witnessed. What the hell was going on.

Asher had barely unlocked his phone when he heard the distant rumble of an engine.

Roman squinted. "Wait a sec, isn't that Lila?"

They all looked toward the approaching blur and sure enough, it was her in a hot pink helmet, and black boots.

Asher's brow furrowed. "How the hell did she find us? Did any of you tell her what's going on?"

Roman and Alaric shook their heads, obviously confused.

"Wait, hold on." Alaric leaned forward, eyes narrowing. "Is that... is that a sword strapped to her back?"

Roman gawked. "What the actual fuck is she doing with a sword? Is she cosplaying the apocalypse?!"

But Lila wasn't slowing. In fact, she was speeding up towards them.

"Something's wrong," Asher muttered, his instincts kicking in as he caught the murderous expression on her face.

"Get off the road! Now!" He barked.

Roman and Alaric dove aside just in time as Lila roared past, her blade whistling through the air, missing them by inches.

Lila let the bike roll into a ditch behind her as she flipped off, landing with grace only years of training could attain. Her sword hovered effortlessly at her side.

"Lila, what the fuck?!" Roman yelled.

Lila turned to him, eyes hardened with no trace of the bubbly girl he once knew. "You don't get to say my name," she hissed.

And then her sword ignited with a flame that was unnatural in both color and heat.

Roman stood frozen, jaw slack. "Holy shit! How did she do that?! Can someone please tell me what the hell is going on here? Are we acting out a movie script or something? Because honestly, I'm starting to feel like this has all been one big prank on me!"

Roman had to shut it when Lila lunged at him, blade raised, barely reacting to the attack.

A crackle of electricity zipped through the air as Alaric moved faster than he'd ever moved in a fight not meant for blood. A rope of lightning snaked from his fingers, lashing around Lila's sword and ripping it clean out of her grip.

"What the hell is wrong with you? What do you think you're doing right now?!" Alaric demanded, shocked and out of breath.

But Lila's response was another blow. She spun, throwing a kick that caught Alaric in the side, but he blocked the second one with a hard shove that sent her staggering back.

"Why are you attacking us, Lila?!" he shouted again.

Her eyes were wild as she said. "I should be asking you that. What the hell did you do to Violet?!"

"What?! What are you talking about?!" Alaric dodged another jab.

But it was too late, Lila's fury was unchecked. She lifted one hand and a gust of wind slammed into Alaric, hurling him backward.

Roman stumbled over to check on him, completely floored. "No. Way. How did she do that?!" He asked Asher this time. "Is she a witch?"

But the answer was already unraveling in front of them. There was no need to hide anymore. Not when she planned to kill them all.

The glamour melted away and like a veil being pulled away from a painting, the illusion shattered.

They all watched as Lila's cheekbones sharpened, her ears elongating to elegant points and her eyes shone like polished moonstone. She was stunningly beautiful.

"Impossible," Adele whispered, stepping forward in disbelief.

"Goddess kiss me." Roman commented.

Alaric, now rising to his feet, blinked at her as realization dawned. "She's Fae?"

Asher's voice whispered in disbelief. "Creatures of Myth."

Lila raised her hand again, and the flaming sword shot back into her palm like it had a mind of its own.

Then she declared with a dark voice. "You're all going to die in my hands today for what you've done to Violet."