

Defy The Alpha(s)

Chapter 4: School Full Of Hot Werewolves

For a week plus, Violet Purple avoided school. By law, all eligible eighteen-year-olds were required to apply to Lunar Academy, but the law didn't specify that the chosen had to accept the scholarship.

The offer also came with a deadline: if the recipient didn't report to the academy within a week, the scholarship would be rescinded and given to someone else. No penalty was outlined for declining, perhaps the rule-makers never imagined anyone would refuse such an opportunity.

For people like her, the gutter kids, scraping by on the ruins of a broken world, Lunar Academy was the dream. But not for Violet. She had no interest in going, especially when her reasons for attending weren't exactly noble. The scholarship deserved someone better.

As if the gods were on her side, Nancy had chosen to leave town at that moment. It wasn't unusual for her to disappear without warning or any explanation, often leaving no note about her whereabouts.

When Violet was younger, she used to think Nancy left because she was a freak, but as she grew up, she understood the nature of her mother's work. Nancy would lose all sense of reasoning whenever she landed a wealthy client, staying with him until her services were no longer required—or, more often, until she overstayed her welcome and got kicked out.

Nancy had always dreamed of marrying rich, but with a job like hers, no man ever took her seriously. It was all fun in the beginning, but things inevitably soured.

The longest Nancy had ever been gone was a month, and Violet prayed she'd pull the same stunt this time so the scholarship opportunity would slip away before she came back. Nancy would be furious, no doubt, but by then, it would already be too late. There'd be nothing she could do about it.

However, Violet had no idea how Mrs. Florence did it, but her homeroom teacher somehow managed to get Nancy's number. She called her ancient Nokia phone, which seemed to have survived since the '90s when the world was still bountiful. The next day, a furious Nancy was standing over her as she lounged in the trailer, and the rest was history.

Call it a sixth sense, but something felt off about the scholarship. Despite not showing up at Lunaris Academy for a week, her scholarship wasn't revoked as she had expected.

To make things stranger, Lunaris Academy had even sent her a letter, politely reminding her that the offer still stood. They even suggested she contact them if she was facing any difficulties preventing her from attending.

It didn't add up. This wasn't how Lunaris usually operated. They were almost chasing after her as if she were someone important. But she wasn't. Sure, Violet was smart and good at sports, but there were smarter students back at her school—the nerds who spent every waking hour studying, all hoping to win this scholarship. Yet, they didn't want them. They wanted her. It didn't add up.

Unfortunately, there was nothing she could do about it. She was going to Lunaris Academy whether she liked it or not.

"Is that all you'll be needing?" Nancy asked, eyeing the open bag where Violet had packed her clothes and personal items. There wasn't much by the looks of it.

"Yes," Violet replied curtly.

If she and Nancy had barely been on speaking terms, it was worse since Nancy found out about her attempt to sabotage her shot at Lunaris Academy.

Nancy frowned, "Maybe I should buy more—"

"Leave it!" Violet snapped in frustration. "Why do you even care?"

A flash of anger crossed Nancy's face.

"Listen, kid, I might not be the best mother around, but you're heading to a fancy school, and I won't have some brat who's fed with a golden spoon looking down on you. Got it?"

Violet was stunned, unable to respond. Where had this side of Nancy been all these years?

Without waiting for a response, Nancy left. An hour later, she returned with a full bag stuffed with more thrift store clothes, accessories Violet didn't even realize she needed, toiletries, and her favorite snacks.

"You're wasting money," Violet grumbled, though it was her own way of saying thank you.

"Well, I don't have to pay two years of school fees now. I'd say I'm the one winning here," Nancy smirked.

Violet rolled her eyes, though a hint of a smile tugged at her lips. The tension that had been brewing for a week between them felt lighter, and Violet realized she was feeling much better compared to when she had been giving her mother the silent treatment.

"And now, for the pièce de résistance," Nancy said, theatrically holding something behind her back.

Violet feigned disinterest but couldn't help her curiosity. When Nancy finally revealed what she was hiding, Violet's face dropped.

"God, no! Nancy, what the fuck!" Violet cried out.

It was a condom. Not just one—an entire packet.

"Hey, hey," Nancy tried to calm her, but Violet wouldn't even look at her.

"I don't need this stuff! Are you seriously telling me to go whore around like you?" Violet snapped.

A flash of hurt crossed Nancy's eyes, but she quickly masked it. Grabbing Violet by the hair, she forced her to meet her gaze. "Now listen to me, young woman. I never said you should whore around—not that it's a bad choice in a school full of rich—"

"Nancy!" Violet growled, the warning clear. She hated her mother's job and despised it when Nancy trivialized it.

"Fine," Nancy sighed, composing herself. "The point is, you're going to be surrounded by hot werewolves."

"Who said they're hot?" Violet rolled her eyes at her mother's dramatics.

"They will be. You haven't related with one yet, but I have, and trust me, they'll knock you off your feet," Nancy said with such conviction that Violet frowned.

No werewolf in their right mind lived in their poor district. Violet had seen them in TV and magazines, sure, they looked good but it was an exaggeration saying the whole race was hot. Moreover, her district had been her entire world for as long as she could remember, and though she resented the opportunity to leave, there was an undeniable excitement too.

Nancy continued, "I'm just preparing you. Werewolves are virile, and humans are fertile. With a school like Lunaris, I'm not ready to be a grandmother. God knows I wouldn't make a good one, and you know it."

Violet's mouth twitched. She knew Nancy was right. Just look at the two of them. The idea of Nancy being a responsible grandmother was laughable, and Violet wasn't cruel enough to bring another life into her chaotic world.

"So, save us both the trouble and take this." Nancy pushed the packet into Violet's chest, and with a reluctant groan, Violet accepted it.

"Thanks," she muttered, stuffing the condoms deep into her bag where no one could stumble upon them. The thought of anyone finding them was mortifying.

"And, in case you're interested, I mixed them up. There are different fruit flavors—"

"Mom!" Violet snapped, her teeth gritted.

Nancy grinned mischievously. "Fine, fine. I'll leave my virgin daughter alone."

Violet shot her a glare, hating how much Nancy loved taunting her about her virginity, but Nancy only laughed and backed off, leaving Violet to finish packing.

Violet zipped up her bag with a sigh, the sound of the zipper was strangely final. She stepped back to look around the small, cramped trailer she'd called home for as long as she could remember.

The peeling wallpaper, the patched-up furniture, the broken clock on the wall, the sight of it caused a hollow feeling in her stomach. This place wasn't ideal by any stretch, but it was the closest thing to home she had ever known. And now, she was leaving it behind.

"You ready to go?" Nancy's voice broke through the stillness. She stood by the door, her usual tough features masking the awkward tension that lingered between them.

Violet glanced over and nodded. "Yeah. I'm ready." The words came out flat though, her heart wasn't entirely in them. There was something unsettling about leaving like a piece of her would stay behind in this rundown trailer.

With her bag slung over her shoulder, Violet followed Nancy outside. The two walked silently to the old bus stop near the edge of the trailer park, an awkward tension between them.

When the bus finally arrived, they climbed aboard and rode in silence to the train station. Lunar Academy was in Aster City, a four-hour journey from here. A whole different world altogether.

At the station, they stood outside the train, awkwardly facing each other.

"So, I guess this is it," Nancy said, shifting her weight from one foot to the other, avoiding eye contact.

Violet didn't respond right away, the moment stretching between them like an elastic band about to snap. Their relationship had always been complicated, and messy, but this was the first time they would truly be apart. And for all the distance they kept emotionally, this separation felt...weird..

Violet couldn't find the words, so she did the only thing that felt right. She stepped forward and hugged her mother.

Nancy stiffened at first, but then her arms wrapped around Violet. For all her faults, Nancy had taken her in when she'd been abandoned as a baby, raising her when no one else would. She wasn't winning any "Mother of the Year" awards, but she had kept her alive, kept her strong. And for that, Violet was grateful, more than she could ever say.

"Alright, child. Make me proud. And if anyone tries to put you down, show them how we ghetto folk do it," Nancy said, trying to keep her usual tough tone, but her voice wavered slightly.

Violet smiled, a lump forming in her throat. "I'll miss you."

"Me too, Violet. Me too," Nancy replied, her voice tight, fighting back the tears welling in her eyes.

For a moment, they just stood there, holding on to each other like they'd never let go. However, the blaring of the train's horn interrupted the moment, signaling it was time to board. Violet pulled away, grabbing her bag.

"I guess I'll see you when the term ends," she said, trying to sound casual, even though the anxiety of leaving alone was sinking in fast.

Nancy waved her off. "Nah, when the term ends, go off with your friends, explore the cities, and have fun." She added under her breath, "And let me enjoy being single again."

Violet snorted, rolling her eyes. Now that she wouldn't be around, her mother would probably bring as many men as she wanted into the trailer. Violet scrunched her face, hoping they would not take their business to her bed. At the same time, she also realized the sacrifices Nancy has made for her over the years for someone who wasn't even her biological daughter.

"Thank you, Nancy," she said it like she meant it.

"You're welcome, kiddo. Now go, before they leave your ass behind." she waved her off, a hint of sadness in her eyes..

Violet waved back and turned to head towards the train. She had just taken a few steps when Nancy shouted, "And don't forget what I taught you, child! When it gets hard, just give it a good suck!"

God, no. Violet froze, mortified as heads turned to stare at her, people's judgmental eyes flicking from her to Nancy. She shot a furious glare over her shoulder, flipping her mother the middle finger as Nancy burst into laughter, completely unbothered by the scene she had caused.

"Trust me, you'll thank me later." Nancy's laughter echoing behind her.

Violet ignored her this time and hurried onto the train, cheeks burning as she avoided everyone's eyes, wishing for the ground to swallow her whole. Of course, leave it to her mother to find a way to humiliate her.

Once she found her seat, she dropped her bag and slumped down, staring out the window. People were still boarding, but soon the train would start moving, and her journey to Aster City—and Lunar Academy—would begin.

Chapter 5: Impossible To Tame A Beast

Note: you are about to glimpse the mind of a sociopath, psychopath, you name it.

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The new students joined the end of the breakfast line, chatting and laughing, blissfully unaware of the predator watching them.

It wasn't until one girl felt the scorching intensity of a stare that she turned around, a smile still playing on her lips, only for it to falter when her eyes locked with Asher Nightshade.

Or rather, with his shade. Had it been his actual eyes, who knew what might have happened to her by now?

She was one of the new scholarship students; like the others, she had heard whispers of his sinister reputation. Her friend beside her, still unaware of the abrupt change in her demeanor, remained engrossed in conversation until the girl tapped her. The instant her friend looked up and met Asher's eyes, the light in her own died as well.

Immediately, their conversation died, turning to face forward. A few nearby students noticed the sudden hush and turned to look, only to quickly avert their eyes once they realized it was Asher Nightshade.

None of them knew why he was staring at them as though he could burn a hole through their skulls, but they didn't want to find out. No one in their right mind wanted to be caught under his attention.

No one.

Asher sighed, running a hand through his jet-black hair, so dark it seemed to repel the light. The sides were faded, while the top was longer, often spilling over his eyes. It used to be even longer, a curtain he'd relied on to hide his cursed eyes. But when he started at this school, he had to rely on the shade instead, forcing him to cut it shorter.

But right now, none of that mattered, not when he had bigger issues. The new girl was still absent. And by "new girl," he meant Violet Purple. Asher knew this because he had been keeping a close watch on her situation.

From the moment Jameson sent out the acceptance letter, Asher had been on high alert, expecting her to show up the next day, ready to fall into his arms—arms that were more than ready to receive her. Except that was not happening.

It had been a week, and still, there was no response from her. He even sent a follow-up letter, just in case she hadn't received the first one, but there was still nothing. To take it a step further, he had Jameson call her school to find out why she hadn't accepted the offer, but they couldn't provide any answers. And it was beginning to drive him insane.

Asher knew that, according to the rules, Violet should now be ineligible for the scholarship by now, but that wasn't going to happen. He was the rule. He would decide which humans came into the school, and Violet was definitely one of them.

He couldn't help but wonder if Violet knew. If she understood that a predator was waiting to devour her whole. Asher wanted to believe that Violet was doing this on purpose, playing games with him. He imagined that once she was done teasing him, she would finally make her appearance.

He sincerely hoped so, because Violet had become his latest obsession, a drug he was already addicted to just from catching a whiff of her. And he intended to get a taste of her soon. The thought of it made a certain area of his body tighten, and he tapped his feet anxiously against the floor.

One thing was for sure: if Violet didn't show up this week, he would drag her from wherever corner of the earth she was hiding in. There was a limit to his patience. No one challenged him and got away with it. They must play the game.

"Hello, brother," a voice greeted as an arm wrapped around Asher's neck, jolting him from his thoughts.

Even without looking or catching his scent, Asher knew exactly who it was. Only one person dared to invade his space like that.

He finally turned, confirming his suspicion.

Roman Draven.

One of his so-called "cardinal brothers," as everyone else referred to them. Though, in reality, they weren't related in the slightest.

The word "brother" made Asher scrunch his nose. He didn't have brothers. They were competitors, all of them, vying for the title of the future Alpha King. But if there was one among them he could "tolerate," it was Roman, and for good reason.

Roman was the most social of the cardinal alphas, charming, mischievous, and known for being a notorious flirt. It wasn't hard to see why women flocked to him.

They adored the dimples that appeared when he laughed, his tousled green hair that he ran his hands through as if trying to seduce everyone with his effortless charm, and those same mesmerizing green eyes that could make anyone fall.

His easygoing nature and sharp wit made him popular among his peers. But beneath that carefree facade was a more cunning side. Roman was a skilled manipulator in his own right.

Though he seemed the most harmless of the four, there was a darkness to him, proving appearances could be deceiving. Yet, despite his roguish behavior, he was fiercely loyal to those he cared about and wasn't as shallow as he seemed. Perhaps that's why Asher let him stick around. Because even he needed a little light to balance his darkness.

Roman, without asking for permission, plopped down beside him, leaning in with a smirk that screamed mischief. "I see you're checking out the fresh meat," he teased.

As if. Asher hadn't even entertained the thought. He wasn't like the man-whore sitting next to him. Yes, he was attractive—handsome as hell, in fact—but no one ever mistook him for a prince charming. And the girls seemed to understand that too, because they kept their distance, sensing the danger in his presence.

Only a few had dared to step into his darkness. And even those who had graced his bed always made the same mistake. They thought they could tame him. They never understood it was impossible to tame a beast until it was too late.

Now, Asher found himself wondering if Violet would be different. Could she handle him, or would she run like the others like a coward? He hoped not. He had so much planned for her, and the thought of finally getting started sent a wicked thrill through him.

Now that Asher had mentioned the girls, he couldn't help but scrutinize them, his gaze sharp but devoid of lust. If anything, he was measuring them against his vision of Violet.

There had only been a passport-sized photo of Violet attached to her application, offering little more than her face. Asher could've easily dug deeper and found more about her, but he hadn't. He liked the anticipation, the mystery.

He wanted to see if the real Violet would live up to the version he'd created in his mind. And the thought of her being everything he dreamed of made him hard again. *Damn the gods. He hadn't even laid eyes on her in person, and yet she was already haunting him.*

"I think I'll go for that one," Roman said casually, nodding toward a girl with large breasts, obliviously chatting with her friends.

Asher fought the urge to roll his eyes. Typical Roman. His brother had always had a thing for boobs, the bigger, the better.

"Not interested," Asher grumbled.

"Your loss," Roman shrugged, his gaze drifting back to ogle the girl.

Pervert. Asher thought. But was he any better? He was already fixated on a girl he hadn't even met. Then again, none of them were normal. Not after what they'd been through.

"So, when are we welcoming the newcomers?" Roman asked, drawing Asher's attention back. He licked his lips like a predator eyeing prey. "I can't wait to make my pick."

They had an initiation for the new students, a tradition the cardinal Alphas all agreed on, presenting a rare united front instead of competing against each other.

Some might call it hazing, but to Asher, it was a way to enlighten the fresh blood about who ruled the academy and who they answered to. Lunar Academy belonged to them, and the hierarchy was something to be understood and respected.

Violet would learn her place soon enough. And it was at his side. He would mold her into his queen, forged from the ashes, unblemished and unbreakable. But like gold, she would have to pass through fire first. Asher could only hope his queen was strong enough to survive the flames.

"Soon," Asher replied, a profound look flickering in his eyes. "Very soon."

Roman raised an eyebrow, scanning his face. "When you say things like that, I can only imagine what's going through your head. What are you planning, puppet master?" He teased, using Asher's nickname.

A slow, wicked smile tugged at Asher's lips. "Don't worry, it's nothing you wouldn't enjoy, Fox," he shot back, teasing Roman with his own nickname.

The two exchanged a knowing look, dark smiles curling on their faces as if sharing an inside joke.

"If you put it like that, I can't wait to enjoy it." Roman leaned back in his seat, visibly more relaxed.

"Oh, you will," Asher added with a glint in his eyes. "It'll be chaos. Speaking of which, I've thought of a little prank you could pull on Griffin this time."

At the mention of the other cardinal Alpha, Roman's eyes lit up. Everyone knew Roman was the trickster, delighting in pranks, especially at Griffin's expense, and often using humor to ease tension between them.

"Go on," Roman leaned forward eagerly. "What should I do to ruffle his feathers this time?"

Asher's eyes gleamed. "I've found out where he hid his mother's necklace..."

Chapter 6: Welcome To Lunaris Academy

As Violet stepped off the train, she was immediately struck by the sheer magnitude of Aster City. It was everything she had imagined and more. If she could compare it to her district, it was safe to say that she had been living beneath a rock all through her life.

As a capital city, it buzzed with energy, alive with towering buildings, throngs of people, and a chaotic blend of sounds that reverberated through the air. Yet, despite its overwhelming presence, no one seemed to notice her.

The girl with the unusual purple hair and duffel bag passed unnoticed through the crowd. In her district, she had always drawn stares, whispers following her wherever she went, but here? She was just another face in the sea of humanity. The reality was both liberating and unsettling.

However, what took Violet aback, though, was the diversity of the people around her. Even among humans, there were so many different races, ethnicities, and styles all mingling together. But it wasn't just humans. For the first time in her life, Violet came close enough to the werewolves, creatures she had only read about in textbooks or heard whispered stories of.

Violet had studied them enough to recognize them by the way they carried themselves, strong, imposing, and exuding a certain raw energy that was impossible to ignore. Her mother hadn't been exaggerating. These creatures were stunning in an almost

unnerving way. Tall, muscled, and impossibly attractive, they exuded an effortless dominance that made it hard not to stare.

But Violet knew she couldn't spend the day gawking. This was unfamiliar territory, and as exhilarating as it was, it was also dangerous. Anything could happen in a place like this. She could be robbed, scammed, or worse, kidnapped. Her instincts, finely tuned from years of cautious living, kicked in, and she approached a few humans who seemed approachable.

"You're going to Lunar Academy?" the man she asked — Carlos, he introduced himself — gave her a look she couldn't quite decipher. There was something unsettling about his expression, almost as if there was pity mixed with concern.

"Yes," she answered.

"No bus goes directly to Lunar Academy," he finally said, his voice thick with an accent she couldn't place. "You'll have to hire a taxi."

Violet's stomach sank. A taxi? Oh god, no.

Back in her district, no one took taxis. They were far too expensive, and she had little money to spare. Violet was stuck, unsure of what to do next. Nancy had given her all that she could spare and she couldn't waste it on a taxi ride.

Carlos must have sensed her distress, because he added, "Follow me."

Violet's gut didn't scream danger, but she was cautious nonetheless. They walked to a nearby parking lot, and Carlos approached a man in a car. After a brief, animated conversation, Carlos waved her over.

"That's my cousin, Amilo," Carlos said, pointing to his cousin who was now trying to turn in the right direction. "I talked to him. He'll take you for half the usual price. You can trust him."

Relief flooded Violet's chest. "Thank you," she murmured, feeling genuinely grateful.

"No worries," Carlos replied, though his tone grew darker. "Just be careful in that damned school. Our kind thinks it's a privilege, but those furry freaks are no good. Devourers, the lot of them. And I wonder why humans are so blind to see it."

His thick accent made the warning even more ominous, but Violet brushed it aside, pushing the fear away. It wasn't like she had much choice. But she kept it in the back of her mind. Just in case

She then glanced over to Amilo, who was now waiting for her.

"Get in, purple head," Amilo called, the nickname almost making her bristle, but there was no malice in his tone, so she let it slide.

Unlike his quiet cousin, Carlos, Amilo was a chatterbox. As soon as they were on the road, he peppered her with questions about her name, where she was from, and a compliment on her hair, assuming it was dyed. Violet didn't correct him. She didn't need him prying too deep into her life.

But Amilo never seems to read the room.

"Violet, huh? Is that why you dyed your hair purple?" Amilo asked, a teasing smile on his face. "Trying to make a statement to your parents or something?"

The question hit a nerve, and Violet's mood soured. She didn't talk about her unknown parents much, but being reminded of it stung. Amilo must have sensed her change in demeanor because he didn't push further, instead turning up the radio and began belting out the lyrics to the song playing.

He had a decent voice, but Violet wasn't about to compliment him. Not when she was grateful for the distraction from his prying questions.

About thirty minutes into the drive down a two-lane road flanked by thick, untamed wilderness, Amilo's voice broke the steady hum of the engine. "We've arrived," he announced.

Violet glanced out the window, confused. All she could see was more trees, nothing but dense forest stretching in every direction.

She frowned. "Mister, there's nothing but—" Her words cut off as Amilo rounded a bend, and suddenly, the sight before her stole her breath away.

"Wow..." she whispered, her eyes widening in awe.

The Academy looked like something plucked from the pages of a fairytale. Nestled in a sprawling estate surrounded by lush forests and rolling green hills, the sight was both breathtaking and imposing. The trees stretched above the road, their branches weaving together to form a natural canopy that dappled the path in flickering light.

As they neared, the grand entrance loomed before her, a large arched metal sign emblazoned with an elaborate coat of arms on the top, and beneath it, in bold, capital letters were the words **LUNARIS ACADEMY**.

The gate itself was supported by two sturdy brick pillars topped with white stone, elegant yet formidable. The surrounding walls seemed to stretch endlessly, marking the boundaries of the prestigious grounds. Neatly landscaped shrubs lined the perimeter, and small spotlights set around them, likely illuminating the grand structure at night.

Despite the ruined state of the world where technology was a rare privilege, the gate was surprisingly automated, sliding open smoothly as they approached. They were met with a small security checkpoint where a guard stepped out, holding a sleek electronic device in his hand that immediately caught Violet's attention.

"Name?" he asked in a tone that was more formal than harsh.

"Violet Purple," she replied, her voice unexpectedly small, the enormity of the moment hitting her.

At the mention of her name, the guard's stern face softened into a welcoming smile.

"Welcome to Lunaris Academy, Miss Purple," he said, gesturing to his partner in the security booth. The barrier was lifted, and as their car rolled forward, Violet caught sight of the guard typing something rapidly into his device.

For a brief moment, suspicion flickered in her mind, but she shrugged it off. He was probably just logging her arrival. Though she didn't own a phone, Violet was familiar enough with basic tech, thanks to the media center back in her old school. Hopefully, Lunaris Academy would offer better resources, and she wouldn't have to deal with booking slots ahead of time just to use them.

As Amilo continued down the pristine concrete drive, Violet marveled at the sight before her. The academy's grounds were expansive, far larger than she had imagined. Tall, majestic trees lined the road, their branches swaying gently in the breeze. Wide, manicured lawns stretched out on either side, dotted with stone fountains, their water glinting in the afternoon sun. Vibrant flower gardens bloomed around them, each petal carefully arranged, proof of the academy's meticulous upkeep.

Then, they arrived at the academy itself.

The main building stretched wide and tall, an imposing structure made of stone. Its architecture was a blend of old-world grandeur and modern sleekness.

But what truly caught Violet's eye were the statues.

Along the roof, leering down at the world below were ferocious stone wolves, their sharp fangs bared and eyes glaring with eternal vigilance. They seemed to guard the academy, adding to its mystique and hinting at the primal power that lurked within its walls.

More cobblestone paths branched out in various directions, leading to other structures she couldn't yet make out, but each one looked just as grand as the last.

Amilo brought the car to a stop and whistled, clearly impressed. "You're really going to this school, Purple Head?"

"Obviously," Violet replied dryly as she stepped out of the car, hauling her heavy duffel bag out with her. She made her way to the driver's side window and handed him the fare.

Amilo accepted it with a grin that might have made her blush if she were into charming older men. "Can I have your number, Purple Head?" he asked with a wink.

Violet almost rolled her eyes but managed to keep her composure. "I don't have a phone," she said flatly, and for the first time, she was genuinely grateful for it.

Amilo didn't push the matter. Phones were an expensive luxury, and he likely didn't expect someone her age to have one anyway.

Amilo shrugged, unfazed. "Well, if you ever need a ride or anything else, come find me or my cousin when you're in the city."

His cousin Carlos, yes –she owed him– him? Not so much. Although she was thankful for the ride.

"Sure." She gave a noncommittal nod, eager for him to leave.

Amilo smiled again, a little too pleased with himself as if he'd won some victory. "Goodbye, Purple Head," he called out before driving off, his car disappearing down the winding road.

The moment he was gone, Violet let out a breath she hadn't realized she was holding. She turned to face the towering doors of Lunar Academy. It stood like a fortress before her, yet called her forward. She gripped the handle of her bag tighter, nerves fluttering in her stomach.

Where the hell was she supposed to start?