

Defy 401

Chapter 401: Secret Of Their Birth

This was certainly not the way Violet planned to reunite with her now-inevitable mother-in-law.

Why did this always happen with Irene?

To make it worse, Griffin came inside her with a deep, animalistic grunt right there, in front of his mother.

Yeah. Caught in 4K.

She was never going to recover from this.

Violet eased herself off Griffin's body on unsteady legs, her thighs trembling. He caught her, hands firm around her waist to keep her from falling.

Violet swallowed, forcing herself to meet Irene's stare.

The woman hadn't moved, she was still rooted in place, stunned. Her gaze raked over them, over Violet's very naked body, taking in the unapologetic aftermath of what they'd just done.

Violet was embarrassed, no doubt about that. But oddly enough, she didn't sense any mockery, disgust or judgment radiating off the woman.

If anything, Irene's expression was unreadable. She wasn't even looking at her anymore, her eyes locked on her son with an emotion Violet couldn't quite place.

And then, slowly, Irene began to move and stopped directly in front of them. She was still staring at Griffin with her

mouth slightly parted, and her face caught between disbelief and wonder.

Violet was confused at first until she turned to Griffin and realised what was going on.

They were mindlinking.

She could see it in his unfocused stare, and the way they stared intensely at each other without saying a thing.

Then suddenly Irene broke free.

"Finally!" She burst out, and pulled Griffin into her arms with a choked sob.

Oh right, Violet recalled now, Griffin could finally mindlink.

It was a gift familiar to wolves that belonged to a pack as Rogues didn't possess one, yet one he was never supposed to have.

It was called the curse of the Cardinal Alphas since despite all their power, none of them could connect with their wolves.

Well, until now.

In the short time they'd spent together, Griffin had confessed a lot, Including how their entire creation came to be.

It started after Angus' plan to engineer a supreme heir failed. With Elijah rendered sterile, it became obvious the succession to the Alpha King's throne would be soaked in blood. All four major packs were poised to tear each other apart, just to place their heir on the throne.

Then Henry found a witch who claimed she could channel the goddess's power. Of course, nothing good ever came from Henry's schemes.

Irene and the other Alphas soon uncovered his plan to create the most powerful heir imaginable. One who would dominate any heirs they would ever birth.

It was madness and would've started a pack war at a time when the wolves were already dwindling in number. But then Leon proposed an alternative since there was no stopping Henry.

They would create powerful heirs for each pack instead. Let the strength be shared, and not hoarded. Their people would follow these new generation leaders that would be indomitable.

Above all, the heirs would rule together.

Well, they all agreed to it.

And yes, they kept it from Elijah.

On the night of the Blood Moon—when the veil between heaven and earth was said to be thin—they performed the ritual on the Alpha with their spouses.

But power always came with a price.

Griffin had told her Irene still carried the shame of what they'd done. Five sacrifices per pack. Even if they were willing sacrifices, blood had still been spilled and innocent lives were traded for power.

Irene could've turned back but she couldn't let Henry seize all the power for himself. She wanted a powerful heir, too.

Because in the end, they were all greedy.

But none of them could have predicted what followed.

Within the same month, all four wives—including Irene—became pregnant. They gave birth on the same day. A divine phenomenon no wolf would forget and the day Elijah found out what they had done.

Elijah was furious. They'd spat in his face by creating powerful heirs that could topple him just because he couldn't have one.

Elijah would have killed the children if he could. But he didn't dare challenge the four packs head-on. So he waited for the boys to grow up just to one day tear them down.

He didn't care about their "unity pact", and insisted only one heir would rule. That way they would likely tear each other apart, and if he had to drag the entire werewolf race into the flames, then so be it. Elijah would rather burn their world to ash than let it belong to those heirs bred to shame him.

But even in his madness, Elijah refused to let the humans have the last laugh, so he barely held the packs together.

It wasn't until the boys turned eighteen and still had no connection to their wolves that the Alphas finally realized

what was gained had to be paid for.

And now?

What was lost had been restored.

Irene was sobbing fully now, buried in her son's arms while Griffin held her close, his eyes glassy with emotion as he patted her back.

When Irene finally pulled away, she turned to Violet.

"Thank you," she said softly.

Violet blinked, smiling awkwardly. Thank her? For what? She hadn't done anything except have the most mortifying public sex of her life with her son.

This was so awkward.

And then Violet realized they weren't alone.

Wolves were arriving, emerging from the treeline one after the other and her stomach dropped.

She was still naked.

Griffin immediately picked up on her distress and snarled aggressively. Several males flinched back, especially as his furious gaze landed on the ones whose eyes dared stray to his mate's body.

"Get her some clothes now!" Irene barked, turning to one of the females urgently. She knew mates well enough, and if any male came near Violet right now, they were dead.

But not all the males turned away, not the one with the green hair.

Roman. He was here!

Violet broke into a wide grin, ready to run to him until she saw his face.

He wasn't smiling back.

Roman stood unmoving like a statue, his expression practically carved from stone as he stared at her. Or more specifically at her neck.

The mating rune.

He saw it.

Fuck.

Chapter 402: Tears And Heart Break

Violet felt dread like never before. God knows what Roman was thinking, but she didn't like the look in his eyes, not one bit.

"Roman." She took a step toward him, but two women suddenly approached her with clothes in their hands.

"No, wait—" she tried to tell them, but they weren't listening. They were already fussing over her, forcing the fabric onto her body. Violet had no choice but to comply, even as she caught Roman turning away in her peripheral vision.

She barely let them finish tugging her pants on before she took off in a sprint. "Roman, wait!"

But Roman wasn't listening.

He was storming away, each step hard and fast, his shoulders stiff, and his energy radiating such coldness she felt it pierce her chest. It was like he couldn't even bear to be near her right now.

Left with no choice, Violet pushed harder, running until she overtook him, and cut him off.

"I said, wait!" she gasped, bending over, and catching her breath after the short but desperate chase.

Then she straightened and faced him. "Where are you going?"

"Isn't it obvious? Or do I have to spell it out for you?" Roman snapped, his voice cutting through the air with an edge she hadn't heard from him before.

Violet laughed, uneasy. "Why are you suddenly acting like this?" She pointed to her neck. "This is not a big deal. It's just some tattoo or something."

"What do you mean it's not a big deal? It is a big deal! You're mated to Griffin Hale! You have a mate bond!" Roman shouted, his voice breaking.

"Well, I don't fucking care!" Violet snapped back, loud and unapologetic. She didn't care that others were watching them, with whispers flying around.

"It doesn't change how I feel about you, Roman, or with Asher, or Alaric." Her voice turned desperate now. "I like you all. No—I love you all. And I'm not going to let some divine tattoos ruin that."

"You don't understand, do you?" Roman's eyes shone with unshed tears. "You have an eternal bond with Griffin. One blessed by the goddess herself."

"Then what about our bond?" she asked, pointing to her heart. "Roman, you told me your animal side bonded with me. That has to mean something, right?"

"I don't know," Roman shook his head, his voice breaking. "I told you—I don't always understand how my powers work and it might even mean nothing. There's no bond that can be compared to the mate bond. Violet, it's an abomination* to get between mates."

"Hey, hey," Violet grasped his face in both hands, trying hold on before he slipped away for good. "I've heard that already. That mates are content with each other. But I'm not. I still want you. I want the others too. There has to be a mistake somewhere, or an explanation for what I feel."

For a fleeting second, it seemed Roman fell for it. His eyes fluttered shut as he leaned into her touch, his face contorting with barely restrained emotion. But when he opened his eyes again, they were steeled with resolve.

"There's no mistake with the goddess," he said quietly. "You're probably only feeling this way because the bond is new. Give it time, Violet and neither me, nor Asher, nor Alaric will matter to you anymore. You'll only want Griffin Hale."

"No. No, no, don't say that..." Violet's voice shook, her own tears now blurring her vision.

Roman's lips quivered as he whispered, "Maybe it's a good thing that out of all of us, the goddess chose Griffin. He's always been the best and he'd treat you well."

"No. Please, don't say that. Please, Roman..." Violet's heart was breaking.

But Roman kept going, his voice thick with tears. "Even if it was short, the moments I spent with you were the best I've ever had. I'll never forget them. God, this is not easy..." His breath hitched as emotion threatened to crush him mid-sentence.

"Then don't." Violet pleaded. "We can go back to the way things were. There's a mate bond, so what? Let's call it a blessing and move on. Maybe if we try hard enough, the goddess will give you, Asher, and Alaric a mate bond, too."

Roman let out a bitter laugh. "It doesn't work like that, Violet. Such thing has never happened before and you don't just force the goddess's hand. We're already perfect examples of that. I'm sorry, Violet, but this is the end of the road for us. You belong to your mate now."

His eyes were shattered when he asked, "Have you even thought about Griffin? How might this affect him? Mates are possessive, Violet. You know that. Go to him. Let go of these lingering feelings."

He was right.

She hadn't thought about Griffin. Not really. Not about what this might do to him.

But the thing was, she didn't feel any different. Sure, there was something special between her and Griffin now, but it hadn't dulled her love for the others one bit.

"No." Violet said firmly, surprising him.

Then before he could blink, she kissed him hard, pouring all of her emotions into it. Shocked gasps resounded from the diverse pack watching nearby. What was the girl doing? Was she out of her mind?

Even Irene had a frown on her face as she turned toward her son, likely expecting him to be barreling toward Roman with death in his eyes.

But Griffin didn't move. He just stood there watching with an unreadable expression.

Irene rubbed her temple. This was getting complicated.

Roman nearly gave in. He could already feel the temptation of her lips, scent, and the ache to hold her again.

But he could also hear the murmurs, and judgment radiating off the others. What Violet was doing right now was seen as an abomination. He had to stop it even if it broke him.

So Roman tore himself away, grabbing her shoulders and pulling her back.

With pain in his voice, he said, "You have to stop now, Violet. Don't make this harder than it already is."

"Roman, please..."

But without another word, he turned and walked away.

"Roman." Her voice was soft at first, somewhat hopeful that he would stop.

But he didn't.

"Roman?" Violet's voice climbed now, panic settling around the edges.

There was still no response.

"Roman!" she screamed, running after him with urgency. "You can't just leave me like this. I'm not going to let you!"

"Violet!" Griffin's voice boomed behind her.

But she wasn't listening. She didn't want to listen. They were making a mistake. She still loved him.

She was still chasing after Roman when Griffin reached her, grabbing her tightly from behind.

"No! Let me go!" she cried, struggling against his hold. "He's leaving me! I have to make him understand!"

Griffin's voice dropped to a growl, his Alpha authority unmistakable. "The best thing you can do right now is let him go."

Then he lowered his voice, eyes sweeping the crowd around them.

He leaned in close, whispering in her ear, "There are people watching."

Violet looked around, and true to his words, the people were staring at her strangely.

She knew exactly what this must look like. She had a mate, and yet she wasn't satisfied. Not just that, she was publicly embarrassing Irene in front of her own people. Shame washed over her.

She turned to Griffin, pressing her face into his chest, and whispered, "Please, take me out of here."

Violet didn't want to be here, not with all their judgmental eyes. Not with the gossips circling her feelings like they understood any of it. They didn't.

"I know. I understand," Griffin murmured gently. "Come."

He wrapped his hand around her arm and guided her forward, leading her toward his mother.

"We need to leave," he said without preamble.

"Good," Irene responded briskly. "There's a chopper on the way."

"A chopper?" Griffin blinked in surprise.

"It's a long story," Irene said, waving a hand, "but we found it near the rogue hideout. And now, we're riding home. It's much faster that way."

"Home?" Violet said, confused. "You mean the school, right?"

She needed to go back and see Roman. She had to try and make him see reasons why this would work. And not to mention, she had no idea where the others were. Roman hadn't come with Asher and Alaric, and that alone gnawed at her nerves.

Irene shook her head. "No, darling. We're going to the East Pack."

"East Pack?" she repeated, turning to Griffin with confusion, expecting him to explain.

Irene answered instead.

"You and my son are Fated Mates. My people have to know that. Which means they have to meet their future Luna. Or don't you know that yet, Violet Purple?"

Fuck. Violet swallowed hard.

It hadn't dawned on her the responsibility that came with being Griffin's mate until now.

Being Griffin's mate wasn't just a bond, but a crown, and it was already heavy.

As if in cue, the chopper appeared above the clearing.

It was time to go.

Chapter 403: The Remaining Three

Lila sat on the hospital bench, her foot tapping impatiently against the floor in a constant, restless pace as she moaned over her decision to help Asher Nightshade.

Boosting Adele's power had drained her, leaving her too depleted to continue the search for Violet. They had no choice but to stay behind and deal with the aftermath the operatives left behind.

Alaric and Roman had rounded up the remaining rogues who had tried escaping in the middle of the commotion. Adele, nearly collapsing herself, used the last of her strength to heal the injured and comfort the traumatized she-wolves, most of whom had never thought they'd be rescued.

In one word, the cleanup lasted well into dawn.

By the time the parents of the Cardinal Alphas arrived, they brought with them their usual entourage of pack members. Henry had personally arranged for Asher's unconscious body to be transported under heavy care. Irene Hale had declared she'd be leading the mission to recover Violet and Griffin herself.

Of course, Lila had insisted on coming too.

"I understand you're Violet's friend," Irene had said, brushing her off coolly, "but you've done enough. Follow the others and leave this to me. I'll find Violet and my son."

And that was that.

Lila had wanted to argue but she didn't have a good enough excuse. Irene likely assumed she was human and had nothing meaningful to contribute to the mission. And Lila couldn't exactly reveal that she was Fae.

It was already dangerous enough that the Cardinal Alphas knew about her identity, and even more dangerous that they suspected Violet's roots. Their parents couldn't know. Especially not their parents.

At least the Cardinal Alphas had a reason to protect Violet, but their parents didn't. Fae power was coveted and werewolves, in all their strength, were still creatures driven by want. Greed was what got them all tangled in this mess in the first place.

Roman, at least, had offered to go with Irene, surprising her. The green haired, slightly likeable asshole had winked at her and Lila understood this was his way of saying, I've got your back.

So Roman left with Irene.

Meanwhile, his father, Alpha Leon, took the lead in rounding up the rogues and securing the scene for formal investigation. An investigation Caspian Storm had already launched into, inspecting the high-tech gear and weapons the operatives had used, even before the special werewolf-human alliance team arrived.

In short, she was shipped off with Adele and Alaric. Which led her to sitting here in the sterile hallway of the hospital, posing as someone waiting patiently for Asher's recovery when in reality, she was simply waiting for any news of Violet.

Just then, a news segment flashed across the television mounted on the wall, immediately drawing her attention.

"We are coming to you live from the edge of the Wildveil Rainforest, located far beyond the structured borders of Aster City and its surrounding human districts. This dense, ungoverned expanse has long been shrouded in mystery, but we have come to confirm that it is indeed the stronghold of the rogue werewolves."

"Over the past several months, attacks on werewolf packs and nearby communities have surged, leading to rising tension between the packs and heightened security concerns. But it seems the rogues may have finally met their match following their brazen kidnapping of Cardinal Alpha Griffin Hale and Violet Purple, a well-known Lunaris Academy scholarship student with ties to all four houses."

"While there has been no official confirmation on the whereabouts of Griffin or Violet, sources say a high-level search operation is already underway, led by none other than the formidable Alpha Irene of the East Pack."

"Initial reports suggest that the Cardinal Alphas were the first to respond upon learning of their friends' disappearance. Eyewitnesses claim they fought fiercely, even when heavily outnumbered. Tragically, the battle has left Asher Nightshade, son of Alpha Henry of the West Pack, hospitalized. No further updates have been given, but our thoughts are with him and his family as he recovers."

"This incident highlights the weight these young heirs already carry. With graduation just months away, many believe this is a glimpse into the future of pack leadership. The Cardinal Alphas are not just students, they are warriors, and if this is any indication, they're already preparing to inherit the mantle of leadership from their parents."

"The alliance between humans and werewolves has never been more crucial, and many are hopeful that these next-generation leaders will usher in a new era of peace, power, and unity."

"Now, as the search efforts continue, we turn our attention to those on the ground. Stay with us as we speak to eyewitnesses and members of the Packs who arrived at the scene shortly after the battle..."

Lila was frowning now as she realized

there was no mention of the operatives from last night. Clearly, the truth was being buried. They were keeping it from the public to prevent panic. But more than that, this was politics. The Alpha King was at the center of it all, and the case had to be handled delicately.

The door opened and Adele stepped out of the room, looking around only for her gaze to fall on Lila. Her expression immediately brightened.

"Hey," Adele said.

Lila ignored her.

Which was fine by her. She was quickly getting used to the girl's unique attitude.

Adele sat down beside her, then glanced at the news screen before shifting her attention back to Lila. "So... Asher is stable now. We had to keep him sedated so his body could use the time to recover." She looked at Lila again hopefully, but there was still no reaction from her.

Awkwardly, she added, "I just wanted you to know. Just in case."

Still no response.

Yep. She was going to keep her mouth shut from this point forward.

Silence stretched for over a minute before Adele finally snapped.

"Okay, I don't want to make it seem like I'm bothering you, but I just can't help it anymore." She scooted closer, squinting at Lila. "Usually, I see these kids as just kids. But something tells me you're not. How old are you, exactly?"

This time, Lila turned to her.

Adele raised both palms quickly. "I just need to know how to address you. That's all."

Finally, Lila replied. "Yes, I'm much older than you think. But don't worry about that. Just pretend I'm one of those kids and nothing has changed because it won't. Once I have Violet back and safe, I'll erase your memory and—"

"Whoa, wait a minute?!" Adele's eyes widened. "Did you just say you'd erase my memory?"

"Violet's secret has to be kept safe," Lila said firmly.

"All you have to do is say a word and I'll carry it to my grave."

"Unfortunately, I don't trust you," Lila said bluntly and Adele flinched as if slapped.

For a moment, she was speechless. Then she composed herself, schooling her face into a neutral expression before she said tightly, "You are one cold bitch, you know that?"

"I don't care what you think about me," Lila said without missing a beat. "My role here is to protect Violet. That is what matters, nothing else."

Adele shook her head in disbelief, then looked past her. "Well, if that's the case, speak of the devil."

Lila, confused, turned to follow her gaze, only to see Roman approaching. Finally!

However, there was something different about Roman. His expression was like stone, his eyes dark, and the energy from him radiating menace as he walked down the hallway with silent fury.

But Lila didn't care. She needed answers now.

She stood, cutting off his path. "How did it go? Where is—"

Roman brushed past her without a glance, as if she were air.

Lila's jaw clenched, her eyes narrowing into ice. She wasn't taking this bullshit.

Roman was still striding ahead when, without warning, he was slammed into the wall with enough force to crack the paint. Before he could recover, the petite-sized Fae was in his face, snarling, "Where is Violet?"

Roman's Alpha instincts flared and he moved with lightning speed, grabbing her and flipping the position, slamming her against the opposite wall.

His voice was low, and feral, his wolf rising to the surface.

"Don't you dare lay a hand on me again unless you want to lose it."

But the defiance in her eyes burned and

Roman could tell she was about to challenge him again.

But before either could strike, Adele's voice rang out.

"Stop it, both of you! Stop it right now!" She rushed between them, turning on Lila. "You want your secret exposed here, in front of everyone? Huh?"

That did the trick. They both stepped back.

However the tension didn't fade and just thickened in the air around them.

"Where is Violet?" Lila demanded. "Why is she not with you? You promised to bring her back."

Roman snarled.

"Your Violet isn't with me because she's fucking wonderful and probably living her best life in the East Pack right now."

"What are you talking about?" Lila blinked in confusion, thrown off-balance.

Roman gave a bitter smile. "Violet has been fate-mated to Griffin Hale. So congratulations..." His tone dripped with sarcasm. "You don't have to worry about the remaining three anymore."

Chapter 404: Do the Hanky-Panky

Violet woke up to soft kisses being showered on her mating rune, and a small sigh of contentment escaped her lips.

She opened her eyes with a smile at the sight of Griffin.

"Good morning, mate. I bet you had a pleasant night?" Griffin said with a knowing grin.

Violet instantly knew what that flirty grin was for.

They had arrived late to the East Pack after nearly a three-hour flight. Griffin had taken her straight to his room, where they'd done nothing but fuck, sleep, fuck again, and then finally collapse in exhaustion.

"Good morning, mate," Violet responded with a purr. "I did have a pleasant night, even if it was short."

Griffin laughed, a deep, rumbling sound that vibrated through her and warmed her from the inside out.

Supporting himself on his arms, Griffin leaned over her and gently brushed her hair away from her face. It was one of those rare moments where there was no talking, just the quiet intimacy of his fingers combing through hair, and his eyes drinking her in like she was the most sacred thing he'd ever touched.

His hair massage was heaven and Violet closed her eyes, savoring it.

Griffin's scent was sun-soaked woods and warm amber, laced with the crisp tang of summer citrus that surrounded her. It calmed and anchored her as the bond pulsed within her. It was no longer foreign but

not yet entirely familiar either. They were two souls, bound together and still learning each other's rhythm.

But like all beautiful moments, it didn't last forever.

"How are you feeling, Violet?"

Her eyes snapped open. She knew exactly what that question was about.

"I'm good," she answered curtly.

"Violet?" he pressed gently.

She reached out and cupped his cheek, saying gently. "I have you, my mate. That's all that matters."

Griffin took her hand in his and kissed it, slow and reverent. Then he said, "You know I don't mind, Violet. You can have them if that's what you want. I don't care what the pack says or if it's conventional or not. All I care about is your happiness."

"And what about your happiness?" she asked quietly.

"I told you, I'm good."

"Mates are supposed to be possessive," Violet pointed out.

"I am possessive," Griffin said. "Just not in the way you'd expect. I don't feel threatened by our little group, our harem, or whatever people want to call it. But the others? Yesterday, I had to fight the urge to rip the heads off the males staring at what's mine."

"Wow. Sexist caveman energy, much?" she joked.

Griffin laughed but continued, "The point is that when you were with Roman, I didn't feel that feral rage. Not even when you kissed him. It just felt normal." He huffed. "I guess I sound crazy."

But Violet shook her head, "No, you don't sound crazy, not to me. And it's comforting because I've been wondering the same thing."

"But then..." She continued, "What if Roman is right? What if it's just because the bond is new and we are just too emotionally connected as a group. Maybe all it needs is time, and soon, I'll forget about the others, while you'll become the center of my universe."

But even as the words left her mouth, her heart ached and Griffin felt the pain through the bond.

His voice softened. "Violet..."

"Shh." Violet hushed him with a finger against his lips. "I don't want to talk about them. What I want is for you to fuck me until it all fades away. Until you're all I think about, mate."

A low growl rumbled from Griffin's chest at her words, primal and pleased.

His voice came out rough and breathy. "As you wish, mate."

They were both already naked from the night before and there was nothing between them.

Griffin shifted between her legs, his hands sliding down her thighs slowly with hunger. He spread her open and leaned in with reverence and possession.

He began to eat her out.

His tongue moved in slow, teasing circles at first, tasting her like she was a delicacy he'd been denied too long. Violet gasped, her hips twitching, her hand flying to his hair as her fingers curled into the thick strands, pulling him closer.

Griffin groaned into her, savoring her taste, his tongue sliding deeper, and flicking at a skilled pace.

"Oh shit..." Violet moaned, writhing under the pleasure of it.

Griffin gripped her hips firmly, holding her in place as her back arched and she began to grind against his face with abandon.

"Yes, just like that... Oh God... Griffin!"

Violet was screaming now, swept up in the rising tide, her body rushing towards release.

Then he slid a finger into her, curving it just right, while his tongue never stopped moving and the double combination completely shattered her.

Violet's climax hit hard, her walls clenching around his finger as she cried out in pleasure.

Griffin watched her with satisfaction.

There was something devastatingly sexy about seeing her fall apart on his tongue.

Violet on the other hand was turned on when she saw her release all over his face. He belonged to her, and there was no better proof than that.

Griffin straightened up and said to her, "Grab the pillows from behind and don't let go else..." He slapped her ass, and Violet moaned, the pain blending deliciously with the pleasure, making her pussy walls clench in response.

Violet didn't waste a second. She reached back and buried her hands beneath the pillows, bracing herself just as he'd instructed.

Then Griffin hooked both of her legs up, gripping them with one hand while the other steadied her hips. With one strong thrust, he buried himself inside her to the hilt. Both of them groaned in unison at the shock of sensation, a euphoric stretch they would never grow used to. No matter how many times they did this, every time felt like the first, intoxicating, and addictive.

Griffin began to power into her such that the bed frame knocked rhythmically against the wall with the force of his thrusts.

"Yes... yes... go on, my sexy beast... give it to me..." Violet moaned shamelessly, her voice filled with desire.

Griffin took her encouragement like fuel, pounding into her like the beast she named him. When it seemed like he couldn't get any deeper, he spread her legs wider and drove into her with savage accuracy.

"Oh my God!" Violet cried out, her eyes rolling back. That angle! That goddamned angle had her seeing stars. She was quaking under him, losing complete control.

Griffin groaned loudly, his movement full of animalistic need. He was completely lost in her. Until—

The door burst open and a red-haired girl barreled in, shouting excitedly, "Brother Griffin!"

Except what she got was an eyeful of her brother's ass mid-thrust and a girl lying beneath him.

She screamed.

Violet and Griffin jolted in panic, instantly scrambling apart with fright etched on both of their faces.

The young girl turned on her heels and dashed out, her shrill voice echoing down the hall, "Mummy! Mummy! Griffin is doing the hanky-panky with some girl!"

Dear. God.

Chapter 405: Getting Married

Griffin hadn't been kidding, he really did have a huge family. They were currently seated for breakfast, and if it weren't for Griffin's reassuring presence beside her, Violet would've bolted. Everyone was staring at her.

The twins, Vivain and Blaire Hale, were eight and unmistakably took after their mother, Irene. Though they were identical in appearance, Violet could already tell them apart by their attitudes and expressions.

Vivain was the one who had barged into their room that morning and ended up reporting their sexual activity to Irene. The girl was bold, brash, and outspoken, while her twin was the literal opposite. Blaire was quiet and sensible. However, it was always the quiet ones you had to watch out for. Griffin had told her the girls were infamous for their pranks, with Blaire as the orchestrator and Vivain as the executioner.

Then there was Kaia Hale, or as Griffin liked to call her, "my number one contender for the throne." She was your typical hormonal teenager, knee-deep in that infamous rebellion phase and, as Griffin put it, "a little difficult" these days. He told her Kaia used to be incredibly sweet, and the two of them had once been inseparable but something had shifted, and that closeness had faded.

Now Kaia just liked to prove that she could do better than Griffin. And perhaps that had something to do with the fact that the Seer, Alice, had predicted Kaia would emerge with an Alpha wolf. That wasn't hard to believe, given her rapid growth—not just physically, but in strength as well—which had begun to create tension between them.

Two Alphas can't rule one pack.

Normally, when one sibling possessed an Alpha wolf, the other did not, unless they were twins. No one knew what the goddess was playing at, but it was affecting their relationship. And it didn't help matters that Irene refused to let her go to Lunaris Academy.

Still, beneath all that, Kaia was a good girl.

Then there was the last, but certainly not the least, the baby of the house, Callen Hale. He was two, maybe three years old? Violet couldn't say for sure, since werewolf children grew so fast. Still, one thing was clear: Callen was absolutely adorable. Violet had no doubt he'd be breaking hearts in the future if someone didn't keep an eye on him. He and Kaia were the only ones in the family who had inherited their fathers' ebony hair.

And yes, there were their fathers, Aeron and Arion. Unlike Arion, who had welcomed her with warmth so far, Aeron still wore that stone-faced expression, like he was two seconds away from drawing a sword and tearing her apart if she ever brought harm to his family. One thing Violet had noticed, though was the entire family had long hair.

Good. She'd want that for her baby too. Wait - what?!

"Are you people going to eat or should I pluck out your eyes?" Irene subtly threatened, and just like that, everyone, and by everyone, she meant not just the children but Arion and Aeron included, dug into their food, the sound of cutlery clicking sharply against plates echoing through the room.

Violet smiled inwardly. She had to admit, she was impressed by the way Irene ran her family. She respected her husbands yet took the role of Alpha all the same. Not everyone could do that.

There were so many food on the table: spiced rice, roasted vegetables, honey-glazed meat strips, buttery rolls, grilled fish wrapped in leaf, thick stew with floating herbs, and bowls of fruit sprinkled with crystal-like sugar. Violet was trying to dish her rice from the main bowl when Griffin said, "Here." He had already served her a portion.

"Thank you," Violet smiled at him.

"Aww, aren't they so adorable," Arion swooned.

"Ugh. This is making me sick." Kaia groaned, then turned to her mother. "How long am I going to endure this?"

Irene gave her a sweet, sarcastic smile. "Till eternity, darling."

Kaia rolled her eyes.

Vivain, seated next to Violet, turned and said, "You are so pretty."

"Aww, thank you," Violet touched her heart, pleasantly surprised.

But she shouldn't have rejoiced so soon because Vivain added, "But you're not prettier than me." She flipped her hair with all the dramatic flair to pass her point.

Damn. Violet was dumbfounded.

Beside her, Griffin snorted a laugh. Even the cold, hardened Aeron had a small smile tug at his lips, although it vanished almost immediately.

"Also, you have a pretty rune. Can I touch it?" Vivain was at it again.

"Dummy," her older sister and twin, Blaire, said flatly. "You don't touch a mate's rune. That's like private."

Irene sighed. "Can we not, like, talk at the table?"

Arion shrugged. "Well, maybe give an exception this time. It's bonding time with the latest member of the family, Violet Purple."

But Aeron countered, "She's just Griffin's mate at the moment. Not a member of the family until the Cnáimhseáil Anama."

"Cnáimhseáil Anama! Yeah!" Callen yelled in excitement.

Vivain joined in immediately, shouting, "Cnáimhseáil Anama!" which made Callen scream even louder with her.

Violet, confused, muttered, "Cnái—what?" She couldn't even pronounce it.

Griffin leaned in and said softly, "CNAWM-shawl AH-na-ma. It's... umr..." He cleared his throat. "It's a ritual invoking the goddess's blessing."

"Oh please, stop sugarcoating the words," Kaia said, clearly relishing his fumbling. Then she looked Violet deep in the eye. "It's your marriage ritual, essentially. In one word, you're getting married. Congratulations, sister-in-law."

"Excuse me?" Violet shouted, shocked.

"Kaia!" Irene reprimanded her.

"What?" Kaia shrugged unapologetically. "It's the truth, isn't it?"

"Whether it's the truth or not, you knew how sensitive that is, and it wasn't your place to say it, and you know it!"

"Well, the milk's been spilled."

Irene glared at her. "You're grounded for the week."

"What?! No, you can't do that! I have an appointment with my friends this afternoon!" Kaia said, horrified.

"I just did," Irene declared.

Kaia turned to her fathers. "Tell her she can't do that!"

Aeron was the one who spoke. "She's your mother, and yes, we're in one hundred percent support of her."

Kaia shook her head as if she couldn't believe they would do that to her.

"I'm done here." She stood abruptly to leave.

"Sit," Irene commanded. "You finish your meal. Now."

There was no disobeying her mother's authority, Kaia sat her ass back down.

Violet then said, "With all due respect, can anyone tell me what is going on right now?"

Chapter 406: Honor Tradition

Violet was seated in Irene's office, flanked by Griffin, while her two husbands sat on the opposite side. They hadn't stayed until the end of breakfast and now it was time for the truth.

Irene began first, a sigh escaping her lips. "First of all, I want to apologize. It was never my intention to keep you in the dark. I had planned to have this conversation with you after breakfast, if only..." She paused, turning slowly to narrow her eyes at her husbands. "If only they had kept their mouths shut."

It was Arion who dramatically shrunk into his seat like a schoolboy caught passing notes, while Aeron remained stoically unbothered, his arms crossed like a wall.

Irene rolled her eyes and turned back to Violet. "As you've heard, we, the East pack, are 'religious people.'" She lifted both hands and wriggled her fingers in air quotes, her voice dripping with sarcasm. "At least that's how most people mock us."

"But I like to think of it as being more connected to the goddess than most packs, and it's no wonder she continues to bless us. When you forget your creator, you edge closer to destruction."

Violet nodded slowly, unsure where this was going. "So... how does this explain the Cnáí-ah-"

"The Cnáimhseáil Anama," Irene corrected her gently.

"Yes. That." Violet gestured vaguely. "Griffin said it's to invoke the goddess's blessing. But the goddess already blessed us with the mate bond. So what other blessing are we talking about exactly?"

"Yes, the mate bond is a gift," Irene agreed. "But gratitude matters. And when we show our gratitude to the goddess, she blesses us further with life, protection, children — females, to be exact."

She let that hang in the air.

"Why do you think the East pack has more pure-blooded females than any other packs?" she added.

"Oh." Violet blinked, stunned. So they were thanking the goddess so they could have female babies. Fantastic. She was doomed.

Irene went on. "Since the ceremony binds you not only to your mate but to the East pack, we often take it as a marriage rite. In summary, the goddess blesses your union, and you're officially one of us."

Great.

It was worse enough that Roman had left her because of the "mate bond", if the rest heard she was "practically" married to Griffin, she didn't know how they'd take it.

"Soooo," Violet dragged the word out, hesitantly, "I can't skip it? Like maybe do it later?"

"No," Irene said flatly, her smile not reaching her eyes. "For Fated Mates, it is recommended to be performed immediately after the mating fever. Trust me, it helps strengthen the bond."

"And ensures you're not a threat to our son," Aeron added from his corner, his eyes hard.

"Dad. Chill," Griffin muttered under his breath.

Arion laughed, far more relaxed than the others, and slung his arm lazily around Aeron's stiff shoulders. "Don't mind the paranoid fool. "He said, "He just doesn't want a repeat of what happened during our time."

"What happened during your time?" Violet asked.

Arion looked at Griffin. "You haven't told our mate about our love story?"

Aeron growled low in warning. "That wasn't a love story."

"Oh, please shut it, you romance killer," Arion dismissed him, waving a hand. Then he turned fully to Violet with an excited gleam in his eyes. "Don't worry, I'd tell you how we ended up in this cozy little domestic arrangement. Now, where do I begin..."

Aeron groaned, pinching the bridge of his nose.

Griffin chuckled, whispering into Violet's ear. "Every time he starts this story, I want to gouge my ears out too."

"Just tell the story, Arion, and try not to add too many embellishments." Irene warned him.

"Irene, love, you wound me. You know my words are the gospel truth, albeit delivered with a bit more flair." Arion winked.

Irene scoffed, then turned to Violet. "These two husbands of mine were sent to kill me because some smaller packs under the East didn't want a woman leading them. They wanted my squirm of a brother, the one they could easily control."

Violet blinked. "Wait. You had a brother?"

"Had," Irene replied simply. "I killed him with my own hands by the time everything was over."

Violet was rendered speechless.

Arion picked up the tale without missing a beat. "So there we were, two brothers sent to kill the East's little Alpha princess on her birthday. It was supposed to be a clean kill. No one was to suspect us. That way, we wouldn't risk a war within the East since there were still sub-packs loyal to her. The plan was to make it look like an accident, you know, poison her drink, stage a drunken fall from a height, maybe blow her up. There were just so many delightful options."

To be honest, Violet's mind was blown. Irene had to be crazy to marry people who once plotted her murder so meticulously.

Arion continued, "And everything was going smoothly—"

"Until you decided to flirt with her," Aeron muttered, glowering.

Griffin leaned in, whispering to Violet, "Here comes the argument. Brace yourself."

"I didn't flirt with Irene. She came my way, swaying that ass, and you know I'm an ass man," Arion said defensively.

Dear goddess. Violet groaned inwardly. That was far too much information.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Irene said airily, though the smirk on her face suggested otherwise.

Aeron grumbled, "Arion chose pleasure over business."

"And yet when you found us, you still joined in," Arion shot back, then gave a slow whistle. "That was our first and most memorable threesome."

Honestly, Violet had no idea how she managed to keep a straight face through it all. But somehow, she did.

Aeron muttered in his defense, "I only joined because I figured getting her to lower her guard would help us strike when she least expected it."

"Except we were the ones caught off guard," Arion chuckled. "We still don't know how, but Irene somehow knew about our mission."

"The goddess protects her people," Irene said proudly.

Griffin broke the truth to Violet, "A Seer warned her at the time, so she was prepared."

"To cut a long story short," Arion continued, "she imprisoned us. Then later, she offered us a chance to live if we served her. I said yes immediately. This one" he jerked a thumb at Aeron, "fought it for weeks."

He laughed. "But even ice melts eventually. And here we are, married and living our best lives. Irene still chains us up sometimes, but now for very different reasons."

Of course, Arion finished with a flourish.

"Thank the goddess. Finally," Aeron muttered, clearly relieved it was over.

Violet looked between the three of them. The dynamic was strange, intense but oddly beautiful. She could've had something like this with her own men, if things had gone differently.

"I would never hurt Griffin," Violet told Aeron, hoping he would understand.

"You won't, not now that you're mated. Elijah can't use you against our son anymore," Aeron replied. "But becoming a member of our pack solidifies that trust."

Irene stepped forward and gently took Violet's hand.

"I understand your hesitation," she said softly. "This is a lot, especially for someone who isn't a werewolf and didn't grow up in this kind of community. But soon enough, everyone will know about the mate bond, and there won't be time for the ceremony. You need to connect with our people first. They need to see that you're one of them, that you'll fight for them just as they'll fight for you. Violet, you need to honor tradition."

For a moment, there was silence as Violet mulled over her decision.

Then she asked with a deep breath, "When is the Cnáimhseáil Anama happening?" She pronounced it properly this time.

"Tonight."

Shit.

Chapter 407: The Goddess Will

Irene straightened at once as soon as the call connected. "Hello?"

"Hello? Who is this?" Nancy's voice came through from the other line.

"This is Irene Hale, Alpha of the East pack," she introduced herself.

"Oh hey, Irene," Nancy's voice peaked in excitement. "How lucky I am, considering I was just about to call you because I haven't been able to reach my daughter for nearly two days now and I just found out from my husband that you're supposed to lead the search for her..." She let out a deep breath and asked hesitantly, "Did anything happen to my daughter?"

"No, nothing happened to Violet. She's safe with me right now."

"Oh, thank God," Nancy breathed in relief. "Thank you for finding her. And I hope Griffin's fine as well?"

"Both of them are fine."

"That's good to know. I guess I have to pick my daughter up. Where exactly are you right now?"

"Urm, about that..." Irene scratched her head nervously. "There is something you have to know about Violet and Griffin..." How was she going to deliver this news exactly?

The pause from Irene's side made something dawn on Nancy. "Dear God," she said with dread, "Don't tell me your son knocked up my daughter? God! Violet! Why do you keep on doing the opposite of what I ask you to do?"

"No, no, Violet is not pregnant," Irene said quickly. "She requested a potent contraceptive this morning to prevent that."

There was a pause from Nancy's side this time before she asked with all seriousness, "Irene, what the fuck is going on right now?"

"Violet and Griffin are fate mated," Irene let it out finally.

"What?!" Nancy was stunned at first, then she let out an ear-splitting scream of excitement that had Irene wincing and removing the phone from her ear.

"Oh my God! I'm so happy for Violet! My daughter has found her mate and it's your son, Griffin!"

"Yes. I'm happy too."

However, Nancy's joy suddenly came to a halt as if something dawned on her. "Wait a minute..." she said, "Why are you the one breaking the news to me and not my daughter?"

Irene licked her lips nervously now, sitting on the edge of her desk as she explained, "There is something else, and Violet says she would only go through it if I'm able to convince you. That's her condition."

"Sure, hit me."

"Violet needs to go through the Cnáimhseáil Anama ceremony tonight."

"The Cnái-what?"

"It's a marriage rite. Your daughter is now the future Luna of the East pack. She needs the blessings of the goddess and my people before she returns to the academy. It is our culture and a way of her solidifying her position," she explained quickly.

"Wait a minute, let me get something straight," Nancy said. "So my daughter, who by the way got kidnapped and I was informed about it through a phone call, is suddenly mated to Griffin and now she has to marry him and you want me to be a witness to this shotgun wedding?"

"It is the way of the East, Nancy. You would know that if you were a werewolf, but I do not take that against you. However, you're mated too and must understand the certain responsibilities owed to your pack."

But Nancy said to her, "I swear, Irene, if you don't release my daughter and I have to get there on my own, not even the goddess would be able to save you from my hand."

"Nancy, you aren't being rational right now."

"I don't care a fucking damn about rationality, all I want right now is my daughter. And the gods help you if you've done something fetish to her."

"I haven't done anything to Violet. If you calm down a little, you would realize I do care about — hello? Nancy, hello?" Irene stared at the screen only to realize she had ended the call.

"Shit!" she cursed, slapping a palm against her desk, running her other hand through her hair in frustration.

At that moment, a knock sounded on her door and she grumbled, "Come in," only for an unexpected guest to appear.

"Alice? What are you doing here?" she asked in surprise.

"I guess you weren't planning to invite me to the Cnáimhseáil Anama tonight?" she asked, holding Irene's gaze.

"You see everything anyway, what's the need?" Irene answered casually.

"Mmhmm," Alice smiled even though it didn't touch her eyes.

She looked around the room, reaching out to stroke the flower in its vase. She said, "Your greed is beginning to get in the way, Irene."

"I'm doing what is right or since when has the Cnáimhseáil Anama become a crime? Moreover, I'm protecting her," she argued.

"The goddess's daughter is not yours to protect!" Alice turned her head sharply. She added in an unsettling low, pointed tone, "Or keep."

Then her voice went back to normal as she said, "Violet Purple belongs in the middle of danger. She is a child of war. That is what she was made for. Not even you can stop that. It has been written down. The chains of events have been set and we are heading towards that moment."

Irene asked her, "If she is to unite all four packs, then why did the goddess bind her to my son only? Doesn't that count for something?"

"Gratitude, Irene. Gratitude."

"I am grateful, Alice. But the prophecy doesn't make sense at this point. She's not chosen by Elijah. If anything, that man would likely send her to the grave now just to hurt my son, Griffin."

"Prophecies are always interpreted personally. The same way Caroline did. The same way you are doing right now. Humans take a piece of it and assume it's the whole without seeing the clear picture. But you, Irene, have always been in line with the goddess. Don't ruin it now. The girl cannot remain here any longer. Send her back. She has no purpose here. For now," Alice said, turning to leave.

"What about the Cnáimhseáil Anama? What do I tell the pack? You think this is easy for me?" Irene asked, exasperated.

Alice stopped, then spoke to her from over her shoulder. "You're the Alpha. Deal with it."

She walked away.

Chapter 408: East Custom

The first time they arrived at the East pack house, Violet hadn't taken the time to look around. It was late, she was tired, and everything had been a blur. But now, standing in broad daylight, the place left her dumbfounded.

It wasn't just a house. It was a freaking mansion built across several hectares of land, with winding stone paths, wide verandas, and forested groves surrounding the main building. Griffin had told her earlier that it wasn't just his family living here, but some members of the pack too. A communal style of living, still practiced by some werewolf clans.

And that was how Violet ended up lounging in the pool area with Griffin's family.

Griffin, in his ever-resourceful fashion, had found her a fitted swimsuit—God knows where from—and she hadn't questioned it.

Violet and Kaia were reclining side by side on long, cushioned sun loungers, soaking in the warm rays, while Griffin's younger twin sisters, Vivain and Blaire, fussed over her like she was a life-sized doll.

They were performing some kind of skincare treatment on her. Violet had willingly let herself be their experiment. The girls were lovely, so why not?

She was relaxed, half-listening to the banter between the twins, until she felt something cold and wet spread across her skin.

Violet tried to lift the cucumber slices off her eyes but Vivian slapped her hand away, followed by a soft, muffled giggle.

Something wasn't right.

"What are you rubbing on me right now?" Violet asked warily.

Blaire answered with the utmost seriousness. "A homemade mud skincare formula developed by me and Vivian."

"Oh," Violet muttered, both impressed and suspicious. Nah, she'd trust the girls. They wouldn't do anything to her.

The twins continued to smear it across her face. The mixture was cool and had a strange, herbal scent. Her nose twitched. "What's in this, exactly?"

Vivian listed proudly, "Neem leaves, rose water, turmeric, ground aloe, goat milk, and dried chamomile petals."

Violet was just beginning to relax again when Blaire added casually, "And cow dung."

"What?" her entire body went stiff.

"Do you know that cow dung is packed with antiseptic and exfoliating properties," Blaire continued calmly. "That's why it's the key ingredient in our recipe."

Vivain, ever the mischief-maker, kept spreading the paste on her cheek, grinning. "You're going to be the most beautiful bride at the Cnáimhseáil Anama tonight."

That was it.

Violet yanked the cucumbers from her face and bolted upright. "Griffin!" She took off screaming, her feet slapping against the pool deck.

Griffin, who had been in the pool with Callen, heard her and rushed out, water dripping down his chest. "I'm here, Violet!"

She rushed into his arms, wiping furiously at her face. "Your sisters put cow dung on my face! Can you believe that? Freaking cow dung!"

But instead of helping, Griffin was busy stifling his laughter.

"Are you kidding me right now?" she snapped.

Oh, he couldn't hold it any longer. The laugh burst out from his throat. "God, you should see the look on your face."

Right on cue, Vivain appeared and flashed a camera in Violet's face. "This one's staying for the record," she giggled.

Violet stared, dumbfounded. What the hell was going on right now?

Griffin finally put her out of her misery. "There was no cow dung in that. Congratulations, you've just been successfully pranked by the twins."

"What?!" Violet turned slowly toward the girls, who were laughing their heads off.

"Oh, I'm going to kill you once I get my hands on you." She looked scary as she walked towards them..

The twins screamed and took off, still laughing while Violet gave chase.

Left with no choice, the girls ran straight to the pool and jumped in, one after the other.

Violet stopped at the edge, hands on her hips, watching them with a deadly glare. The twins swam happily, unbothered.

"Loser!" Vivian shouted, hands cupped around her mouth.

"Come join us!" Griffin called.

That was the only warning Violet got before he grabbed her by the waist and leapt into the pool.

"Ahhh!" Violet screamed right before the water engulfed her and she kicked her way up, gasping for air once they surfaced.

"Seriously!" she shouted, punching his chest.

Griffin only laughed, water streaming down his face. Then he pulled her in gently, kissing her. It started soft, offering a quick apology.

But the fire built fast, and soon they were locked in a passionate kiss. Griffin backed Violet against the edge of the pool, his hands sliding under the water. One of his hands gripped her thigh, while the other cupped her ass, pulling her in tighter.

A splash of water hit their faces.

"Get a room, you two horny rabbits! There are minors here!" Vivian booed, while Blaire shielded Callen's eyes.

Kaia, who had pretended not to be paying attention all this while, sighed and returned to scrolling through her phone.

Griffin retaliated first, splashing Vivain in the face.

"Ow! That's unfair, you big bully!" she shouted.

"You didn't think it was unfair when you smeared fake cow dung on my face," Violet said, splashing her right back.

"Oh, it's on now!" Blaire declared, gathering water in her palms.

And just like that, the water fight began.

Water flew everywhere as Griffin and Violet teamed up against the twins while Callen was caught in the crossfire, squealing with delight.

There was nothing but laughter, shrieks, and splashes as they had fun. It was a rare

chaotic, beautiful kind of joy that Violet wished she would have one day when she starts her family.

And that was exactly the scene Irene walked into when she arrived at the pool.

Violet knew instinctively that the woman was here for her.

Griffin grabbed her waist and lifted her effortlessly onto the pool deck. Damn, that was hot. She was so lucky to have a mate like him.

Griffin followed after her, and they walked over to his mother.

"What's up?" he asked.

"The Cnáimhseáil Anama won't be happening. Your mother threatened to kill me if I don't send you back," Irene said flatly.

At once, Violet and Griffin exchanged a look, but said nothing.

Irene sighed. "Yes, I know, Violet. You set me up for failure."

Violet shrugged. "If she said yes, I would've done it. Mama knows best, doesn't she?" her smile was wicked.

"Anyway," Irene continued, "while we won't perform the Cnáimhseáil Anama, there's another part of our custom we can't ignore. It has to be done before you leave."

"What is it?"

"You have to cut Griffin's hair."

"What? No!" Violet rejected it immediately, but the look from Irene and Griffin told her that was final.

"Nooooooooo!"

Chapter 409: Hair murder

The East men kept their hair long because it was considered a sign of virtue.

From the moment a male child was born, his mother tended to his hair until he was old enough to care for it himself. It was considered offensive for anyone else to handle it, unless you were someone special to him, precisely, a chosen mate, or a Fated one.

Hence, the moment both are paired and recognized by the pack, the female is expected to cut the male's hair. It marks a transition as the male goes from the care of his mother to his mate.

He belongs to her now. Everything from his treasured hair to the sole of his feet. So, his hair has to be cut to the root to symbolize the end of an old life, and the blossoming of a new one.

Although Violet had known about it, the reality hasn't dawned on her until now.

Right now, she was being escorted by a herd of girls she hadn't seen in her entire life. They were young maidens of the East pack, and apparently, it was tradition for them to lead the mate of the heir to the hair-cutting ceremony.

Although it wasn't the Cnáimhseáil Anama, Violet sure felt like a bride being led to her groom. Except this bride wasn't happy at all.

For over an hour, she had argued with Irene and Griffin over the cutting of his hair. Did she really have to cut the whole thing? Couldn't they just trim it? Maybe spare a few inches?

Not that she minded seeing Griffin with barely any hair, he'd still look dangerously good. But she loved his locks. No, she envied them. She liked touching them, tugging and twirling the hair around her finger. She couldn't just let them go like that. She had to fight for them!

But Griffin had promised they'd grow back before she knew it, and that this had to be done.

So here she was, heading off to commit hair murder. The gods help her. Her heart was already breaking.

Violet could hear traditional drums and the melodic echo of voices raised in a chant as they approached the courtyard. The place was already full with members of the pack gathered in neat rows, some seated, and the others standing, all of them waiting to witness the symbolic ritual.

Violet was dressed in a flowing red gown, her hair cascading freely over her shoulders and decorated with tiny golden ornaments that clinked gently with her movement.

Kaia and the twins were part of her entourage. As she walked, she felt a small hand slide into hers and looked down to see Blaire peering up at her, offering her silent support. Violet smiled softly, heart warming just a little. Not to be outdone, Vivain quickly took her other hand.

And just like that, Violet found herself being led to her fate by the mischievous twin duo.

As she approached, Violet could make out the elders of the pack. They were the older-looking ones, clad in ceremonial robes, and seated in an exclusive spot at the front under a stone arch. They were still, their expressions grave as they watched her with eyes that had seen a lot.

The same arrangement was mirrored to the left, where the alphas of the other sub-packs under the East were gathered. She could feel their curious gazes too assessing her. They had all come on such short notice to witness their future leader's Fated Mate, and Violet wasn't sure if that was comforting or terrifying.

At least she'd called Nancy earlier and explained things. Since it was late already, she and Griffin would return to Lunaris tomorrow so she wouldn't need to come down here and murder Irene in cold blood.

But all those thoughts quickly evaporated from Violet's mind the moment her eyes fell on Griffin. He was standing on an elevated stone platform beside Irene and a woman she presumed to be the priestess. He exuded effortless regality despite the vulnerability of the moment.

Griffin wore only loose crimson pants, the fabric hanging low on his hips. His chest was bare, his muscles taut with every inch of him painted with the ceremonial oils. His glorious red mane of hair was left to spill over his shoulders in waves, gleaming beneath the light like blood and fire.

Violet's throat tightened, her heart aching. She felt tears prickle her eyes, yet forced herself to breathe. She had to do this.

The girls helped her up the steps of the platform and then stepped back. Griffin turned to her, his eyes full of love and encouragement as he reached for her hand and tugged her gently to his side. She moved with him with her heart hammering against her chest, as they turned to face the crowd together.

And then the priestess stepped forward, her own the deepest red Violet had ever seen. She lifted her arms gracefully, and spoke with a rich and sonorous voice over the entire courtyard.

"The goddess be blessed, for she, in all her wisdom, has once again smiled upon our people."

At once, the members of the pack bowed their heads in reverence.

"It is not every day that the heavens open and bestow a bond as sacred as the one formed by fate itself."

Her eyes was on Griffin and Violet.

"And tonight, we stand here to witness the passing of tradition."

The crowd erupted into cheers, howling, clapping, with some thumping their chests in celebration. The sound rolled like thunder across the courtyard.

A young servant ascended the platform quietly, carrying a tray. On it sat an ornate pair of scissors, a gleaming clipper, a fine-toothed comb, and other small instruments, all neatly arranged atop a white silk cloth.

The priestess turned and took the tray, then stepped toward Violet. Her expression was solemn as she held out the tray to her.

"It is time," she said.

Violet gulped. "Wait, can I have a minute —"

But she didn't get the chance to finish because Griffin had already gone down on his knees before her, and bowed his head.

The sight knocked the air from Violet's lungs. The moment was here and there was no turning back.

Chapter 410: East pack's Newest Member

The cheers from the crowd had grown deafening, almost wild with anticipation, as if the very act of Violet cutting Griffin's hair would summon down the heavens itself.

But Violet didn't move. For over a full minute, she just stood there motionless, and made no attempt to reach for any of the tools laid carefully on the tray before her.

The pause was long enough that people began to notice and their excitement started to wane. Their roaring cheers suddenly became confused murmurs.

The elders exchanged pointed glances, their once warm expressions replaced with tight-lipped disapproval. The Alphas from the sub-packs shifted in their seats, some leaning to whisper, with the others shaking their heads.

One of them said to his Luna with a low chuckle, "Seems like the great Irene ended up with a whim of a daughter-in-law after all. This is going to be fun."

The murmuring grew louder now, spreading like a slow-building storm. The air turned tense as the people became impatient and discontent with what was going on. They had come for a ceremony, not whatever was going on right now.

"What are you waiting for, child? Do it already! Don't keep your elders waiting!" the priestess urged her sharply.

Violet's eyes flicked to hers, then turned to Griffin who said to her. "Don't worry, Violet, it will grow back soon enough and you'll have it all to yourself."

A single tear slipped from Violet's eye, trailing down her cheek. His beautiful reassurance had torn straight through her chest, yet, the same words also gave her strength.

With a deep, shaky breath, Violet reached forward and picked up the scissors.

She stepped closer while the crowd held their breath in anticipation. Her fingers trembled as she ran them through Griffin's hair one last time. Then she took a fistful of those brilliant red strands and cut.

The instant the first lock fell to the ground, the crowd lost it. There was an uproar of wild celebration, howls of joy, hands clapping, and drums beating loudly. You would think Violet had just struck gold when all she had done was cut a piece of hair.

The tears she had been trying to hold back came harder now. This was stupid. Why were they celebrating this? Couldn't they see how beautiful his hair was? That they shouldn't have lost it.

Still, Violet couldn't stop. She had started this and had to finish it.

With every cut, Violet was saying goodbye. The memories came in waves now and she recalled the way her fingers would run through his hair. The way Griffin leaned into her touch. The times she shampooed and braided it. The way she tugged on it when they kissed like they had all the time in the world.

Now she wouldn't be doing that for a long, long time.

Violet gave up the scissors for the clipper now, having cut it down. But the tears came harder to the point her vision blurred completely and she knew, without a doubt, she was going to ruin Griffin's haircut. She was going to make him look ugly and it was all because she just couldn't get anything right.

"Here, let me help you." It was Irene.

Violet didn't argue.

She nodded without a word and let the woman guide her from behind. Irene's arms came around her, firm yet gentle, steadyng her hands as she held the clipper with her. The celebration around them had dulled now, the sound of joy softening into a hush as the pack members watched with surprised expressions.

This had never been done before. The cutting of the hair was always left to the mate alone. It was a sacred rite, a symbol of possession and bond. For the Alpha's mother to step in was unprecedented.

Yet, the vulnerability of the moment was warm and so heartbreakingly human that it tugged at something in them. Violet was human and was still learning. She didn't know their ways and Irene, their leader was right there with her.

But not everyone was charmed by the moment.

"This has to be the first I've seen a mate disgruntled over such a ceremony," Elder Regina said with visible distaste, stomping her staff.

"Well, there's always a first time for everything in one's lifetime, don't you think?" Elder Nulia replied, a knowing smile on her lips.

Regina scowled and moved on, biting her tongue. She couldn't speak against Irene's grandmother, not here. And definitely, not now.

Irene remained by Violet's side the whole time, adjusting the clipper's length when needed, and directing her. Together, slowly, gently, they worked until Griffin's hair was cut down into a perfect buzz.

Then Irene stepped back.

Violet leaned forward and kissed Griffin on the top of his head, her eyes closed. A single tear slipped from her cheek, landing softly on his scalp. Then she stepped back and Griffin rose to his feet with a boyish grin.

"How do I look? More handsome?" He flexed his arms. "Rugged?"

Violet smiled, though her heart was still sore. "You look more manly."

But then Griffin's expression shifted, his grin faltering. He looked uncertain. "Please don't tell me you no longer like me now that I've lost my seductive feature?" He sounded serious. Almost scared.

Violet laughed, and it was real this time. She said to him. "I loved your beast, Griffin, what makes you think I wouldn't like you in bald hair? Come here, silly."

Griffin pulled her into a hug, and then they were kissing passionately, like the world didn't matter and this was their ceremony.

Then Irene's voice rose, clear and commanding.

"East pack," she called out, turning to face the crowd. "Here is your cardinal alpha and his Fated mate, Violet Purple."

At once, the celebration returned with thunderous force. The pack roared their approval to the sky.

There would be lots of eating and drinking tonight as they celebrated not just Griffin's mate, but the newest addition to their pack : Violet Purple.