

Defy 411

Chapter 411: Use The Bond

While the East pack were celebrating, their Alpha King was in a hot mess.

Elijah was not alone in the meeting room. Alongside him were his wife, Beatrice, and the respective Alphas of the Four Majors: Henry, Leon and Alexa, Zara and Caspian, while Aeron and Arion came in Irene's place.

The large monitor embedded in the wall guttered for a moment, then steadied. Right now, the screen brightened with the connection to President Roy, a great tension saturating the air.

President Roy's face appeared—the stern look and the eyes burning behind the wire rims of his glasses were evidence enough that he wasn't calling for diplomacy. He was furious, and it was the kind that came not just from betrayal, but from knowing he now had to answer to a global cabinet that smelled blood in the water.

Behind him were the muted shadows of his advisors, but Roy didn't need backup because his presence alone was deadly.

"Do you have any idea what you've done, Elijah?" Roy asked in a tight voice.

Elijah, seated at the head of the council table, leaned forward. "I'm well aware of the situation, President Roy," he answered with a voice that was calm, yet lined with irritation.

President Roy threw his head back and laughed like he had lost his damn mind.

"No, you're not," he said. "Because if you were, you wouldn't still be sitting down right now!" His voice rose in pitch as he banged his hand on the table. "You handpicked a madman and gave him access to both werewolf and human DNA. Patrick Vale—or should I use his real name, Elias Turner—wasn't making any compatibility program. He built a goddamn drug lab and cooked up Ignis, a serum that turns civilians into monsters!"

Beatrice sat beside her mate, unmoving, but her nails tapped slowly against the polished wood of the table.

"Patrick is after my people," Elijah countered. "The destruction he's wrought has been mostly on werewolves. The testing, deaths, and the loss? It's our packs that bled, not your humans."

Roy laughed without humor. "Oh, you want sympathy now? After you gave that lunatic the keys to both our kingdoms? Let me spell it out for you: it won't just be your people who pay the price. It never is. If the 'Ignis' drug leaks into human hands, do you think humans won't weaponize that? You think desperate people won't buy it to level the playing field?"

"If it gets down to that, we will manage containment until all threats are neutralized," Elijah said tightly.

"Containment? You really think you can contain a goddamn chemical revolution? Ignis gives strength and speed, nearly all the features your kind possesses. And you think fear, desperation, and greed won't drive humans to swallow that poison the first chance they get? He's about to start a global addiction, Elijah. You think I'm worried about what Patrick did to you? I'm terrified about what your screw-up will do to me."

Caspian, Zara, Leon, Henry, and Aeron, who were in the room with him, shifted uncomfortably. But no one dared speak.

Roy drew closer to the camera.

"The upper echelons already know, Elijah. We've kept this from the public for now. But how long do you think that lasts? One overdose on camera. One black-market batch turning a civilian into a berserker in broad daylight, and it's over. The peace we built will be reduced to ash."

Elijah stood slowly, pushing his chair back. "You came here to scream, Roy. Are you done?"

Roy blinked. "Am I done? No. You haven't even begun to hear me."

"I admit I made a mistake. I should have vetted Patrick. I should have checked his operations more thoroughly. But the mating compatibility project wasn't some villainous plot to conquer humans. You knew that as well. It was about survival. Our pure-blooded female population is nothing to write home about. This was supposed to stabilize our peace treaty, and Patrick offered answers."

"And instead he built a goddamn firestarter. A synthetic miracle that'll burn down both our houses."

"Then let me clean it up."

"You better. Or there won't be a second chance. Because I swear to every god you wolves bow to, if Ignis becomes the spark that leads to war, the next time our species clash, it won't just be female werewolves going extinct. It'll be everyone."

Beatrice finally spoke. "It won't come to that."

Roy's eyes snapped to hers. "It better not." He looked back to Elijah. "Fix this mess quietly. I want Patrick found and every formula burned. Including that wretched hospital in Lunaris, I want you to shut it down. If you find any of his experiments or accomplices, I want them detained. Also, I want oversight, Elijah, from my people."

Elijah bristled. "You don't get to audit my territory."

"Then watch it fall from the outside, because if your mess spills over into my cities, I will respond. And it won't be with diplomacy."

The screen went black.

Silence stretched across the room for a moment.

Leon exhaled. "That could have gone worse."

Zara cut him a look. "Only if he'd declared war."

Beatrice turned to Elijah. "We need to find Patrick immediately."

Aeron said, "Wasn't there one of the rescued werewolves who said he had escaped from the hideout? He could tell us the location."

Elijah lifted his head and looked at Aeron as if noticing something for the first time. He asked, "Where is Irene at this critical moment?"

"She's busy with the pack."

"Busy with what? What could be more important than this meeting, or is she testing me right now?" Elijah grunted.

Aeron said to him through gritted teeth, "Our son, Griffin Hale, has been fate mated."

"What?!" Everyone shouted in shock.

"How did that happen? Why wasn't I informed until now?" Elijah asked, irritated.

"Because the bond hit them during the kidnapping incident and you were busy dealing with other important issues. It didn't seem like a big deal—"

"If my heirs are getting fate mated, it is a big deal to me. And who is he mated to? Don't tell me it's..."

"Violet Purple. Yes, sir."

Henry's head jerked up so fast, it nearly cracked. Impossible! Not that girl!

"No way," Leon said, eyes wide.

"Great," Zara said. "Another human to dilute the bloodlines. On the bright side, now she's mated, our son Alaric will come back to his senses." She said to her husband. "We better find him a match before he falls for another schemer."

Caspian said nothing, just offered her a supportive smile.

"This is a good thing. A human mated to a cardinal alpha?!" Beatrice exclaimed. "The announcement would make good publicity and a distraction from the scandals at Lunaris."

Elijah said thoughtfully, "And it seems my meeting with this Violet Purple is inevitable."

Chapter 412: They'd Pay

Elias Turner, no, Patrick Vale, sat motionless on the edge of the bed, his fingers gripping a photograph. It was the only thing he seemed able to hold onto anymore.

The girl in the picture was none other than his girlfriend, Cynthia. Well, now, his late girlfriend.

If he had known that night just a few days ago would be the last time he would see her, he would have never let her go. There were far more skilled men that would have led the operation, but he let her take charge because he trusted her. And now, his mistake has cost him forever.

A guttural roar was ripped from his throat as he hurled the picture frame across the room. It struck the wall with a violent crack, the glass shattering into pieces. But then, the same sound seemed to break something open in him.

"No, no, no..."

Patrick dropped to his knees, crawling over to the mess, not even flinching as shards bit into his palms and knees. Blood slicked the floor as he pulled the photo from the broken frame, hugging it to his chest like it could somehow bring her back.

"I'm so sorry..." he sobbed with a cracked voice. "I'm so, so sorry..."

Saying those words knowing she'd never hear them made the cries come harder, and his shoulders to shake with the weight of grief.

There was not even a body to bury. Cynthia was simply gone while he sat here, still breathing. She must be cold wherever she is and disappointed in him.

Suddenly the door was kicked open, and

Patrick jolted, turning with wide, bloodshot eyes as two figures stepped into the room.

"Aww," Vera drawled with mock sweetness, her smile curving with venom. "There he is."

She glanced over her shoulder. "Told you he'd be cooped up somewhere crying like some baby."

Behind her, their brother Joseph followed in with easy steps, a matte black Kel-Tec KSG shotgun casually slung over one shoulder. He gave Patrick a lopsided grin. "Hello, brother."

Patrick wiped at his face, trying to gather whatever dignity he had left. "What are you both doing here?"

Vera tossed a glance around the wrecked room and sighed. "Came to bust your sorry ass before they get to you. You're not exactly hard to find."

She stepped forward. "Now come on. Let's go."

But Patrick stayed rooted, his hands balling into a fist. "No. I'm not going anywhere."

Vera raised both hands in mock surrender. "Alright."

Then without warning at what was coming, her hand cracked across his face. The slap was deafening and Patrick stumbled from the force of it.

He barely had time to process it before the second hit came, harder, across the opposite cheek. Then the third one arrived, and this time it was with a closed fist, sending him falling to the floor.

Joseph didn't even flinch. He just whistled as if he was relishing the show. "Damn."

Vera reached down and grabbed Patrick by the collar, hauling him up. She then yanked him close until their faces were inches apart, her voice cutting and icy.

"Usually, I wouldn't care about your pathetic ass," she said. "But you're currently useful to us brother. So no, you don't get to waste away, Elias. Not when we have a war to prepare for."

Patrick couldn't speak. His eyes were dazed, his lip bleeding, and he still held the photo like it was his lifeline.

Vera's gaze landed on the picture, and for a moment, her hardened expression eased.

"I get it," she said, her voice surprisingly gentle. "You just lost the love of your life, and your heart must be breaking right now. But tell me, do you think this is what Cynthia would want if she could see you like this?"

Then, in a move that contradicted the violence from just moments before, Vera suddenly cupped his face. Her touch was tender, even doting, as if she hadn't just slapped the soul out of him. His face was flushed red, and she massaged the skin with surprising care.

"Are you going to stay here and grieve like a pathetic fool, or are you going to give Cynthia the revenge she deserves? They took her away from you, Elias. They have to pay. Or would you rather her death be in vain?"

It wasn't a rhetorical question, Vera expected an answer. But Patrick said nothing, the only sound escaping him a thick, snot-filled sniff.

"SPEAK UP, ELIAS!" she roared into his face.

"N-no..." he stammered, his heart pounding.

"Say it again!"

"NO!" Patrick shouted louder this time.

"Good," Vera said with a satisfied smirk. "Because your position has been compromised, and we have to get you out of here before they find you. So move your ass."

She shoved him back with a forceful push and turned to walk out of the room.

Patrick stood there for a second, breathing hard. Then he looked down at the picture in his hand. They did this to her. He squeezed it.

They were going to pay. Every single one of the wolves.

"Yes," he muttered, the fire in his chest reigniting. "They'll all pay."

"That's more like it," Joseph chuckled, clearly impressed. He patted Patrick on the shoulder as he passed by. "That's how we Turners do it."

Together, they exited the room. But Patrick didn't make it far before he froze in his tracks. There was blood smeared on the hallway floor with bodies of his people laying crumpled in death. Some bore gunshot wounds while the others had been taken out with blades.

Vera caught his stare and sighed as if it was a chore to explain what happened.

"Since we're moving, we had to do a little clean-up," she said coolly, brushing past another corpse without blinking.

Patrick spun toward her, furious. "These were the people I worked with! How the hell do you expect me to continue my work alone if you get rid of them all?"

Vera arched her brow. "Who said anything about killing them all? We split them into two groups, kept the important ones, your doctors, the core brains, and dropped the dead weights."

She gave a pointed shrug. "Labor isn't hard to find. And while I'm not a nerd like you, brother, I'm not stupid either."

Without waiting for his reply, she walked off.

Just like that, Patrick followed his family, who had already secured a new location and the essential resources to continue his work. As for the old hideout, they burned it to the ground, ensuring nothing remained for their enemies to find when they eventually arrived.

Chapter 413: Betrayed By Her Own

"What are you doing?" Daisy asked in confusion, standing at Lila's doorstep. The girl was hurriedly stuffing her things into a small backpack.

Daisy wasn't alone. Ivy stood beside her, brows furrowed as she asked cautiously, "What's going on, Lila? Where are you going?"

Lila finally looked up, registering their presence.

"Good, both of you are here," she said, turning to her desk and picking up a folded letter.

"I was going to come find you two, but things worked out anyway." She walked over and placed the letter in Daisy's hand. "Give this to Violet when she returns."

Daisy frowned, trying to return the letter to her, but she wouldn't take it.

"I don't understand. What is going on, Lila? Where are you going? Why can't you wait for Violet yourself? She and Griffin already called to inform us they'll be back tomorrow. So whatever you have to say, you can tell her directly."

But Lila remained said. "You don't understand, Violet will never forgive me for the things I hid from her. If she's truly mated to Griffin, then everything changes. I have to return to the Fae realm. The Queen must unlock her powers—trust me, Violet needs it now more than ever."

"Do you have to go?" Ivy asked, her tone exasperated. "Can't you, I don't know, give the Queen a call or however you people notify each other in the Fae realm?" She sighed. "I don't like this, Lila. Everything's happening so fast and our group is falling apart. I don't even understand what the heck is going on anymore."

Lila turned to her. "It's more complicated than you think. I've been operating under the radar, that's why Baron and his lackeys haven't found me. Or Violet. But I've been called back home, and I need to know what's going on."

She reached into the pocket of her pants and pulled out a strange medallion, pressing it into Ivy's hand. "When Violet returns tomorrow, give this to her. Make sure she wears it. You know how stubborn she can be."

"What's it for?" Ivy asked, lifting the medallion and examining the Fae engravings etched into its surface.

"It's to mask her from any of my kind who might try to snitch her out in my absence. I've placed a masking spell on her already, but I don't know how effective it will be once I cross realms. So think of it as backup."

"And the letter?" Daisy asked, eyeing it again. "What's in it?"

"Enough clues to answer the questions she's been asking herself all this while. It's spelled so no one else can read it except Violet. Whatever knowledge she decides to share with you afterward is her choice."

She paused, then added with sincerity, "But I truly hope both of you stick by her side until the end. I can feel it inside me dark times are coming."

Daisy and Ivy exchanged an uneasy glance, visibly unsettled by her ominous words.

Lila turned back to her bed and slung the backpack over her shoulder, tightening the straps.

"When are you going to be back?" Daisy wanted to be sure.

"Time works differently in the Fae realm, but let's say in two weeks. If I don't return by then, you should be worried. However, be rest assured once I'm back, things would be different. I'll make it up to Violet for real. No more secrets and if it works out well, she might meet her mother for real this time."

Daisy and Ivy looked at each other and shrugged. That sounds nice?

"So," Ivy said, "How does this work exactly? Do we escort you to the bustop or something? Is there a route that takes you exactly to the Fae realm?" She was curious.

"You both don't need to see me out, I'm good." Lila said to them.

Ivy then stepped forward and pulled her into a hug, saying, "Come back soon, else I'll find another person to fill your void."

"Yeah, you can try." Lila was not threatened.

Daisy said to her coolly. "Be careful out there."

"You too. Take care of each other."

"We would."

"I still think this is uncomfortable leaving without seeing Violet." Ivy said.

"It's now or never. Violet will understand." She said and took her leave.

Lila did not leave through the school gate, instead, she slipped away under the cover of the night, heading deep into the Silver Glade and reached the stream.

Looking around to ensure she was alone, she reached into her pocket and brought out a coin etched with Fae sigils.

She tossed it into the water and whispered. "Aeslién."

The lake rippled almost immediately.

Then Lila took one last glance over her shoulder and without hesitation, she jumped in. Just like that, she vanished beneath the surface.

Moments later, Lila emerged, gasping softly, into the familiar chill of the Fae realm. She was home.

Earlier that day, she had planned to send a message to Queen Seraphira, updating her on Violet. But instead, a message from Zyrella had found her first.

Zyrella was her second-in-command, the one tasked with protecting the Queen in her absence. If anything had gone wrong, Zyrella would have been the first to send word. And she had.

Lila now stepped cautiously through the elusive moss-covered spot where they had agreed to meet.

Zyrella was there already, standing at the center of the clearing, in her silver armor. Her dark braid hung down her back, and her sharp eyes softened slightly when they landed on Lila.

"Sister," she said.

"Sister," Lila replied, walking over.

They embraced tightly, foreheads pressed together in recognition. They have been apart for a while now.

But there was no time for pleasantries.

Lila pulled back. "Tell me. What's happened with the Queen? Is the palace secure? What has Baron done to her?"

"The Queen is safe. Nothing happened," Zyrella said.

Lila froze, confused. "What?"

And then it hit her.

Her eyes widened as the truth clicked into place.

Zyrella smirked cruelly. "We only needed to draw you back to the Fae realm."

"You betrayal! How could you do this to Queen Seraphira?" Lila hissed, her hands already glowing with raw magic.

Energy surged through her fingers, and she hurled a bolt of light at Zyrella, but the woman was fast. She dodged it, retreating as the woods came alive with movement.

Fae soldiers poured in from the trees, armored and armed, surrounding Lila. They were Baron's loyalists.

Lila fought hard, taking down every soldier who got too close. But they were endless and it was not long before she was overwhelmed.

She screamed as iron chains suddenly lashed around her throat, sizzling against her skin. Lila collapsed, writhing in pain as the chain burned into her collarbones.

Zyrella stepped forward, crouching beside her with an almost amused expression. "The great Lila, finally on her knees. This is going to be so much fun."

The Fae then punched her across the face, knocking Lila unconscious.

Chapter 414: What About The Others?

Whew. Just when you think Lunaris Academy has reached its drama peak, another scandal waltzes in wearing stilettos and a guilty conscience.

So remember the scandalous bedroom tape that had the whole school in a chokehold? The one that dragged Elsie to social purgatory and had students howling at the moon with popcorn in hand?

Well, guess who just admitted to leaking it?

Grace.

Yes, the sweet, forgettable, hide-in-the-background and Elsie's partner-in-crime, Grace.

Here's what she wrote in her Moonfeed confession, and you better believe I screenshot every syllable:

> "I was jealous, okay?! She used me! Elsie acted like we were a thing, but everyone knew she was engaged to be married to one of the Cardinal Alphas. Still, she kept sneaking around, and using me for her satisfaction. And what did I get in return? Nothing. I just wanted people to see who she really was. I didn't mean for it to blow up like this. I thought I could blame it on the Violet and her friends, but it got too far. I'm so sorry. I never meant for it to go this way."

Ah, the sweet scent of guilt and backstabbing besties. You can almost taste the desperation.

Naturally, Principal Jameson, in her usual dramatic flair, addressed the school assembly and declared Grace would be expelled immediately as punishment for "breaching Academy trust."

Harsh? Maybe. Deserved? Hmm. But here's the thing, kittens, let's not ignore the scent of something rotten beneath this oh-so-convenient closure.

I mean, Grace is a scholarship student. That means she's here on brains, not bribes. You think she'd risk everything for a petty revenge tape? Please. The girl doesn't even own a proper hover-tab, much less high-grade surveillance gear. And let's be honest, Grace never hit me as the mastermind type.

So, who does this really benefit?

> Principal Jameson? She wraps up the scandal neatly, no further questions.

> Elsie? She's now wrapped in the public's pity and still somehow not suspended?

I don't want to say conspiracy but babes, it's practically spelled out clear.

But hey, what do I know? I'm just a humble gossipmonger with impeccable instincts.

ROGUE PROBLEM = SOLVED

In other news, the Rogue menace plaguing the outskirts of United Dorminia has been neutralized. Dealt with. Donezo.

Thanks to a top-secret operation (and a lot of bloodshed I'm still piecing together), the captured she-wolves have been freed, and Violet Purple and Griffin Hale have been rescued!

But WAIT. That's not the real shocker.

FATED MATES?! OH, SWEET MOON!

Are you sitting down? Are you clutching your pearls? Because I repeat — Griffin Hale and Violet Purple are FATED MATES!

I'll give you a moment to scream.

Yep. You heard it right. The goddess clearly thought it'd be cute to lock our Purple Queen and the East Pack beast together through an unbreakable bond of cosmic snu-snu. I wouldn't be surprised if they burned down an entire forest by accident

(And don't lie, you know snusnu happened. I bet Griffin growled, and Violet... ahem, moving on.)

HAIR TODAY, GONE TOMORROW

Below this post are the actual photos (yes, I have sources in the East Pack. Don't @ me) from the East Pack haircutting ceremony.

Because as we all know, once a male wolf from the East pack accepts their mate, the mane must go. RIP Griffin's glorious locks.

Let us observe a moment of silence.

...

...

Okay, moving on. He's still hot.

WHAT ABOUT THE OTHERS?

Before you pop champagne, let's not forget: Violet was in a relationship with ALL FOUR Cardinal Alphas.

Yes, we all know this isn't just romance, but political warfare wrapped in pheromones.

So, what now?

Did she get a chance to say goodbye?

Did the others even know?

Because let me tell you what I've seen:

> Roman Draven has been seen scowling around campus, looking like someone took off with his baby maker — alright, that sounds crazy even for me.

> Alaric Storm has vanished. Probably summoning thunder —thankfully far away from Lunar Academy. Praise the lord.

> Asher Nightshade remains unconscious. And that, my dear readers, is the one that terrifies me most.

Because when Asher wakes up and realizes his "Purple Queen" has been fated to someone else — and he wasn't even awake to fight it?

Boom. Emotional massacre.

Let's not pretend we don't remember who's been the most obsessed with her since day one. If anyone's going to implode in dramatic, fire-and-brimstone fashion, it's him.

And even I don't want to witness that.

MATE BOND OR CURSE

In most stories, the mate bond is a blessing. But in this one? Dear goddess, It's starting to feel like a curse.

But if there's one thing we know about Violet Purple, it's that she survives the storm. Whether it's Elsie's schemes, rogue attacks, or emotional fallout from three broken hearts... (Ouch) Our girl always finds a way.

GENTLE REMINDER

Oh, and while we're all swooning over the surprise mate bond reveal, let's not allow the fever to drown out the real drama still unresolved at Lunaris. Because I can't be the only one still waiting to see Elsie Lancaster finally held accountable. Goddess bless the mate bond, but some of us are still keeping score, and babes, I haven't closed my book yet.

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

The Oracle

P.S. Griffin still looks like a snack with his new buzz cut. A bald, fate-mated, six-pack-having danger snack.

Chapter 415: The Prophecy About Her

"Griffin. Up! Up!"

Violet Purple clapped her hands near his ears, but she might as well have been trying to wake a tree. The man didn't so much as twitch.

Not that she could blame him.

Last night had been all shades of lawless fun. They'd drunk enough to kill a small horse, and honestly, it was a miracle Violet was even standing. Then again, desperation did wonders. When your goal was to fix a broken relationship and return to your other boyfriends, you learned miracles are possible.

Griffin, however, hadn't fared so gracefully. His pack brothers had poured drink after drink down his throat in celebration because apparently getting off the "unmated" market meant immediate alcohol poisoning. And this was the glorious aftermath.

"Griffin, please," Violet groaned, dragging her hand down her face. There was no moving him, he was heavy, and dead to the world.

Left with no other choice, Violet went for the nuclear option. She climbed over him and kissed him firmly on the lips. She felt the jolt through the bond before he stirred, though it was something below that moved first.

The next second, Griffin flipped her beneath him like a switch, pressing his body into hers as he kissed her senseless. Violet gasped, her fingers instinctively reaching for his hair, only to remember there was none. She sighed against his lips.

Griffin finally pulled back, grinning. "I wouldn't mind waking up like this every day..." He was already leaning in for another kiss when Violet pressed a finger to his lips.

"Alright, my hot lord, time to get your ass moving. We've got a long day ahead, remember?"

"Oh, right," Griffin groaned, rolling off her. "I feel like crap."

"That's what you get for trying to outdrink an entire pack."

"Noted."

He swung his legs off the bed and without warning dropped his shorts, revealing that unfairly perfect ass. Violet got an eyeful of it.

Griffin glanced over his shoulder with a lazy, knowing smirk. "Care to join me? Might need a hand or two."

Violet raised a brow, her lips twitching. "Tempting, but I'm already dressed," she gestured to her outfit which he clearly hadn't noticed until now. "So yeah, five minutes, Hale. Chop-chop."

Griffin mock-saluted. "Anything the boss says." And with that, he sauntered into the bathroom.

Violet collapsed back onto the bed, the smile she'd worn for Griffin slipping away like mist.

While on the surface, she looked eager to return, but deep down, she was dreading it. The last confrontation with Roman hadn't exactly gone well and she had no idea how things stood with Alaric or Asher now. How was she supposed to fix this? Was it even fixable?

Her fingers drifted to the mating rune carved against her neck. If only it had appeared somewhere less blindingly obvious, maybe she could speak to the others without constantly reminding them that fate had chosen Griffin over them.

Not that Violet regretted being mated to Griffin. No, not one bit. The bond was beautiful, but the timing? Not so much.

Griffin got ready in no time, and soon, they were set to leave. However, Irene had insisted she needed a word with them, and that was how they found themselves seated in her office, awkwardly perched across from her desk like two teenagers about to be lectured.

She didn't waste time. "First of all, I would like to render an apology not just to you, but to your mother, for my earlier behavior. I know I shouldn't be saying this to you, but since Nancy's been ghosting my calls, here we are."

Violet wasn't even surprised. Her mom could hold onto a grudge like it paid her rent. If Irene thought a few missed calls was the worst of it, she clearly didn't know Nancy.

"It wasn't my place to organize a traditional wedding without her approval. And you too," Irene added, turning her gaze fully on Violet, "forgive me for trying to coerce you into it. I swear, my intentions were good. I only wanted what I thought was best for you and Griffin."

"I'm good, Irene. Honestly," Violet said with a wave, "No hard feelings."

"Thank you, Violet." Irene let out a breath, visibly relieved. Then her expression changed. "Although, there's something else. I've been wondering about the right time and place to bring it up, but I can't hold it in anymore."

She locked eyes with Violet and said carefully, "There's a prophecy about you, Violet."

"Excuse me?" Violet said in shock. That was not what she expected. She had thought this meeting would be about sex education. Definitely, not this.

"At first, I thought it was about Elsie," Irene admitted. "Why do you think I endured that girl for so long?"

"Whoa." Griffin cut in. "What are you talking about, Mom?"

"'The one chosen by the Alpha King would unite the four packs.' That's what Alice told Caroline, years ago, or so I believed." Irene's voice was charged with conviction. "When I first saw you with my boy, Griffin, I had my doubts. But during Parents Week, watching how the others were drawn to you, I knew at once the prophecy wasn't about Elsie. It's about you."

Violet's brows drew together as something clicked. "That's why you called me 'Destined One' that day. It felt so weird and confusing."

Irene nodded solemnly, confirming it.

"But that doesn't make sense," Violet said now, frowning. "I'm not chosen by the Alpha King, and I'm mated to Griffin..." Her voice trailed off, tangled in doubt.

"The thing about prophecies," Irene said calmly, "is that they're often misunderstood. They don't always play out the way we expect. Maybe there's a piece of the puzzle we haven't seen yet. Still, Alice is certain you're the one. And frankly, I see it too. Especially with what's been going on between you and the other Alphas..." Her gaze sharpened, lingering on Violet in a way that said she knew exactly what she was talking about.

Violet's breath caught in her throat. She began to fidget, avoiding the woman's gaze. "I—I can explain, Irene—"

"Child," Irene said with a maternal tone, "I've seen fated mates before. I've had them in my pack. That kiss with Roman? It should've been impossible. If the mate bond worked the way we've always believed, you wouldn't have looked at him twice. And my son—" she glanced at Griffin briefly "—he would've gone feral. Mates are territorial. Possessive. Griffin should've ripped Roman apart. But he didn't. So yes, I don't know what game the goddess is playing, but I do know this, trust your instincts, Violet."

She straightened up, her tone now resolute. "It won't be easy. This goes against our laws, against everything we thought we knew about the mate bond. But if the prophecy is true, then eventually, it'll all make sense."

Finally, Irene said. "And no matter how this unfolds, rest assured you have my support, Destined One."

Chapter 416: Griole

"Is something going on today?" Violet asked the moment their car rolled past the school gates and she caught sight of the suspiciously extravagant decorations hanging on them.

"I have no idea," Griffin replied, his brows drawing together as he looked around too, noting how the entire school grounds looked oddly cleaner, brighter, and fancier than usual.

"Maybe Lunaris Academy has finally learned its lesson and..." But Griffin's words trailed off abruptly. His mouth stayed open, but all that came out was, "Oh shit."

Violet pulse raced at his sudden reaction. She then turned in the direction of his stare, and the sight that met her eyes made her face fall.

"You have got to be kidding me," she muttered, her voice flat with disbelief.

Just past the fountain and sprawled in massive, sparkling letters across the school's entrance was a banner that read:

"Welcome back to Lunar Academy, our fated couple, Griffin Hale and Violet Purple."

And it got worse from there.

The walkways were lined with the students cheering like they'd just been told a royal wedding was taking place. Some of them waved tiny flags while the others held up signs with pictures of her and Griffin that Violet swore she'd never taken in her life.

Shirts, caps, and posters were all branded with "Griole" slogans in ridiculous fonts. A deafening wave of screams erupted as students swarmed the car, some even slapping the hood in excitement like it was a good luck charm.

Who the hell was responsible for this?

Violet didn't have to think too hard because standing smugly at the school's entrance was Principal Jameson, flanked on both sides by Daisy and Ivy.

For a fleeting second, rage, molten and unfiltered, coursed through Violet at the thought of her roommates putting her through this knowing how much she hated public spectacles like this.

But then the stiff smiles on their faces and the tension in their shoulders was enough evidence that the witch Jameson had orchestrated this whole PR circus and roped them in as props.

And as if that wasn't enough, reporters were at the scene with cameras. Lots of them. Flash after flash exploded against the car windows as the vehicle was forced to slow down to accommodate the media swarm.

Violet's left eye twitched. A vein popped on her forehead.

"Run them over," she told the driver.

"Wait, what?" Griffin choked, whirling to her in horror.

"Please don't do that," he told the driver, then turned back and cupped Violet's face between both hands. "Baby, what's going on with you? Talk to me."

"That witch!" Violet growled. "I'm going to kill her! She's using the mate bond for a media stunt! She had no right putting us in the spotlight like this, not without permission!" Her chest heaved, and her hands shook with fury.

Griffin's voice was gentle but firm. "I get it. I do. But no killing, babe, not today. There are reporters out there just dying to spin a story. They're looking for weakness, and we're not giving them anything, right?"

Violet inhaled deeply, grounding herself. "Right," she said with a shaky breath.

"Good," Griffin said, pressing kisses to both her cheeks. But Violet needed more so she grabbed him and kissed him full on the mouth. Griffin happily obliged.

Their lips met, hard and hungry, until the commotion outside their window felt distant. The anxiety melted away, hearts syncing to the rhythm between them. When they finally pulled apart, Griffin gently traced the mating rune on her neck with reverent fingers.

"My mate," he murmured with a touch of awe in his voice.

Violet, not missing a beat, traced his rune in return, her voice possessive. "All mine."

"All yours," Griffin echoed, leaning his forehead against hers.

Then Griffin exhaled. "It's time."

He pulled back and looked her in the eye. "But promise me if it gets to be too much,

I don't care who's in the way, I'll knock every single one of them down to get you out of here."

Violet grinned, amused despite herself. "That's so romantic. But as you said, the press is out there. We're not adding scandal to this madness. We're going to be on our best behavior." She kissed him again, short and sweet.

"Alright," Griffin said, shifting toward the door. "Ready?"

"As the day I was born. I mean, I didn't exactly have a choice being brought into this world, did I?" Violet shrugged, dryly.

Griffin laughed as he opened the car door. "You are so weird, and I love it."

Then, with grace, he stepped out first and extended his hand, helping Violet out like the queen.

The noise tripled immediately. The deafening wall of sound smacking them in the face as students lost their minds. Someone even threw confetti into the air like this was a royal coronation.

"VIOLET! GRIFFIN! VIOLET! GRIFFIN!"

The cameras went off nonstop while reporters aggressively shouted overlapping commands.

"Turn this way!"

"Can we get a kiss?!"

And then it got weirder.

The beat of a marching drum suddenly blasted through the air, and the crowd parted like the sea, making way for a very enthusiastic, cheerleading squad strutted out.

"Is this happening?" Violet deadpanned.

"Oh, it's happening," Griffin said grimly, watching as the cheer captain somersaulted to the front and struck a pose.

Then the music started.

"G! To the R! To the I-F-F-I-N!

V-I-O to the L-E-T! Again!

Griole! Griole!

Mate bond magic, too legit!

Alpha strength, purple storm,

They've got the love that breaks the norm!

Hey! Hey! Who's that pair?

Griole's bond is RARE-AIR!"

The squad kicked, flipped, and twirled like their lives depended on it. Midway through, one of them launched into the air, did a backflip, and landed in a dramatic split while two others held up glittery signs shaped like their mating runes.

It was... a lot.

By the time it ended with a pyramid pose and a chant of "GRIOLET RULES!" the entire courtyard had broke into thunderous applause.

Students were celebrating as if the Moon Goddess herself had descended to officiate their bond. Someone even threw a flower crown at Violet's head and it landed perfectly. While another shouted, "MAKE A BABY!" and they laughed at it.

All this for a mating bond? Violet was just left speechless.

Almost immediately, the long awaited Villainess, Principal Jameson stepped forward.

"Welcome back, Griffin Hale and Violet Purple, our newest fated mates!" she announced grandly.

A fresh wave of cheers came from the students.

Violet glared at the woman so hard that Griffin had to give her hand a squeeze. He whispered, "Smile and wave, baby. Smile and wave."

Violet did that.

She smiled only.

Not that it touched her eyes.

Chapter 417: New Quarters

Before Violet even knew it, Principal Jameson was already there, arms wrapped around her mate Griffin in a hug.

"Get off him!" A snarl left Violet's throat before she could stop it.

The words were sharp enough to startle the few students near the front, while Jameson in question flinched in surprise, quickly releasing Griffin as murmurs began to circle through the crowd.

Everyone stared to see what would happen, but then, Jameson turned to the press with a breezy laugh, her voice woven with charm. "Fated couples, so adorably possessive, aren't they?"

The students burst into laughter, and the press ate it up like starved piranhas. Their camera shutters clicked faster now, casting Violet Purple in the flawless role of a fierce, territorial mate.

Jameson, clearly milking the attention, added with a grin, "I'd hug you too, Violet, but I wouldn't want Griffin tearing off my head. Not that I'm any threat to your bond, of course. But I understand, I was quite the beauty in my day." She finished with a dramatic pose.

Was this woman seriously kidding her?

While everyone else found the scene hilarious, Violet didn't find the situation amusing one bit. Her expression was caught between a grimace as she fought the very real urge to reach out and deck the principal square in the jaw.

Sure, Jameson looked good, but it was only because she tried too hard. The woman wore heels high enough to make her look like a giraffe and probably slept in a vat of night cream.

But still, Violet had to give credit where it was due: at least she didn't touch her. That might've ended badly for both of them. Well, one of them. Lucky Jameson.

Thankfully, her roommates Daisy and Ivy took the opportunity to engulf her in a hug. A moment the media gleefully captured. Couldn't someone get some privacy around here?

"Thank God you're safe," Daisy said.

"You don't know how worried we were," Ivy added.

"I know. I'm so sorry," Violet murmured, hugging them tighter. She missed them terribly.

"Don't apologize. You didn't ask to be kidnapped," Ivy said gently.

Still, Violet couldn't help but notice someone was missing.

"Where's Lila?" she asked.

"Long story. But we can dive into that after we escape this circus," Daisy said, shooting a look at the crowd of gawking students.

"If we ever get out of it," Ivy muttered with a chortle that sent a chill through Violet. "You won't believe the changes Jameson's made."

"What changes?" Violet asked, dread already forming in her gut.

As if summoned by Violet's anxiety, Principal Jameson took the spotlight again. "Now, we wouldn't want to exhaust our fated mates too soon. It's time for Violet and Griffin to retreat to their quarters. All interviews will commence tomorrow."

"We didn't agree to any interview," Griffin said firmly.

"Oh, darling, you're fated mates. Interviews are just the beginning," Jameson replied sweetly.

"Great," Violet muttered, her hand instinctively touching the mate rune on her neck, a gesture instantly immortalized by flashing cameras. Goddess, this was a nightmare.

"The East House has been prepared for both of you. So chop chop, lovebirds. The media wants to capture the moment for posterity. This is history in the making." Jameson looked unreasonably proud of herself.

Violet's expression shifted instantly. Her eyes narrowed. "What do you mean the East House has been prepared for both of us? You mean Griffin, right?"

Jameson laughed it off. "You're fated mates, silly. According to Academy rules, bonded pairs stay together. Your belongings have been moved to Griffin's quarters. Your friends' things, too, to ease your transition."

That was it. Violet lunged at her. Daisy and Ivy, already anticipating it, grabbed her arms before she could commit any regrettable assault.

"We'll be leaving now," Ivy said quickly with a nervous laugh, dragging Violet away.

Griffin stepped close to Jameson, and leaned in. He whispered, "The next time you pull something like this without asking, I promise you won't like my response."

Despite the threat, Jameson kept her expression neutral, and her gaze professional to the end.

Griffin turned and waved at the crowd, blowing kisses as he followed after Violet.

Meanwhile, Daisy and Ivy didn't loosen their grip on Violet until they reached the East House.

"Welcome, Luna Violet," students from East House greeted her with giddy enthusiasm.

What fresh madness was this?

She was still Violet. Not Luna.

Finally, they reached Griffin's room. Immediately the girls released her, Violet let out a scream so loud the walls might have trembled.

Daisy and Ivy winced from the corner as she poured out her frustration.

When Violet was done, she was heaving, slowly calming down. That felt a little better.

She looked around and saw her things neatly stacked in a corner of Griffin's living room.

Daisy explained, "It felt wrong rummaging through your stuff. Oscar didn't let us touch Griffin's either. So we just stacked everything for you."

"I can't believe you two let Jameson do this," Violet said, exasperated.

"What exactly were we supposed to do against Jameson?" Daisy replied, hands raised.

"Besides," Ivy added, "you're mated to Griffin. Everyone knows mates move in together. Or were you expecting him to sneak into your shack every night and do the mating mambo on that torture slab of a bed you call furniture in our miserable shack?"

"God," Violet groaned, rubbing her forehead. Why did fated mate always translate to nonstop sex in everyone's head?

Well, kind of. Griffin was irresistible. Sometimes she did lose control. Whatever.

"Babe," Ivy continued, "I know you won't like it, but I'm saying it anyway. The new room they gave us is way better, and I'm not going back to that deathtrap. Not unless a fifth house opens."

Violet had no words. Not one.

Right then, the door opened and Griffin stepped in.

Daisy and Ivy exchanged a glance, taking his appearance as time to go.

"We'll let you settle in. But seriously, we have to talk. Soon," Daisy said with pointed emphasis.

"If you need us, we're downstairs," Ivy added. "Girls' wing of the dorm, of course."

The door closed behind them.

Violet exhaled. It was just her and Griffin now.

Chapter 418: First Couple Fight

Violet and Griffin didn't exactly have the time to talk. Not when Oscar, Griffin's Beta, made his appearance and handed her phone to her. Alaric was the one who found it at Asher's place and passed it to him to give to her.

"Where is Alaric now?" Violet asked after several failed attempts to reach her lightning prince. Each of her calls went straight to voicemail.

"The last time he was seen was at the hospital with Asher. No one's spotted him since," Oscar replied.

"My call's not going through either," Griffin said, lowering his phone with a frown.

Just like her, he'd only just gotten his phone back. Griffin had been using an alternative while they were at the East Pack, while Violet had been left with none. And though he had always let her use his whenever she needed it, having her own again felt relieving. As small as it seemed, it reminded her she was still her own person and not just someone's mate, tethered to their convenience.

Violet glanced at Griffin, her voice soft with worry. "Do you think he's safe, wherever he is?"

"If he's hiding intentionally," Griffin said, "then he's good."

Oscar cleared his throat. "The rest of the pack members here at school can't wait to be officially introduced to Luna Violet."

"I'm Violet. Not Luna," she corrected him with a flat tone .

"You already are. Sooner or later, you'll embrace the title, Luna."

Violet rolled her eyes while Griffin shot Oscar a look that clearly said drop it. His mate had been through enough. She didn't need more roles forced onto her especially ones she wasn't ready for.

"About Alaric," Oscar continued, "if he's really that important, I can try to track him. Discreetly." The way he said it hinted he knew more than he was letting on.

Violet and Griffin exchanged a look. She didn't have to speak, her eyes were already pleading.

"Sure. Go on," Griffin said with a nod.

"Alright, Alpha," Oscar replied, giving them one final look before heading out.

As soon as the door closed behind him, Violet turned to Griffin. "Thank you."

"You're welcome. Anything for you, mate," Griffin said, gently brushing her cheek with his knuckles.

But Violet pulled back, almost immediately. "Now I just need to find Roman and make him see things clearly."

"Whoah, slow down, Violet. You just got here. You haven't even rested or moved your things," Griffin said, stepping into her path.

But Violet countered immediately. "The mating fever already distracted me enough. I don't need more rest. My things can wait, I'll pack in later. Right now, I need to find Roman."

She moved to pass him, but Griffin caught her wrist gently, but firm. "You don't understand, do you? Everyone's watching you. Reporters are still on campus, and any one of them could twist something and make it worse."

He pulled her closer, his voice lower now. "Look, I get it. I understand how you feel. But those people out there? They don't. Not about you. Not about us. A mate is supposed to be satisfied with their mate. If they catch you in a compromising position with Roman, Violet, they're going to chew you up."

"So what do you want me to do?" Violet snapped, her voice rising. "Sit still and wait for their approval? Just stay here and do nothing?"

"I'm not saying do nothing," Griffin shot back. "I'm saying not right now. There are too many eyes on you—on us—right now."

"And what about Roman? He's probably out there, hurting, and you expect me to do what? Sit still?!"

"Well, that's what's supposed to happen!" Griffin's voice rose to meet hers now, anger flaring behind his words. "The goddess mated you to me! Me, Violet! Me only! What do you expect Roman to do? Walk up and congratulate us? Roman loved you. As much as I love you. If the situation were reversed, I'd be hurting just the same."

"Then if that's the case, you shouldn't be stopping me. Roman needs me. And I don't care what the media ends up painting me as." She yanked her arm from his grip, her glare blazing. "Apologies for dragging you into my mess by being your mate."

She stormed toward the door.

"Violet—" Griffin called after her, but she didn't stop or look back.

Violet opened the door, walked out, and shut it behind her.

She couldn't believe it. Just days of being mated and they had their first fight already.

And just like that, reality snapped into place.

The mate bond wasn't some magical fairytale promise of happily-ever-after. No, it was a soul-shattering connection. One that amplified every feeling they had for each other and bound their fates tighter than blood. But it didn't make the hard moments disappear. If anything, it made them harder to ignore.

As Violet stepped outside, it didn't take long for the members of the East Pack to spot her and greet her like she was royalty.

"Luna Violet!"

"Luna Violet! You're glowing!"

Their voices rang with excitement, and their faces were lit up with awe, admiration, and the kind of reverence that hadn't even existed just a week ago. But their smiles faltered quickly when they got a good look at the scowl on her face.

Violet's expression was tight, and she looked irritated.

The couple of students exchanged confused glances, whispering behind their hands. Was something wrong? Trouble in paradise already? They hadn't even finished airing the couple montage on Moonfeed and the goddess-blessed pair were already fighting?

Violet, of course, noticed the shift in the air but she didn't care and kept walking.

But as Violet reached outside, she realized Griffin's concern.

Not long ago, some students looked at her like she was an anomaly, a rebel who didn't know her place, but now, everyone wanted to be associated with her.

"Violet!"

"Over here, Violet!"

People she hadn't spoken to in her entire time at Lunaris were suddenly waving, and calling her name like she was a friend. Violet offered a small smile, but she never stopped walking. She had a destination, and it wasn't for show.

Still, Violet wasn't stupid. She couldn't exactly stride across campus looking like she was off to find a forbidden ex-lover. Especially when even the wind had ears at Lunaris Academy.

So, she took the route to the shack. No one would question her going back there since it had once been her home. Most would assume she forgot something or felt nostalgic, maybe even a little sentimental. But definitely not that she was going to see another male that wasn't her mate.

Violet kept checking her back every few steps just to be sure no one was tailing her. Werewolves were stealthy by nature, and trust was a luxury she didn't have today.

Once she reached the shack, Violet slipped inside the room and waited a bit. She listened for footsteps or rustlings. But there was none. She was alone.

Only then did Violet come out and continue on her journey. There was only one place Roman would be and it was the treehouse.

It was the only place he always returned to when he wanted to be alone.

The only problem was Violet had no clue where it was.

Chapter 419: Seeking Roman

Unlike Alaric's lab, which was easy enough to locate, Roman's treehouse wasn't even marked on the school's map. Not that Violet was surprised by it.

Roman's treehouse was private to him, especially considering she was the first girl he brought up there despite his notorious reputation as a player.

His pack members would know though, especially Abel, his loyal Beta. But she couldn't even chat him up in this situation.

How could she even begin that conversation? "Hey Abel, where's the man whose heart I may have shattered in real time?"

No. Just the thought made her sick with shame.

God only knew the member of his pack must hate her ass now.

However, there was one person who knew secrets no one else knew.

The Oracle.

Violet pulled out her phone, and privately chatted with the oracle.

VIOLET:

I need your help.

A reply came in almost immediately.

THE ORACLE:

Well, well. Violet Purple. Congratulations on securing your mate. 😊 Now tell me, darling, what could you possibly need help with?

Violet didn't waste time and typed her request.

VIOLET:

I need a map to Roman's treehouse.

She then waited.

THE ORACLE:

Ooh, a secret rendezvous with an old flame? This is going to be so interesting. Should I bring popcorn?

VIOLET:

This is not the time for jokes. I need that map.

THE ORACLE:

You know how this works. Information for information. What's the saying again? Nothing good is ever free?

And yes, this was one of the many ways the Oracle got her informations and it was

through deals. You wanted something, you offered something. That's how she always knew everything before it even happened.

But Violet was in no mood for games.

VIOLET:

How about I try not to reveal your identity and you send me the map?

Violet's tone was sharp and unbothered by pleasantries. She simply tucked the threat into a single line.

A long pause followed. And then the reply came in.

THE ORACLE:

So I help you out and this is how you repay me, Violet?

Violet exhaled, then finally typed:

VIOLET:

I'm not in the mood for games, Micah. Just help me out, please?

Three dots blinked on the screen for a moment. Then came the response.

THE ORACLE:

Hmm. Smart girl.

There was a short delay. Violet shifted on her feet, glancing at her surroundings, impatience gnawing at her.

Then—ping. A map dropped into her chat, and she clicked it immediately.

It was marked clearly, Roman's treehouse was circled clearly in red, alongside detailed paths on how to get to it.

The Oracle's final message followed right after:

THE ORACLE:

I take it you don't want your little detour headlining my article tomorrow? Then I believe you owe me a visit, Luna Violet.

It was just words but Violet could feel the threat hiding beneath them.

She typed back the only thing she would allow herself to say:

VIOLET:

Thank you.

Then she ended the chat.

Violet followed the path etched in the Oracle's map, and it took her nearly thirty minutes to get there.

The last time she came here, it had been at night and Roman had held and carried her through out. But now, in full daylight, the treehouse revealed itself in plain sight and it stunned her.

It was perched high, at least twenty feet in the air, cradled between the thick limbs of two towering oaks. A long wooden stair with no railing for grasp led up to it, crooked and a little too adventurous for her liking. Roman must have been in his crazy phase when he built this death trap.

Violet sighed. If this was a test from the goddess to prove her love for him, she'd gladly take it. Left with no other choice, she crouched and began her ascent.

Each step creaked beneath her feet, the old planks groaning like they hadn't been used in days. A few of them looked ready to snap under the wrong pressure, and Violet had to test each one before committing her weight.

By the time Violet made it to the top, her thighs were burning and her breath was slightly uneven, but she stood firmly on the landing. She pushed through the curtain and walked in.

Roman lay on the only couch in the room, his long form stretched out and completely naked like the day he was born. He had probably completed a shift and hadn't bothered dressing afterwards. But Violet didn't care. Her eyes didn't go there.

She took in the open cooler in the corner and the scatter of empty beer bottles around the floor and her chest ached. He'd been drinking because of her.

Violet moved slowly, stepping past the bottles and lowering herself gently onto the floor beside the couch. From this angle, she could see his face clearly. Roman's lips were slightly parted, and his hair tousled in a way that only made him look more heartbreakingly beautiful, vulnerable, and human.

Violet didn't even realize when her hand reached out, and her fingers brushed through his thick, silky green hair, combing back the strands that had fallen over his forehead.

The contact was featherlight, and reverent causing a soft sigh to escape his throat. Then he leaned closer. Even in sleep, his body recognized her touch.

Violet smiled, her lips twitching faintly at the corners. So she kept on stroking, letting the silence wrap around them. Hours might as well have passed by, but Violet didn't care. Her hand ached badly, but she never stopped stroking his hair.

Then, slowly, Roman stirred.

His eyelids fluttered, eyes unfocused at first. "Violet?" he murmured, voice rough with sleep.

"Yes, it's me," she replied softly.

For a moment there, hope sparked in Violet's chest that this might be the opportunity to talk this out.

But then the clarity returned to his eyes and with it, returned the anger.

Before Violet could say another word, Roman shot to his feet in one swift motion.

"Roman—wait! Please!"

But he was already gone.

Chapter 420: Her Side Piece

"Roman!" Violet was screaming now as she stumbled out of the treehouse. "Roman, please, just talk to me!"

But there was no sign of him, only the trees and the distant call of the birds, oblivious to her heartbreak.

Hot tears streamed down Violet's cheeks, blurring her vision. She could feel it. Roman was slipping through her fingers, vanishing into the wilderness of his own pain.

In her desperation to get down and find him, her tear-blurred eyes missed a step on the precarious wooden staircase.

It happened in a flash. One moment she was rushing down, and the next, she was falling.

Panic crashed over her like a wave and her arms flailed uselessly, grasping at nothing. The fall wouldn't kill her, but the impact would be brutal. She was stupid. What had she been thinking? Climbing a rickety staircase in the middle of an emotional breakdown?

Violet closed her eyes, bracing for pain. But it never came.

Something, or rather, someone, caught her mid-air, and the next moment they were rolling across the forest floor. His body cushioned the fall, taking most of the impact.

When they stopped, she found herself sprawled on top of Roman. His beautiful green eyes stared up at her. And that was it, the floodgate burst open.

"Why are you all doing this to me?" she sobbed. "Is it a crime to get a mate bond?"

The words left her like a raw wound, torn open in the middle of the forest. Violet was exhausted. She was tired of the drama. Tired of pretending. Tired of being pulled in every direction. She was just so tired.

Roman swallowed hard, his jaw tight as she cried on top of him. Slowly, he shifted and wrapped his arms around her, letting her bury her face into his chest.

For a while, there was nothing but the sound of Violet weeping while Roman simply held her. Then, cautiously, he began to pat her shoulder, guilt etched across his face.

He hadn't meant to hurt her like this. There was just so much anger and betrayal inside of him he didn't know what to do with it.

Minutes passed and Violet eventually pulled away, her eyes red, and her voice hoarse. They sat there in silence, the raw kind that stretches between two people with too many unsaid things between them.

"It's already evening," Roman muttered, getting to his feet. "You should leave. These woods aren't friendly at night."

Violet stood up quickly as well. "Seriously? That's all you're going to say?"

Roman froze. "What do you want from me, Violet Purple?" he snapped, his green eyes flashing. "You have your mate now. Go to him."

"I want you!" Violet shouted back. "I want you, Roman. Is that so hard to believe?"

"Oh, I see what this is now," Roman said bitterly, laughing without humor. "The goddess might have bonded you to Griffin, but you still want to keep the rest of us hanging. You want to keep me. That's not romantic, Violet, that's whorish."

Violet's hand flew before she could stop herself, landing a sharp slap across Roman's face. His head turned with the impact, and for a second, even the forest seemed to hold its breath.

Roman slowly looked back at her, his eyes blazing with disbelief at first, then fury. He stepped forward, his body tense, and he looked as if he would throttle her.

But then, his hands caught her face and pulled her in. Then he kissed her, fierce and bruising. Like he hated that he still loved her.

Violet moaned the second their lips crashed together. It wasn't gentle. It wasn't slow. It was anger and frustration and everything they hadn't said.

Her hands clawed at his bare chest, dragging down his skin, needing him closer now. Their mouths moved fast, lips crushing, and teeth clashing. Violet felt his tongue push into her mouth and she met it with her own, wet and wild, tasting him like she was starving. Indeed, she was.

Roman groaned low in his throat, his arms locking around her. She ground into him, her hips moving desperately against his, feeling all of him pressed against her. He was already hard and shaking with how badly he wanted her.

Violet didn't care that he was naked and that they were outside. If anything, she wanted him to lose control.

Roman grabbed her thighs and lifted her in one motion, and she wrapped her legs around his waist like it was second nature. The next second, her back was slammed against the rough bark of a tree, and still, they didn't stop kissing.

Violet grabbed his bottom lip with her teeth and bit hard. Roman grunted from the pain, but it only made him kiss her harder. His fingers dug into her waist, holding her so tight it hurt, but it felt good at the same time.

The both of them were moving, grinding, like the kiss was going to consume them whole. She could feel the heat in her core rising, fast, needy, and uncontrollable. Violet wanted to forget everything. The mate bond. The Heartbreak. Everything.

Fuck. Roman hissed between his teeth, the heat building so quick it almost knocked the air from his lungs.

Violet was going to be the death of him.

Both of them were gasping, the kiss messy and their bodies grinding like they couldn't get enough.

He wanted to come inside her. Goddess, he wanted more than that.

The pressure was unbearable. He was so close.

Suddenly, Roman dropped her legs, stepped back, and spun around to the tree beside them.

"God—!" he growled, tilting his head back as he spilled his release against the tree bark instead. Roman shuddered, his muscles tense.

When he was done, he leaned his forehead against the tree, his chest rising and falling in ragged breaths.

Violet stood there watching him, her own chest heaving, her lips red and kiss-bruised.

Roman turned to her after catching his breath and said coldly, "Well, you've gotten what you wanted from your side piece. Now go enjoy your main one. Have a nice day with Griffin."

"What?!" Violet blinked, stunned. Was Roman serious right now? She knew he could be difficult sometimes, but this was a whole new level of petty.

Before she could say a word, Roman had already shifted into a green tiger and vanished into the forest.

What the hell just happened? Violet was dumbfounded.

Still, no matter how it ended, Violet knew she had gotten to him, even if just a little. And that was enough for now. There was time. She'd make him come around. She was sure of it.