

Defy 431

Chapter 431: Calm A Storm

This was a really awkward situation.

Griffin was still in his beast mode, which meant he had nearly taken up all the space in the backseat. Violet had no choice but to sit on Roman's lap. Wasn't this amazing?

It wasn't surprising that Violet felt something poke her from behind. She glanced over her shoulder.

"It has a mind of its own," Roman said sheepishly.

Violet shook her head in utter disbelief and then turned back around with a chuckle. However, her eyes connected with Asher's through the rearview mirror, and the laughter died off immediately. Asher looked away, and that felt like a stab to her chest.

Asher was the one driving and had not spoken a word to them. Violet didn't know how to start a conversation with him. He was mad at her, there was no doubt about that.

Recognizing the tension between them, Roman seized the opportunity to speak up. "Yo, how did you find us?"

Asher adjusted in his seat, relaxing as he explained, "I knew you guys were going to come find me, so I was alert. When I heard the commotion outside, I scaled the walls through the balcony, and the rest is history."

Although Violet had stayed with werewolves for a while now, it still amazed her each time they performed extraordinary feats like that. He climbed down six floors, unharmed. Yeah, totally impressive.

Violet couldn't wait to be impressive too.

"So you left us with your evil father?" Roman asked, disbelief evident in his voice.

As if in agreement, the beast let out a low snarl at the mention of "evil father."

"You came out unharmed, didn't you?" Asher replied, prompting Roman to shake his head in disbelief, as if he couldn't fathom being friends with this emotionless robot.

"Where are we going?" Violet finally inquired.

For a moment, she thought he wouldn't respond, but he said, "We are going to find Alaric."

Violet felt a wave of relief wash over her, until he added, "Or would you prefer I send you and Griffin back to campus while I search for Alaric alone? I'm sure you'd rather spend more time with your lovely mate, even if it's his beast."

Violet scowled. "Really, Asher? Do you think that little of me?"

"I'm merely stating facts," he replied coolly.

"And your 'fact' suggests I would pass up the chance to find Alaric, who has gone AWOL?"

"You have a mate now, it shouldn't surprise me," he said, his tone indifferent, only to mumble under his breath, "After all, you never bothered about me."

But Violet heard him and retorted, "I did worry about you!"

"Really?" he sneered. "When? When Griffin was dick-deep inside of you? Or when you suddenly heard I was awake?"

"Well, forgive me, your royal dickhead, but I won't apologize for the mating fever because I enjoyed every moment of it. And forgive me for knowing you didn't die because Nancy kept me updated on your condition. I also apologize for not calling your father to say, 'Hello, psycho father of the year, please extend my greetings to your unconscious son; I'll visit soon.' Or perhaps I should apologize for not

having the ability to multiply myself so I could send one of me to visit you in the hospital, another to find Alaric, and yet another to see Roman while I bond with my mate. How's that for an apology? Do you need more?"

"I'll pretend I'm invisible," Oscar said, shrinking further into the seat. He wanted no part in the lovers' quarrel unfolding around him.

The silence that followed suggested that Asher had given up on the argument, but after a beat, he spoke up. "You already have a mate. Why even bother with us?"

"Because the mate bond is not complete. Not without you. All of you," Violet said, her words a plea.

This time, when Asher's gaze connected with hers, he saw the raw emotion in her eyes and found himself unable to look away. There was a depth to her words that resonated with him, stirring his feelings once more.

"Look out—!" Oscar shouted in panic, jolting Asher back to reality.

Reacting instinctively, Asher swerved the car just in time to avoid an oncoming truck, the tires screeching against the asphalt.

"Can we just leave the fights for later and concentrate on staying alive?" Roman yelled, his voice tinged with stress.

"Stay alive!" The Beast roared back, its voice a deep growl that filled the car with an unsettling energy.

"Exactly, buddy!" Roman exclaimed, suddenly feeling a camaraderie with the Beast, as if they were allies in this chaotic moment.

"I'm sorry," Violet suddenly said, her voice softer now. "I'm sorry for not visiting earlier."

Asher sighed, his grip tightening on the steering wheel as he concentrated on the road ahead. It wasn't fair to be too hard on Violet. He was just annoyed — and a little heartbroken.

They drove in silence for a while until Oscar suddenly said. "I've found him. You were right."

"Right about what?" Roman asked, his curiosity piqued.

Oscar rotated his tablet screen towards the others. "Just like Asher guessed, Alaric's been brewing a storm over Pine Ridge Lodge for a day straight. Even booked the whole place under his own name."

Roman whistled. "For someone who doesn't want to be found, he sure isn't subtle."

"Are you sure?" Violet asked, hopeful.

Oscar explained, zooming in on the radar. "The storm's parked right on top of the property. There's no movement, no dissipation. Weather service flagged it as 'unusually localized atmospheric activity.' So, yeah. Definitely your boyfriend.." He coughed awkwardly, "I mean, Alaric."

Asher flexed his grip on the steering wheel. "How far?"

"Hour and a half," Oscar said. "Roads are clear, but—" A flash of lightning illuminated the horizon, followed by a lazy roll of thunder. "—expect a drizzle and some dramatic cloud cover."

Roman clapped his hands. "Perfect! We show up, Violet gives him a kiss or more, and viola! Storm down!"

Chapter 432: No Matebond Without You

Loneliness had always been his companion, but this time it hurt more than ever. All Alaric wanted was to let it go. And he did.

Dark, angry clouds choked the sky above Pine Ridge Lodge, swirling ominously. It wasn't raining, but the air was heavy with moisture, the scent of ozone thick enough to taste.

Alaric stood shirtless and barefoot on the rooftop, his eyes glowing silver, crackling with power as lightning coiled above his head like a crown.

No one had truly loved him. Not his parents, for whom he always had to beg for attention. Not the girls, who approached him only because he was a cardinal Alpha. Even in the end, Julia had chosen Roman, the fun, handsome one, over him, the dorky one.

And then there was Violet, the one girl who accepted him despite his flaws. But even she had been taken away, leaving him to wonder if he was destined to be alone after all.

Thunder rumbled through the sky, a fitting backdrop to Alaric's rebellion against the heavens. It would have hurt less if they had mated Violet to someone else, but Griffin? One of the cardinal alphas? Why not him? Was he truly that unworthy?

Another mighty thunderclap echoed, followed by another and another. The next bolt struck close, scorching the ground, yet Alaric didn't flinch.

This was why he had booked the lodge for the entirety of his stay, sending away the guards and staff. Here, he could unleash his pain without fear of collateral damage.

Alaric closed his eyes, surrendering to the tempest within him. The energy rushed through his veins, a wild current that ignited every nerve ending. Lightning cracked across the sky, illuminating the dark clouds, while thunder roared like a beast unleashed, shaking the very ground beneath him.

In that moment, he felt invincible, a god among mortals, cloaked in the fury of the storm. The world could burn around him, and he wouldn't care. Heartbreak twisted inside him like a knife, but the power was intoxicating, drowning out the pain.

Alaric embraced the chaos, feeling the air crackle with energy. He was teetering between despair and the thrill of destruction, letting the storm consume him.

"Alaric?"

At first, he thought it was a figment of his imagination. But when he heard his name again, the silver in his eyes faded, and the storm of destruction he had summoned eased just a little as he turned around.

And there she stood. Violet purple.

No way.

Alaric shook his head, trying to dispel the vision. Had he descended into madness?

"It's me," Violet said.

Great. He wasn't hallucinating.

"What are you doing here?!" Alaric was flabbergasted. Violet was on the same rooftop with him.

She stood there, drenched, her hair plastered to her scalp like dark tendrils. She must have been caught in the storm he had summoned. Alaric knew the areas outside the lodge bore the brunt of his punishment, and deep down, it soothed him to know he was not suffering alone.

Until now.

"I came to see you." Violet said.

Her words made his heart skip a beat, a flicker of hope igniting within him until reality crashed down.

"Oh right, you're here to break up with me in person."

Thunder cracked loudly, a bolt striking just in front of Violet.

"Could you tone down the storm a bit, Alaric? I need to talk to you." She cautiously stepped closer, wary of being roasted alive.

"Don't bother, Violet. Just go. We're over. Do whatever you want." His voice dripped with resignation, accepting his fate.

"Could you just shut up and hear me out first?" Violet's voice rose with frustration.

"Just go!" Alaric roared, his command punctuated by a thunderbolt that struck so close to her that she yelped, startled.

"You're already with Griffin. Don't make this hurt more than it has to." His eyes pleaded, filled with pain and hurt.

Alaric was breaking, and Violet could see it. The right thing to do would have been to leave him alone, but she was done with stubborn men deciding her fate for her!

With her lips set in determination, Violet stomped over to Alaric, ignoring the violent thunderbolts around them. If she perished, then so be it.

"What are you doing?" Alaric felt a surge of fear at the fire in her eyes and whatever reckless idea was brewing in her mind.

But Violet ignored him and walked over, grabbing his face and kissing him firmly on the lips. She didn't deepen the kiss; she simply pressed her lips against his and held them there.

Alaric froze.

What was happening? This didn't make sense. Violet shouldn't be kissing him.

As if recovering his senses, Alaric jerked away, staring at her in shock. What had she done? She shouldn't be kissing someone who wasn't her mate.

Then Violet said, "I don't have a mate bond, not without you in it."

And then she kissed him again.

Alaric hesitated, his body tense, unsure of what to do. This didn't make any sense and shouldn't be happening at all.

But then Violet deepened the kiss, her lips moving against his with a fervor that ignited something in him. Alaric's instincts kicked in and he wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her close as if afraid she might slip away.

Thunder rumbled in the distance as he kissed her back, hard and desperate. Violet moaned into the kiss, the familiar zing of lightning coursing through her, sending shivers down her spine. She clutched his hair, pulling him closer, pouring all her longing into the kiss.

She missed this. She missed him.

When they broke apart, Alaric's eyes were wide with wonder.

"How is this possible?" he whispered.

Violet smiled, a playful glint in her eyes. "You seriously didn't think you'd be rid of me that easily, did you? Not even the goddess can separate us, you knucklehead."

She leaned in to kiss him again, but Alaric shifted away. "What about Griffin?" he asked, wanting to be sure.

Violet's expression softened. "Not just Griffin. The others can't wait to see you too."

Chapter 433: Talk Things Out

Pine Ridge Lodge sat at the edge of a tranquil mountainous area, characterized by unique pine forests, granite massifs, and limestone formations, where the mist never seems to fully lift.

Aside from the storm summoned by Alaric, the altitude keeps the air cool and crisp, while the narrow road winding up to the property ensures its isolation.

Right now, the others were settled in the main lodge, waiting for Violet to win over her other boyfriend, Alaric.

While Asher and Oscar were deep in conversation, Roman and the Beast were left to "bond".

At that moment, Roman burst out of one of the lodge rooms, finally dressed in pants he had stolen from Alaric's room. Yes, he had found his room already. Haha, he was quite efficient,, wasn't he?

"Finally, a semblance of normalcy!" Roman declared, striking a pose as if he were on a fashion runway.

Then he pulled out an oversized pants saying, "I don't know who left these granny pants, but they should fit!"

He tossed the pants at The Beast, who was lounging on a nearby couch, his huge body dwarfing the furniture. The Beast, however, didn't even flinch nor bother to catch it. The pants landed on the floor, sliding off his muscular thigh and pooling at his feet.

Roman sighed, shaking his head. "Come on, put them on!"

The Beast grumbled. "No."

"Try again," Roman said, crossing his arms defiantly. "Put them on!"

The Beast growled in response, this time with more force, slamming his massive hand into the wall, causing a crack to spiderweb across the plaster.

"Bad Beast!" Roman chastised, pointing a finger at him as if he were scolding a misbehaving child. The Beast glared back, his expression one of irritation.

Roman rubbed his hand over his face, exasperated. "Don't make me do this, please," he pleaded.

But the next moment, Roman grabbed the pants and approached The Beast. "Alright, lift your leg!"

The Beast, caught off guard, raised one leg, his brow furrowing in confusion. Roman quickly slipped the first leg of the pants onto The Beast's foot, grinning like a madman. "Good job! Now the other one!"

"Why?" The Beast grumbled, but Roman was already in full swing, encouraging him. "If you're happy to see your mate, raise your leg!"

This time around, The Beast raised his other leg quickly, and Roman managed to wrangle the second pant leg on. By the time he was done, he slumped back into a chair with a sigh.

His eyes were never going to recover from what he had seen. Who even assigned this fate to him?

This time around, Roman was minding his own business, lounging on the couch with a snack in hand, when he felt a gentle nudge against his side. He glanced over at The Beast, who was looking at him with an expectant expression. Roman rolled his eyes and turned away, ignoring him.

But that only seemed to spur The Beast on. With a mischievous grin, he nudged Roman again, this time more forcefully. Roman lost his balance, slipping off the couch and landing on the floor with a thud.

The Beast howled in laughter, clutching his sides as he thoroughly enjoyed Roman's misfortune.

Roman, not one to back down, quickly scrambled to his feet, a playful glint in his eye.

"Oh, it's on!" he shouted, and before one knew it, they were tackling each other to the ground, a flurry of limbs and laughter as they rolled around in a playful scramble.

As they wrestled, The Beast managed to stand up, but Roman was determined not to let go and climbed up his body like a monkey.

Trying to get him off The Beast accidentally knocked down a flower vase, then the chandelier, sending it swaying precariously.

"Roman!" Asher's voice chided him from across the room, but the warning fell on deaf ears.

The Beast was far gone in their playful antics, and with a gleeful roar, he grabbed Roman and began to toss him around like a ragdoll.

Just then, the door swung open, and in walked Violet and Alaric. The instant The Beast saw Violet, he dropped Roman unceremoniously to the floor and turned to her with an innocent smile, as if nothing had happened.

Roman, now sprawled on the ground, looked up at Violet with a weak grin. "Hello," he managed to say, his voice strained from exertion. He was never babysitting again. He could already feel the bruises forming.

Violet raised an eyebrow, taking in the scene. "What on earth happened here?" she asked, stunned.

"What happens when you let two kids take care of each other." Asher said bluntly, glaring at Roman.

Roman rolled his eyes. He should have come take care of Beast himself if it were that easy.

"Why is he in this form?" Alaric asked puzzled. " Griffin never let's him out in this form for long."

The Beast heard him and hissed at him.

At once, Alaric lifted his hand in surrender. He won't be the one provoking him. That creature had serious anger issues.

As if that was not enough, he grabbed Violet to his side and declared. "Mate. Mine."

"Alright, buddy, this is not time to claim possession. This is time to talk." Violet said, taking a seat with the Beast doing the same obediently.

Alaric was impressed with the way Violet handled him knowing The Beast was never docile. The mate bond indeed does wonder. It was at this point, he couldn't help but feel happy for his friend, Griffin. Perhaps he deserved this bond after all.

"I think it's time for me to take my leave," Oscar announced. He didn't want to be there when they started that conversation.

Asher told him. "Be sure to keep an eye on things as I told you."

"Of course, I'll keep you updated." The beta couldn't have been more pleased to escape the place.

Minutes later after Oscar left, Violet spoke up. "I'm really glad you all gave me a chance to talk things out," she said, her voice sincere.

Alaric, Asher and Roman looked at each other. Even The Beast was calm as if realizing the gravity of the conversation.

"I know so many things have happened so far but be rest assured that nothing is going to break our relationship, not even a mate bond with Griffin. That is why I must tell you about the prophecy and my identity because we have a problem at hand..."

Chapter 434: Their Promises

"...So let me get this straight," Asher swallowed hard, his voice nearly a whisper. "King Angus is alive?"

"And you're his daughter?" Alaric asked, sounding equally stunned.

"And you're a princess," Roman added, eyes lighting up with a dreamy grin. "I always knew there was something special about you, Princess."

"Princess." The Beast repeated, his deep voice rumbling as he gently played with Violet's hair, if feeling the importance of the word.

Violet had unearthed every detail of her life, and now she braced herself for the commotion that would inevitably follow.

She wrung her hands, her fingers nervously tangling together as she studied their reactions. "Are you guys angry at me?" she asked, unsure.

Asher looked at her strangely with confusion. "Why would I be angry at you?"

"Because I'm Angus' daughter," she said hesitantly, as if the truth was poison on her tongue. "And heir to the throne. Micah thinks trusting you all is a bad idea. He believes you'd betray me and take it."

At that moment, the real question Violet wanted to ask hung in the air: Can I trust you?

Violet didn't want to say it outright. She didn't want to seem like she doubted them. But how could she not? Being "Alpha King" was the future these boys were raised and trained for their entire lives, and now, out of nowhere, she was the heir apparent. If she were in their position, accepting that fate would be a great challenge.

Violet rushed to clarify, "Not that I intend on ruling. I mean, I don't even have a wolf, nor do I know anything about ruling a bunch of creatures."

Her laugh was hollow and awkward as she tried to downplay her significance, hoping to ease the tension in the room.

"You shouldn't have trusted Micah with your secret," Asher scolded.

"Not all of it," she muttered. "And he's my brother."

"Micah is a demon. They're not to be trusted, brother or not. Why do you think he's not running for the throne? He's the legitimate heir while you're the illegitimate one."

Asher's words were brash, but it was still the truth.

"If her mother was mated to Angus, then she's a legitimate heir," Alaric countered. "Fated mates are recognized by the heavens themselves. Even without a formal union, their bond makes it official."

"Try explaining that to the wolves," Asher said sharply. "Her mother severed the bond, and that alone would take a hell of a lot of explaining. Not that it's even happening."

"Good," Roman cut in, surprisingly serious for once. "For a moment, I thought you'd lost your mind thinking of making Violet's identity public."

Roman might not have been the brainiest of them all, but he wasn't dumb. He was just shrewd in his own way.

"I'm not stupid, Roman," Asher snapped. "This is a complicated situation."

Then he turned to Violet, meeting her gaze. "I don't speak for the others, but I'm not fighting you for the throne. I never will. Not when I know it was never mine to begin with."

Alaric scoffed. "That's rich, coming from you, Asher. You've always fought the hardest for the throne and your father practically worships the ground you walk on, bragging about how you'd win."

Asher didn't flinch. "I fought because you three were in the race and I couldn't possibly lose. Then, Violet wasn't in the picture. But now, I know what matters most to me, and it's her. My father can rot in whatever cursed pit of hell he crawled out of."

His loyalty might've been intense, but it was sexy as hell, and Violet's face was beet red while her heart thudded like it wanted to leap out of her chest.

"I've said my piece," Asher added, turning to the others. "What about you?"

"I never cared about the throne anyway. Deep down, I think Leon knew I would never win either, but he just didn't want to be left out. And who knows, a miracle might just happen," Roman said.

And by miracle, he meant winning through cunning means. There was no way he'd beat Asher in a straight fight unless he outsmarted him. If anyone had a real shot, it was Alaric. Or Griffin, if only he added a bit of flair to that strength.

"I never had any interest in the throne either. My mother just couldn't stand the thought of the North losing out. Besides, I'm their perfect son who can do anything he puts his mind to," Alaric added, his voice carrying a trace of bitterness.

Violet's heart ached at his words. She reached over and squeezed his hand comfortingly. Alaric smiled faintly and intertwined their fingers.

Now that all three of them had voiced their allegiance, there was only one person left.

All eyes turned to Griffin, or rather, the Beast. Sure, it was assumed Griffin would support Violet now that they were mated. But politics was politics, and mate bonds didn't always mean loyalty. They needed to hear it from him directly.

As if sensing the weight of the moment, the Beast let out a soft, sorrowful whine.

He didn't want to leave.

Violet stepped in. "I trust Griffin. He wouldn't—"

She didn't finish because the Beast nudged her gently.

"Beast. Go." His voice was gruff, his warm amber eyes locked onto hers with determination.

Violet sighed. If he must do this then.

"See Beast later?"

He nodded eagerly, his expression brightening like a child promised ice cream.

Then he reached out and cupped her face, as if committing the feeling to memory. Violet leaned into his touch, letting the moment linger.

From the side, someone sniffled.

Asher and Alaric turned to Roman, eyebrows raised.

"What? Isn't it touching?" he said defensively.

They shook their heads and looked away.

It was time.

The Beast stepped back. His muscles rippled and deflated, his body shrinking until Griffin stood in his place once again.

He stumbled slightly but steadied himself with a breath.

"I have no interest in the throne," he said, eyes on Violet, "not as long as she's in the picture."

And, as if on cue, the oversized granny pants slid from his waist.

Roman doubled over in laughter.

Chapter 435: How To Trigger A Mate Bond

"The same way people change, that's the same way words do. Which is why we must swear this promise today, and let the heavens bear witness," Asher declared, firmly.

Violet didn't know what she had done to deserve this level of dedication from her men—and they weren't even fully mated yet. Honestly, she didn't need them swearing anything. But once Asher made up his mind, there was no turning back. And besides, the others had already agreed.

All four of the Cardinal Alphas stood facing each other. Asher was the first to lift his hand and a single claw erupted from his finger. Without hesitation, he used it to slice open his palm and blood began to drip from the wound.

Understanding the mission, Griffin followed after Asher, slicing his palm without hesitation. Alaric and Roman did the same, their blood dripping in crimson rivulets onto the floor.

With his bloodied hand raised, Asher turned to face Violet fully. His expression was intense and unwavering.

"In the name of the Moon Goddess, who bore witness to our ancestors and the first pack's rise," Asher declared, his voice solemn and sure, "I, Asher Nightshade of the West pack, swear this oath."

One by one, the others followed suit:

"In the name of the Moon Goddess, who bore witness to our ancestors and the first pack's rise. I, Griffin Hale of the East pack, swear this oath."

"In the name of the Moon Goddess, who bore witness to our ancestors and the first pack's rise. I, Roman Draven of the South pack, swear this oath."

"In the name of the Moon Goddess, who bore witness to our ancestors and the first pack's rise. I, Alaric Storm of the North pack, swear this oath."

Then, in unison, they recited after Asher:

"I swear I will never raise arms, plots, or ambition against Violet Purple for the throne. Whether crown or command, I choose her. If she rises, I rise with her. If she falls, I fall beside her. But I will never be the hand that brings her down. If I fail, let the goddess deal accordingly with me."

As soon as the words left their mouths, they stepped forward and pressed their bleeding palms together, stacking them one on top of another.

"Let our blood bear witness."

A moment later, thunder cracked through the house like the heavens answering back. The walls trembled and Violet jolted. The Alphas were startled by the suddenness too.

"Did you do that?" Roman asked Alaric, narrowing his eyes.

"That wasn't me," Alaric replied flatly.

But Roman wasn't convinced.

Before another word could be said, Violet gasped, her eyes wide with shock.

"Guys, look," Griffin said, pointing to the floor.

They all followed his gaze just in time to see their spilled blood vanish. More like, it was absorbed into the ground as if the earth itself drank it. When they looked back at their hands, the wounds were gone, and their skin flawless and neat. There was not even a smear of blood.

A heavy stillness fell upon them, while goosebumps broke out across their skin.

Even Asher who had planned this hadn't expected that. He had hoped their oath would mean something serious, but this felt sacred.

"I guess this means Momma Goddess just said yes," Roman said, breaking the silence with a low whistle.

The alphas stepped apart and returned to their previous seats.

"Although," Roman added, settling in with a mischievous grin, "she might also want to answer when she plans to bond us too. I'd love to have lots of snu-snu in the name of a mating fever."

He winked at Griffin, who rolled his eyes in exasperation.

Roman could be insufferable sometimes.

"Roman's not wrong though," Alaric said. "If we can figure out what triggered the mate bond between Griffin and Violet, maybe we can find a way to quicken the process..."

...and finally have sex with her without risking death.

Alaric didn't say that part out loud, but it wasn't hard to guess what he was thinking. They were horny wolves, after all.

Asher only raised a brow, but Alaric and Roman had already zeroed in on Griffin. Roman even went over to their seat, forcing them to make space so he could squeeze in.

"Tell us, Griffin," Roman said, "how did the mate bond happen?"

"You already know that," Griffin replied.

"He means to say," Alaric clarified, "how did it feel right before the mate bond hit you? What emotions were you feeling then? Maybe that's the key to triggering the bond. Followed by the action, of course."

Griffin tilted his head, thinking, while both Alaric and Roman watched him with rapt attention.

"When Violet left with that bastard—"

"I didn't leave with him," Violet cut in. "At least not intentionally. I was only trying to find a way out of there. For all of us."

"Which was pretty stupid."

"But effective. You did let the Beast out, didn't you?" she fired back, leaving Griffin momentarily speechless.

"Can we go back to unlocking the bond, please?" Roman said, hands up. "Some of us are desperate here. You two can argue later."

Griffin finally confessed. "I felt helpless. Like they took away what should be mine..." His brows furrowed as he pieced it together. "I couldn't let that stand. I had to do something. I felt this great anger and red was all I could see as the Beast took over. I had this burning desire to find Violet and protect her...." He looked at her as he said it. "And I did find her. I did protect her."

For a moment, there was silence. Violet and Griffin just stared at each other, their bond shining through.

"So..." Roman broke the moment, "all we have to do is throw ourselves in danger for Violet and bam! Mate bond activated?"

"Or maybe," Alaric mused, "it's about proving yourself to the goddess."

Roman nodded, proud. "I knew being your mate would be a full-time job. I'm game."

At that moment, Asher suddenly shot to his feet, frowning as he stared down at his phone.

"You have got to be kidding me...!"

Chapter 436: Stolen Throne

Lunaris Academy's ballroom — the same place where the scandal happened — had now been transformed into a makeshift press conference room. A row of reporters lined the front, their camera lights blinking and ready for action.

The official seal of Lunaris Academy was emblazoned on the wall behind the podium, and was flanked by the flags of the four major packs, with the emblem of United Dorminia at the center.

The room was occupied by heads of departments, academy board members, Betas from each pack, and even a representative from the President himself. Notably, the seats reserved for the Cardinal Alphas, and unsurprisingly, Violet Purple, remained empty. Their absence was louder than words.

"Thank you all for honoring my invitation today," Principal Jameson began, her voice formal and even. "Lunaris Academy does not take recent events lightly. What occurred during the Parents' Day Gala was deeply inappropriate and has cast a shadow on the integrity we strive to uphold."

She paused, letting the gravity of her words settle.

"That is why we are here today to allow Miss Elsie Lancaster the opportunity to address the public directly. She has requested to speak, and this academy believes in due process, even in the most difficult of times."

She stepped aside with a measured gesture.

"Miss Lancaster, the floor is yours."

The air was heavy with whispers and judgment as Elsie Lancaster appeared at once, heading towards the mic while camera flashes went off relentlessly, capturing every inch of her drastic transformation.

Elsie wore a modest white dress that was no doubt the result of aggressive PR damage control. It was too simple, and totally unlike her. Her silver curls were tied into a plain ponytail, and her makeup was so minimal it was nearly nonexistent.

Gone was her radiant poise and the signature icy confidence. Elsie now stood stripped bare by the court of public opinion looking remorseful, or at least pretending to.

Principal Jameson remained behind her with a passive expression, offering no visible support.

Elsie leaned into the microphone, her voice surprisingly soft.

"I want to start by apologizing to the students of Lunaris Academy, to the faculty, to the community, to the Houses I represent, and to the public watching from beyond our walls for the events that came to light during the Parents' Gala."

Gasps broke across the hall. Not out of shock since everyone knew what had happened, but at hearing it acknowledged out loud. The recording after all had horrified the parents, and humiliated the school's legacy.

"I understand that I represent more than just myself," Elsie went on. "As a bride candidate for the Cardinal Alphas, I was chosen to embody honor, purity, and grace... " her voice faltered briefly on "grace", prompting a few snickers from the press, "and I failed to uphold that image."

She bowed her head as if weighed down by shame. But those who knew Elsie at all knew she wasn't sorry for what she did. She was only sorry because she got caught.

"I deeply regret the pain and embarrassment this has caused. I am cooperating fully with the disciplinary board and will accept their decision."

Elsie said the safest line of all, one that showed humility without admitting fault.

Behind her, Principal Jameson didn't blink and was perfectly composed. This wasn't the first time she handled situations like this.

"I hope in time I can earn back the respect of my peers and the trust of the public. Thank you."

Elsie offered a shallow bow and turned from the podium, ignoring the barrage of questions reporters hurled at her.

"Elsie! Is it true you seduced Grace?"

"Was the video consensual?"

"What's your standing with the Cardinal Alphas now that Violet is mated to Griffin?"

"Have they abandoned you?"

"Where are the cardinal alphas now?"

Security intervened quickly, shielding her as they ushered her offstage. The commotion continued until Principal Jameson returned to the mic and tapped it once, the sharp pop silencing the room.

"After thorough deliberation," she said crisply, "the Lunaris Academy Disciplinary Board has reached a decision regarding Miss Elsie Lancaster."

A hush fell on the room.

"As punishment for her involvement in the indecent incident during the Parents' Gala, Miss Lancaster will undergo community service both on campus and off. Effective immediately, she will serve a minimum of four hours each day for two weeks."

She didn't pause. "But disciplinary actions alone are not enough. Over the past week, Lunar Academy has faced a reckoning. Embedded class divisions once dismissed as tradition have become a source of harm. I'm referring, specifically, to the Luna Rankings."

That name alone caused a visible stir among the audience.

"What began as a harmless popularity contest became a method of exclusion, bullying, and emotional distress especially among our human students. Therefore, effective immediately, the Luna Rankings are abolished."

Shock rippled through the hall again, more stunning than the first time.

"Lunar Academy was built on unity and we intend to restore that foundation. From this moment forward, everyone is equal within these halls."

But that was a huge lie. Everyone in the room knew the truth: werewolves would always reign. This was merely window dressing. A political performance meant to soothe tension, not end it.

"And to ensure our human students are not only protected, but heard, we are taking an unprecedented step," Jameson said, now raising her voice slightly as the tension increased. "With the full support of President Roy and Alpha King Elijah, Lunar Academy is proud to announce the creation of a fifth house."

Shock thundered through the room. Reporters sat up straighter, their fingers flying across keyboards, camera flashes firing like strobe lights.

"A house solely dedicated to the representation and welfare of human students. A place where their voices will be respected, their culture honored, and their concerns addressed."

Jameson let the silence stretch, milking every bit of the suspense. Then she said slowly, "And to lead this new house and represent the human voice at Lunar Academy, please help me welcome..."

She paused intentionally.

"...Natalie Avax."

Chapter 437: Bonding Retreat

"That fucking bitch!" Asher roared, hurling his phone against the wall with such force that it shattered on impact.

As if that wasn't enough, he kicked the couch, but it didn't give him the satisfaction he was craving. So he slammed his fist into the wall instead.

"Asher!" Violet shouted, horrified.

She rushed over, grabbing his arm. "Stop it, Asher!" she yelled, pulling his hand away from the cracked plaster and turning him to face her. "Stop it right now!"

"Calm down, dude!" Roman added, equally stunned by the sudden outburst.

Although Asher stopped lashing out, the fury still burned in his voice. "She fucking betrayed me! The fifth house was supposed to be yours!"

"I know," Violet said gently. "But that's not a reason to hurt yourself."

Her eyes welled with tears as she gently took his bruised hand in hers. "It's not worth it."

As was common with werewolves, it was not surprising to Violet when the wound healed right before her eyes, but that didn't mean it didn't hurt. Asher was so used to the idea of pain that getting hurt felt completely normal to him. But that shouldn't be the case.

Knowing that Violet was hurting because of him made the ache in his chest burn hotter than the anger tearing through him. He didn't want to see her cry for him.

Asher whispered, "Everything was supposed to be perfect. It was my gift to you. You're supposed to rule alongside us."

"I know, Asher. But even you have to admit there are too many thrones waiting for me to rule." She grasped his face, her voice steady with conviction. "I don't need you to build me some elaborate kingdom as a gift. You're all I need, Asher. Just you."

Unable to hold back anymore, Asher grabbed her face and crushed his mouth to hers. He kissed her hard, pouring all of his emotions into it. The anger, pain. Everything.

Asher sucked on her lower lip first, then bit it, pulling a small gasp from her. His tongue then followed, tasting her deep, slowly, and filthy. Like he needed her in his lungs just to breathe.

One of his hands slid down, gripping her ass hard, dragging her flush against him. Violet felt every inch of his need, thick and pressed into her like he could very much brand her with it.

When he moved against her, Violet moaned against his mouth, her fingers fisting the back of his shirt, with her knees already going weak. Asher knew her to destroy her completely.

When he finally pulled back, Violet stumbled slightly. Her lips were red and parted, her breath ragged and her eyes glassy. Her head wasn't just spinning, she felt drunk on him.

Asher's eyes were dark, his pupils blown wide. The way he looked at her, Violet had an idea what was going through his mind right now.

"Someone definitely turned the heat on," Roman whistled, fanning his face dramatically.

Violet flushed a deep shade of red, unlike Asher, who returned to his usual unreadable expression.

"Who do you think pulled this off? Or did Jameson intentionally screw us over?" Roman asked.

"Jameson probably did," Griffin said. "She made it clear Violet and I had to do an interview today. This is probably her getting back at us. "

"I think so too," Alaric added. "She likely struck a deal with Natalie's father. Let his daughter be the face of reform, and in return, he helps her keep her job. A win-win for the both of them."

"Such decisions wouldn't get through without Elijah signing off," Asher muttered. "He probably saw through our plan and decided Natalie was the safer option."

"Not to mention," Violet cut in, "I'm now allegedly West House. There's no way he'd want to hand that much power to me."

"Exactly," Asher said. "The man already hates our guts. Wouldn't be a shock if he's redirected that hate right at you too."

Roman slapped his hand against his thigh with a loud smack. "You know what this calls for?" he asked, eyes gleaming.

There was silence in the room. Everyone blinked at him, offering nothing but a collection of blank, suspicious stares.

He threw his hands in the air. "A fucking vacation, baby!"

There was still no reaction.

"I'm serious! Alaric already booked out the entire lodge. I say we take full advantage of it and deal with our problems later. Our haters can go fuck themselves."

"What about school?" Alaric asked, skeptical of the whole thing.

Roman gave him a flat look. "Do you want to think about school right now?"

"No," Alaric admitted without hesitation.

"Exactly what I'm talking about."

Asher said. "Only if Violet agrees."

Immediately, four pairs of eyes turned to her.

Violet groaned. "I'm behind on everything. Assignments, reports, combat sessions, I'd say I need a miracle but apparently, what I have are four determined boyfriends."

"Tutoring? Handled," Alaric said without blinking. "I'll walk you through every damn class."

"I'll take you on in combat," Griffin added. "You'll be ahead of the whole class before you know it."

"I'll personally see to it that you're fit enough to outrun your problems," Roman grinned. "Physically, at least."

"And I'll write your tests," Asher muttered, arms crossed. "You'll get straight A's. I'll make sure of it"

Violet's jaw dropped. Just like that. They've solved her problems.

Roman pointed a finger like a salesman sealing the deal. "Just say yes, baby. You know you want it."

He wasn't wrong. She did. Every part of her wanted to be with them and away from the chaos of Lunaris Academy.

"Fine," she said, biting back a smile. "Yes, let's do it."

Roman whooped, grabbed her by the waist, and spun her in wild, dizzy circles as Violet shrieked and clung to him, laughing so hard she could barely breathe.

"Come on, boys!" Roman yelled triumphantly. "It's a goddamn bonding retreat!"

Alaric just shook his head with a fond

smile while Asher looked like he already regretted saying yes.

As for Griffin, he had never looked more satisfied.

Chapter 438: The Sycophant

They applauded her like she had won a prize, yet it didn't feel like a win to her. Natalie knew she was a puppet dancing on someone's strings. And she didn't like it one bit.

The charade was over, which meant the cameras had stopped rolling, and Natalie waited right outside the hall for Jameson.

It wasn't long before Jameson arrived, laughing politely at whatever the two board members beside her said. Even her laughter was airy and professional. Jameson was always the picture of poise.

Natalie didn't care that she was with guests, she pushed off the wall and stepped directly into her path.

The board members were startled at her abrupt appearance, their brows drawn in confusion. Jameson, as expected, took charge of the situation.

"Isn't that our new Alpha? Oh—wait, that's what the wolves say, right?" Jameson chuckled stiffly. "For humans, we say 'President,' don't we?"

She looked far too pleased with herself for a line that landed like a wet sock. Natalie just stared at her, deadpan. She was not flattered, nor amused. And she didn't even pretend to be.

"I get it," she said to the board members. "She's still in shock. We didn't tell her about the position until the last minute. I'd be rattled too if I—"

"Is this funny to you?" Natalie cut her off, unamused.

The board members looked deeply uncomfortable now sensing the tension between them. Jameson turned to them with a sweet smile. "Why don't you two head ahead? I'll catch up shortly."

They left without hesitation.

As soon as they were gone, Jameson focused on her.

"What's the problem, Natalie, dear?" she asked, her tone suddenly flattering. "You did great out there. We even tailored the script to your taste. I don't see anything wrong."

"Do you think I'm stupid?" Natalie hissed.

Jameson said nothing.

"I get my news too, and I know for a fact that position was supposed to be Violet's. So tone down the asslicking. It's beginning to make my skin crawl."

Jameson was taken aback, silence dawning for a beat. Then Jameson sighed and ran a hand through her sleek hair. When she looked back up, the sugary charm was gone.

"You're right. Violet Purple was the original choice."

"Then what changed?"

"The moment Violet bonded with Griffin, the power dynamic shifted. We need someone neutral. Someone not easily influenced by the wolves. Someone on our side. Someone with influence."

"And you picked me." Natalie nodded, tone dry. "Or rather, went through my father."

Jameson didn't deny it.

"The Avax family isn't insignificant," she said. "Unlike Violet, a nobody who got lucky clinging to the Cardinal Alphas, you come from bloodlines that matter. When the fifth house is built, your family name will finally have a place in Lunaris Academy."

Natalie stepped closer until they were eye to eye.

"One day, you'll get what's coming to you."

Jameson didn't even blink. The children's threats had long since stopped fazing her. These days, they sounded more like motivational quotes.

Natalie glared hard enough, then turned and began to walk away.

"Where are you going?" Jameson called after her.

"Getting the fuck away from you," Natalie retorted.

"You can't do that. We have lunch to attend."

"I have classes."

"Cancel them," Jameson said. "Your father's waiting. And so is the President."

Natalie froze mid-step. Then turned slowly. "The President?"

Jameson nodded, already walking toward her. "You're representing all of humanity now, Natalie. Get used to it." She brushed an invisible dust away from the girl's shoulder. "We leave in my car. I expect you in ten minutes. Dress like the winner you are."

She brushed past her with her usual superior air and left.

Twenty minutes later....

Natalie sauntered toward the car, entirely unbothered by the sight of Jameson standing beside it with her arms folded and a deep frown carved into her face.

"I said ten," Jameson remarked dryly, pointing out her lateness.

"Not my problem. Now drive."

Jameson bristled at the girl's attitude. But there was nothing she could do. This was the small price she paid to hold the position she had today. Look at her, having a private meal with the President. How many principals could boast of that?

So yeah, even if it involved playing chauffeur to a spoiled princess, she'd do it. As long as she kept her job.

Natalie slid into the back seat, and Jameson got in behind the wheel. The ride was tense, awkward, and quiet until Natalie decided to break the silence.

"I'm curious about something," she said, voice smooth. "How much exactly did Caroline pay you to clear her daughter's name?"

Jameson's gaze didn't shift from the road. "Excuse me?"

Natalie cocked her head. "I mean, don't you find it a little too convenient that Grace suddenly confesses to leaking the sex tape, but she's neither arrested for illegal filming. Then she's expelled from Lunaris Academy? And yet, somehow, she's transferred to another school downtown in the middle of the semester, while Elsie gets the stage to apologize and walks away with community service?" Natalie gave a short, humorless laugh. "You really are proficient at your job, Principal Jameson."

Jameson wasn't rattled. "Elsie is the victim in this scandal and the punishment was appropriate. Caroline and Elsie chose not to press charges, and frankly, I agreed. No need to ruin a young girl's life. Expulsion was punishment enough. If Grace found another school, well lucky her, don't you think?"

"Hm," Natalie hummed, yet the sound was empty.

There was a pause.

"Although I'm curious about you too, Natalie," Jameson said, casually.

"Curious about what?" Natalie lifted a brow.

"How do you get your information? If I wasn't so careful, I'd almost think you were the Oracle. Or..." She paused for suspense.

"...You're just close to her. And it wouldn't surprise me at all, considering the kind of details you get."

Their eyes locked through the rearview mirror and the silence between them buzzed.

Then Jameson let out a light and dismissive laugh.

"Or maybe I'm wrong," she said sweetly. "Who knows?"

Natalie's lips pressed into a thin, hard line.

That bitch.

Chapter 439: The Cornered Animal

The restaurant was all polished woods, velvet chairs, and had the kind of silence that said important people ate here. In one word, it had all the warmth of a graveyard. And seated at the head of the table like a king in his den was President Roy.

Except there was one person Jameson hadn't mentioned would be present.

Natalie froze, the breath knocked from her lungs like a sucker punch at the sight of her.

Kate.

Her stepmother.

Kate was seated beside her father and looked up the second she sensed her arrival.

"Oh, look who finally showed up," Kate said, smiling far too brightly as she peered over the rim of her glass.

But Natalie didn't move, she stood there like a deer caught in headlights.

"What are you standing there for? That's President Roy. Greet him," Jameson nudged her with an elbow, snapping her out of it.

President Roy didn't look like a president, at least not in the stiff, boring way most imagined. He was in his early fifties, but age sat lightly on him.

His red hair, brushed back with a touch of silver at the temples, gave him a graceful, striking edge. Dressed in a crisp navy shirt with rolled sleeves and dark trousers, President Roy looked relaxed, in control, and deceptively approachable. Fit, tall, and confident, he wore power without needing to flaunt it.

"Hello, Mr. President," Natalie greeted, her voice breathy like someone who'd just sprinted a mile.

"Hello, Natalie. How long has it been? Last year?" He asked, his green eyes studying her.

"Two years ago, sir," she replied politely.

"Oh," Roy was taken aback. "How quickly time flies."

"Indeed," said David, Natalie's father, gesturing to the chair. "The kids grow up so fast these days. What are the both of you waiting for? Sit already."

Natalie and Principal Jameson slid into their seats, directly opposite David Avax and his wife, Kate. At once, uniformed waiters approached them and began to serve the first course: rosemary butter scallops, a bowl of pumpkin soup with smoked cream for Jameson, and grilled seabass fillet with a side of truffle risotto for Natalie.

"I saw your interview," Kate said to her, slicing through the silence like one of the steak knives on the table. "You did well."

Natalie's fingers tensed slightly against her napkin. She didn't look at her when she said, "Thank you."

And that was all. There was no warmth, nor any follow-up to her words.

David let out a dry chuckle. "That's more than you've said to your mother in two years."

President Roy, already lifting his glass, paused mid-air. "Two years?" he asked, clearly surprised.

Kate let out a small laugh. "Natalie hardly comes home. When school closes, she sails off to wherever she pleases, anywhere but home."

Natalie picked up her water glass and took a slow sip. This? All of this? It was her nightmare come to life.

"I've seen them most of my life," she said casually, setting the glass down. "I'd like to explore the rest of the world now."

That earned a genuine chuckle from the president.

"Well, I won't fault her for that one. I was just like you when I was younger, always on the move. Well, until I met my wife."

Everyone burst into laughter at the joke.

Everyone except Natalie. She just folded her hands in her lap, expression unreadable, and waited for the real conversation to start.

Or maybe, she could take the bull by the horn since everyone was dancing around it.

"I guess I should thank you for the new position." She said straight to president Roy.

President Roy wiped his mouth with his napkin and dropped it on the table.

"I hope you understand the importance of your new role," he began, his tone almost grandfatherly. "You're not just a House Leader. You're the eyes and ears of our people in that Academy."

Natalie lifted her brow. "So I'm a spy."

He spread his hands. "I want you to observe. To ensure that school doesn't become a breeding ground for werewolf supremacy. We're simply balancing the scales."

"That's rich," Natalie muttered, stabbing into her food with more aggression than necessary. "We're the ones who pushed ourselves into their centuries-old academy. That school didn't beg for human students, we barged in."

"Natalie!" David cautioned her, but President Roy lifted a hand, stopping him.

President Roy's smile didn't waver.

"Idealism is a luxury, Natalie. I need pragmatists. Dorminia thrives on balance. And right now, the board needs a human voice it can trust."

"So you picked the girl who didn't ask for this and shoved her in front of a firing squad," Natalie said flatly. "And I'm supposed to play nice while the wolves stare at me like I stole their kingdom."

Jameson cut in. "You're not a placeholder, Natalie. You're a symbol. The Fifth House represents a new Chapter for Lunaris Academy, one where humans aren't just tolerated but given their rightful seat at the table."

She set her fork down. "And what if I don't?"

"Then someone else will," her father said, unapologetically. "They won't be as smart as you, sure, but they'll get the job done. With or without the Avax name."

The point was made.

Natalie rose from her seat with a controlled grace, folding her napkin and placing it beside her plate.

"If you'll excuse me," she said, offering no further explanation.

No one stopped her. Jameson glanced up briefly, but David didn't blink. President Roy continued to swirl his wine while Kate watched her like a hawk.

Natalie exited the dining room with even steps, but the moment she turned the corner into the marble-tiled hallway, her control broke. She rushed into the restroom instead.

Inside, Natalie turned on the tap, cupped cold water in her palms, and splashed it over her face. Her breath hitched slightly as she stared at her reflection in the mirror.

Among many reasons, this was why she stayed away from home. She didn't want to be pulled into this mess of politics, and power dinners.

She reached for a towel and was still dabbing the water off her face when the soft creak of the restroom door opening caught her ear.

She looked at the mirror and her entire body stiffened.

It was Kate.

The woman stepped inside slowly and without breaking eye contact reached back to twist the lock shut with a soft click that sounded like a gunshot in the silence.

"Hello, Natalie," Kate turned, a wolfish gleam in her eyes.

Goosebumps lifted on Natalie's spine like a row of tiny knives and she dropped the towel slowly. Her reflection was no longer calm, but alert like a cornered animal.

Chapter 440: Forbidden Secret

Natalie was as still as a tree. No, she wasn't even breathing at this point as Kate approached her.

"You don't seem to be excited to see me after all this time," Kate said with a mean moue, obviously disappointed by her attitude.

"But don't worry," she said, "I missed you."

Then she cupped Natalie's face and kissed her. It wasn't a simple and chaste kiss that was exchanged during greetings. No, it was a full-blown kiss with tongue.

Natalie did not respond. She was just frozen on the spot as the woman took the pleasure she needed from her. Even when Kate sensed she wasn't being responsive, she didn't stop. Instead, she moaned, pressing herself further against her body, trying to turn her on.

By some will, she managed to push her away. "I-I don't want to," Natalie stammered, the usual confidence she was known for, gone.

"Why?" Kate's eyes flashed with annoyance. "Don't you want me anymore?"

She wanted to yell at Kate. To scream at her. Perhaps even punch her face. But for some reason, she couldn't. All she managed to mutter was, "This is wrong."

At least she knew now. No, for a while. But it had taken her time to get over her. To realize that her stepmother had groomed her for life.

Natalie's mother died when she was ten. Then just a few months along the line, her father had married Kate. And yes, him remarrying was her fault.

After her mother's death, she had been a little difficult. Always crying and throwing tantrums at her father. But she was a little child who had lost her mother and wanted a little attention from her father. But he was never there. Work came first for David, above every other thing.

So after a terrible fight with her father one night, with her demanding for her mother, David made her wish come true. He married Kate.

Of course, she had never liked Kate and made things difficult for her. But her father's second wife was patient and incredibly great with kids. It wasn't long before Natalie warmed up to her and they became best of friends.

Finally, things were better again, or so Natalie thought.

It had begun with chaste kisses on the cheeks and then on the lips. Then one day, she kissed her fully on the lips. It left her stunned and befuddled. But Kate had smiled and told her, "Remember, I love you best."

Her younger self had not thought much about it even though it felt weird. Moreover, her relationship with her father was distant and practically non-existent. Even as a kid, deep down, her younger self knew it was wrong and never mentioned it to her friends. Only Kate loved her. What if Kate got in trouble because of what she said? She'd have no one else by her side.

Kate did not kiss her like that again until months later. This time when Kate kissed her, she introduced the tongue, saying, "This is how you should kiss a guy..." She winked at her. "...or a girl in the future. Mummy is just giving you a headstart."

This time, curiosity played a role. What more tips could Kate give her? Just like that, she began to enjoy the kisses a little too much. Kate was good at the games she played because the kisses did not come as often. Like a junkie on adrenaline, she sought it out and was practically overjoyed any day Kate did her the favors.

On her thirteenth birthday, Kate had decided on a private birthday for her. That night on Avax's cruise ship, Kate had narrated to her how much she wanted a child. But David didn't want any: Natalie was enough for him.

"I always wondered how it'd feel to have a child suckle on my breast..." Kate had said, squeezing her bosom.

Kate was so pretty she could have made a career out of modeling. As a brunette with shiny, wavy locks, she had an hourglass shape, legs that went on forever, and a perfectly sculpted backside. She was a beauty. It was not a wonder David had married an eye-doll he could show off during formal events.

"Come, Natalie..." she cajoled her. "Come be my baby."

Natalie came along like a baited fish. She couldn't help but be intrigued by the size of it, totally unlike her growing ones.

"Touch it..." Kate said.

She touched it.

It felt weird but good. Like a soft, warm pillow, but alive.

"Taste it..." she commanded.

She tasted it.

The sound that had left Kate's mouth the moment her lips made contact felt oddly satisfying. She loved the way her head lulled back. The pleasure on her face. She liked that she liked it. Natalie went on to pleasure the only woman who loved her.

That was also the first night Kate went down on her. It felt like nothing like never before.

By the time Kate was done, she had kissed her—one of the best parts of their lessons.

"You realize you cannot tell anyone about this?" Kate told her.

This was wrong. Thirteen-year-old Natalie knew that deep down, but it also felt good. She liked the feeling.

"Okay," she said.

"Promise me!" Kate barked.

"I promise!"

"Till the day you die, you cannot tell Daddy, your friends at school! No one at all! If you even let out even a whisper, then Mummy would be gone. Do you want to lose me just as you lost your first Mummy?"

Natalie shook her head frantically. Then she promised. "I swear it! I will not tell anybody."

"Good girl," Kate said and rewarded her with a kiss.

She pulled back and whispered, "Happy birthday to you, Natalie. Always remember, Mummy loves you best."

Natalie smiled back at her.

And that marked the beginning of their forbidden relationship. One that went on till Natalie realized how messed up and broken she was.