

Defy 461

Chapter 461: Stirring Bond

Roman's hand flexed where it pressed to the mat, his knuckles whitening.

"Roman," Violet said, her breath catching.

"What?" he rasped with a rough voice. "I'm playing the game."

Liar.

"Left hand, yellow." Asher announced.

Violet reached across the mat and instantly regretted it. The stretch pulled her forward, leaving her no choice but to arch her back, and that gave Griffin a full view down her neckline.

His breath hit her seconds later brushing over her chest hot and slowly, causing her nipples to harden beneath the thin fabric. Goosebumps spread like a wildfire along her arms, and Violet bit down a sound that wasn't a laugh.

Goddess help her.

"Right foot, red." Asher called.

Violet tried to shift, but he was already ahead of her. Alaric was pressed against her side, his arm braced beside her waist, and thigh flush with hers. His face was angled down while his lips was dangerously close to her neck, and the tension in his jaw said he was seconds from sinking his teeth in.

Violet tried to move, but everywhere was too tight, too hot, and too much. She was surrounded on all sides with Roman behind her, eyes on her thighs; Griffin above, breath on her chest; Alaric beside her, radiating heat like a fire pressed too close; and the slow, ravenous burn in her stomach that was quickly getting out of control.

Her thighs clenched on instinct while her breathing stuttered. Gods, she was getting wet. Again.

"You're shaking," Asher pointed out, his gaze catching hers. He was standing above them with the spinner in hand.

"I'm fine," Violet lied.

Asher simply raised a brow, then smirked in anticipation for the next move.

Violet in question did not know who would fall first. Was it Roman, who kept inching closer with a hunger in his eyes; Griffin, whose gaze was glued to her breasts; or Alaric, who looked like he was two seconds from pulling her into his lap and saying fuck the game; or her, who was so worked up, she was ready to drag one of them, if not all of them, straight to a corner and let them do naughty things to her.

"Left foot, green." Asher called again and everyone moved. Except it was obvious the game had reached its limit with the way they were all twisted around Violet like a human knot.

Just a slip of her leg and Violet collapsed straight into Roman, dragging Alaric down with her. In the scramble, Alaric tripped over Griffin, who ended up crashing on top of them, but not before shielding Violet with his body, his arm snapping out just in time. Griffin, in turn, adjusted his weight mid-fall, clearly realizing what was about to happen.

Still, in the end, they all dropped together in a pile of bodies breathing hard, their muscles aching and skin flushed with heat.

And there she was, flat on her back, dress rumpled, hair wild, and her men trying not to crush her with their weight. Had anyone told her this was how her night would end? Violet wouldn't have believed it.

Laughter burst out of her mouth, genuine and uncontrollable. "You're all assholes."

And just like that, Alaric, Roman and Griffin crackled with wild laughter that reverberated across the garden.

While they were still laughing, Asher used his foot to nudge the others aside, clearing a path to reach Violet. But Roman wasn't having it. He stuck out a leg and tripped him, sending Asher crashing straight into Griffin, missing his face by mere inches.

Asher growled in frustration, but before he could retaliate, Violet reached out and pulled him to her side, hence displacing Roman in the process and leaving her sandwiched between Asher and Alaric.

"See? Isn't this nice?" Violet said, referencing the open sky above them. There weren't any stars visible, not with all the string lights overhead, but the moon was out tonight, round and bright in its waxing gibbous glory. The whole moment felt perfect and right.

Except Roman didn't like being left out. He kept inching closer, trying to reclaim his spot.

"Stop it, Roman." She chided him.

He froze instantly, his expression falling into a dramatic pout. Violet wasn't really mad, but the guy needed to learn. Sometimes she wondered if the goddess had handed her a needy child to raise in the name of a potential mate.

Shaking her head, Violet rose to her feet. "I'm hungry."

She made her way to the table Griffin had decked out in mouth-watering dishes, picking out her favorites before settling on the couch. The others except the green menace had drifted to one corner with their heads bent close, whispering like they were plotting something.

Violet was mid-crunch on a spring roll when the green menace aka Roman appeared in her line of sight, his eyes wide and pitiful.

"What is it this time?" she asked, tossing another snack into her mouth.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled, looking like a kicked puppy.

Violet sighed. "That's the problem, Roman. You're always sorry, but you never learn."

"I know, I'm sorry for that too." He kicked at the ground like a guilty schoolboy. "I just... I can't help it. I always want to be close to you."

Violet nearly rolled her eyes at the dramatics, but something in those words made her pause. Was the Matebond stirring? Or was this his animal side? What even was the difference?

Still, she couldn't stay mad at him. "Come here."

Roman didn't need to be told twice. He dropped his full weight onto her lap, sprawling with satisfaction. Violet ran her fingers through his hair that was soft and thick and addictively silky. Roman let out a low, contented growl and closed his eyes.

It was a moment just for the two of them.

Until the others returned.

She arched a brow as they stood before her. Alaric was the first to speak.

"We've got a game everyone can join, and no one gets to back out."

Violet looked at him, intrigued.

He grinned. "What do you say we play spin the bottle—truth or dare?"

Chapter 462: West Vs South

There was a wicked twist to their version of Truth or Dare: the spinner got to choose the punishment, whether the chosen picked truth or dare. With werewolves able to sniff out lies, there was no such thing as a safe option.

That little tweak made the game far less predictable and far more dangerous. Hence a thrilling tension buzzed in the air, the kind that promised someone was about to get wrecked.

Alaric might have been the one to announce the game, but Roman was the one who enthusiastically set everything up. Violet swore she'd never seen him move that fast in his life.

In the blink of an eye, all five of them were seated in a circle on the mat, a glass bottle resting temptingly in the center. Everyone looked excited — everyone except Griffin, who had a large bowl of snacks on his lap and was nonchalantly munching on chips. Usually, people said a woman who could eat was sexy, but in this case, it was the other way around. Griffin Hale eating was as sexy as hell.

"So, who's going to spin first?" Alaric asked, his gaze bouncing around the circle.

"I will!" Roman jumped in, already reaching for the bottle only for Asher to snatch it first, his grip firm.

Roman blinked in surprise, his brows raised questioningly.

"I'll go first," Asher said with a tone of finality.

Violet and Alaric exchanged a look, both noting the sudden spike in tension between the two men but wisely said nothing.

With a look of pure concentration, Asher crouched forward and flicked his wrist. The bottle spun fast and everyone leaned in as it whirled, tension saturating the air until it finally slowed and stopped on Roman.

Of course.

Roman threw both hands in the air. "As if that wasn't calculated at all." He sneered.

Asher didn't bother to argue, asking straight away, his gaze razor-sharp. "Truth or dare?"

Roman scoffed. "Obviously dare." He met Asher's eyes with a challenge. Picking truth would've been seen as weak and he was many things, but never a coward.

"Then I dare you..." Asher drawled slowly as if savoring every second of it, "to kiss Violet passionately for two minutes without touching her."

Griffin's chewing slowed. Oh boy.

Then Asher added, voice edged with wicked satisfaction, "If you fail, you don't get to climb into her bed for two nights."

The effect was immediate.

Roman's confidence evaporated like mist under sunlight while his mouth fell open slightly, then snapped shut. Violet was rendered speechless while Alaric burst into laughter so hard he nearly toppled over, slapping his thigh and stomping the mat.

Griffin, still chewing, gave a loud hoot. "Oooh, brutal," he said through a mouthful of chips. "That's gonna hurt."

They all knew what this was. Asher was finally having his revenge on Roman, and the dare was a cruel one. Everyone knew Roman couldn't keep his hands off while kissing. This was going to be a torturous one for him.

"Fine," Roman said through gritted teeth.

Asher's smirk widened. "Clock starts when your lips touch hers."

Roman was already seated close to Violet, so he didn't need to move. All he did was turn to her and Violet swallowed hard at the burning intensity in his eyes. The desire to win was written all over his face.

Then he leaned in slowly, and Violet met him halfway. Their lips brushed once, light, and teasing before pressing more firmly together.

Unlike Violet, who closed her eyes, Roman kept his wide open. He knew the moment he let himself get lost in this kiss, he'd fail Asher's wicked little test. So he focused on the feel of her lips, soft and maddening, and the faint taste of alcohol clinging to her tongue.

What he refused to focus on was the overwhelming temptation to clasp her face and kiss her deeper and rougher, the way he craved. Or the way his hands itched to roam down her sides, squeeze those two perfect breasts her Fae mama had so generously blessed her with. Or better yet, haul her onto his lap and worship every inch of that dangerously perfect backside.

But he didn't. Instead, Roman balled his hands into fists and held them stiffly at his sides, breathing through the growing ache in his body because right now, this was a fight he intended to win.

However, it wasn't so bad. Roman concentrated on sucking her lower lip like he meant to leave a claim until the sound of clapping interrupted them from behind.

"Bravo," Alaric cheered, clearly enjoying the show.

"Time's up!" Griffin announced, tossing a handful of popcorn in Roman's direction.

Roman pulled back with a wet pop, licking his lips like he'd just tasted victory. He turned his head slowly, locking eyes with Asher. The look he gave him was a smug smirk mixed with a dark promise. It would be Asher's turn soon and he'd ensure he felt it.

"So," Violet breathed, catching herself, "who's next?"

"Let's go clockwise," Griffin said, still munching.

And that put Alaric next.

He spun the bottle and it whirled and slowed before landing on Violet.

A chorus of whistles came from the rest of them. Clearly, Alaric had won the jackpot.

"Truth or dare?" he asked, already looking excited.

"Truth," Violet said, lifting her chin. It wasn't that she was afraid of a dare but she figured everyone else would go for dares and wanted to stir things up a little.

Alaric looked quite pleased with her choice. "Alright then," he said, "How do you feel about sleeping with all four of us at the same time? Are you actually comfortable with a fivesome?"

"No punishment?" Violet noted.

"Don't worry, I know you won't lie, or forfeit." He sounded confident.

Indeed, she didn't.

"Actually, about that..." Violet began, and the boys waited in anticipation.

Then she smirked. "I don't mind at all."

They exhaled at once before proud

grins spread across their faces. Roman's in particular looked smug enough to light the whole garden on fire. Clearly, whatever wicked plan he had brewing was still on track.

And as fate would have it, it was his turn to spin.

Roman didn't take his eyes off Asher as he reached for the bottle. The message was clear: this one's for you.

Except the bottle landed on Violet. Again.

"Seriously?" Violet threw up a hand, already sensing the storm brewing behind Roman's devious smile. She didn't want to be dragged into this ongoing alpha showdown, but the gods clearly had no intention of sparing her.

"Truth or dare?" Roman asked sweetly. Quite too sweet.

Violet hesitated. She knew better than to pick dare because Roman was unhinged with creativity. But truth didn't feel any safer either.

"Truth," she said finally, going with the lesser evil.

Roman grinned like the devil himself. "Between Asher and me, who's the better kisser?"

Oh, that little bastard.

Violet stared at him, mouth parted in disbelief.

"And the punishment..."

Chapter 463: Be Roman

"And your punishment is..." Roman paused, dramatically dragging the moment out, his eyes glinting mischievously as everyone waited for the verdict.

"No punishment at all,"

"Huh?" Everyone was surprised, Violet in particular.

She blinked, thrown off balance. That was definitely not what she'd been expecting.

But her gaze suddenly narrowed at him, questioning his intention.

Roman simply shrugged, his mouth curving into a crooked smile. "I'm petty, yeah, but you also told me to grow up. So you can decide to answer or not."

Violet stared at him, speechless. Of all the things Roman could've said, that had not been on her bingo card, not even in a thousand years.

And just like that, a proud feeling bloomed in her chest.

Her baby was growing up.

"I'll answer," Violet said, stunning everyone. They had thought she'd evade the question now that Roman had given her the option. Nonetheless, none of them objected and let her do her thing. Asher didn't even let the emotion show on his face.

"You know, I really like the way you kiss me, Roman." Violet confessed and that got everyone's attention.

"You're just so playful with it," she continued, her fingers curling slightly on her lap. "There's this confidence in you, like you know you're good at it and want to make damn sure I enjoy every second. And I do. Every time. It's like..." She bit her lower lip, her cheeks flushing. "Like tasting sunshine on my lips."

Roman sat up straighter, his grin already expanding.

"You're so damn unpredictable sometimes," Violet added, laughing lightly. "I never know what you're about to do next and then your tongue..." Her voice trailed off as her blush deepened. "It just works like magic inside my mouth."

By the time she was done, Roman looked like a man who had already declared victory. His expression screamed self-crowned champion of kisses with his chin tilted. He looked smug and all too proud.

But then Violet turned her head, locking eyes with Asher. "And I like the way Asher kisses me too."

Roman's face twitched.

"Asher's got this possessive, dark edge about him," Violet said, her voice a little lower, almost like a confession. "It makes my heart race and my stomach flip before our lips even touch. And then when we do kiss..." She exhaled, visibly affected just by the memory. "It feels like he wants to consume me whole. Like I'll never belong to anyone else. And maybe I shouldn't admit this, but when he gets rough with me out of nowhere? It kind of turns me on."

That one hit like a bomb.

Alaric and Griffin burst into hoots and cheers, their laughter loud, and Asher, who had been stone-faced until now, allowed a slow grin to spread across his face.

Although Violet was blushing like an overripe tomato, she was far from done.

"And then there's Alaric," she went on, turning to him. "Kissing him feels like life itself. Like I've stepped into another universe where nothing else matters. And then, when he sends that lightning through my veins—" she paused, smirking at Alaric's rapidly reddening ears, "—it's like I explode into a thousand pieces. And it's sexy as hell.

Not to mention, I think I have a kink for his Adam's apple. I just can't help but want to graze my teeth over it all the time."

This time it was Alaric's turn to look away, pretending to rub at his jaw while the others whistled and laughed.

Then she faced Griffin.

"And Griffin's kisses..." she said softly, almost reverently, "are so sweet, they make me want more. When he kisses me, I feel taken care of... safe. Until he switches things up and reminds me he could break me in half if he wanted, and the scary part is—I'd let him."

Griffin, blushing like an actual virgin, groaned and dragged a palm down his face. "God," he muttered.

Roman laughed so hard he almost doubled over. "That was so damn cute," he said between chuckles.

"You'll be the death of us, won't you?" Asher commented, enjoying the moment.

Alaric cleared his throat, his composure still shaken by her confession. "It's your turn to spin, trouble."

"Oh." Violet clapped with excitement.

Without missing a beat, she reached for the bottle and gave it a dramatic spin. The glossy surface caught the garden lights as it whirled in dizzy circles, tension building with every turn until it finally slowed and pointed.

"Alaric Storm," Violet announced sweetly, "Truth or dare?"

"Dare." Alaric's voice was cocky, as if he could handle whatever Violet threw his way.

Violet didn't hesitate. "I dare you to flirt with Roman for five whole minutes."

The effect was instant.

Griffin choked on his water and spat it across the grass. Asher let out a full-bodied laugh, his shoulders shaking from the force of it.

Alaric face-palmed, unable to believe Violet set him up with that while Roman looked personally attacked.

"Really, Violet?" he deadpanned, scandalized. "Really?"

"Sorry, but it's a game." Violet replied in between laughter.

Alaric was serious about the game and turned to face Roman who already was beside him.

"Don't do it." Roman shook his head.

Alaric said. "What do you mean by that, baby? I've got five minutes to ruin your life, but I only need one."

Violet howled with laughter. This was better than she thought. And so did Griffin and Asher who were more composed than her.

Roman begged. "Don't traumatize me, Alaric."

But Alaric had already entered his character.

"You know," He began with a sultry tone. "your pheromones have me in a chokehold. I'm fairly certain it's a biological crime to smell that good and not share."

"Oh my God," Roman whispered with dread. "Don't bring science into this."

Unfortunately, that was exactly Alaric's forte and he was just getting started.

"But I must," Alaric continued, touching his thigh now, "because clearly, you're composed of ninety percent temptation, ten percent terrible decisions, and all of it highly reactive."

His hand trailed higher, purring. "If I had to describe you using chemical bonds, I'd say you're ionic. Because the moment you enter a room, I lose my electrons, and control."

Griffin wheezed while Violet doubled over, breathless with laughter. Asher was embarrassed, Alaric was terrible. But that didn't mean he didn't enjoy Roman's situation. If he could later, he would reward Violet for this.

Roman's face was buried in his hands. He couldn't do this anymore.

But Alaric was far from done.

"You're like Schrödinger's cat," he added smoothly, "because just looking at you has me questioning reality. Are you chaos or salvation? A paradox I'm dying to open."

Roman muttered. "For the love of Newton, you should give up at this point."

Griffin fell on his back laughing.

Alaric reached out and grabbed Roman's jaw. "I could write sonnets about your bone structure, paint murals of your smirk and model physics equations around that jawline. You're not just pretty, Roman... You're theoretically devastating."

Roman backed up, eyes wide. "I will sue you for emotional damage."

"I bet your love language is entropy," Alaric said, licking his lips. "Beautiful, destructive and absolutely unavoidable."

Griffin howled.

Violet wiped tears from her cheeks, gasping. "I... I can't even... that was—Alaric—damn!"

"I'm scared," Roman muttered.

"You should be," Alaric whispered, mock-sultry. "I haven't even gotten to the astrophysics metaphors yet."

Roman at once scooted away from him. Alaric has lost his god damn mind.

"Don't run from your feelings, babe," Alaric called after him. "We could've had something real."

This time around, not even the actor, Alaric could escape the infectious laughter that rocked the garden.

"We are never doing that again," Roman warned, showing off his arms. "I even have goosebumps from that terrible flirting."

"It was good though." Violet said, feeling damn proud of the little monster she was.

"Yes," Griffin concurred, wiping a tear from his eye. "Best dare ever. And it's my turn."

Griffin spun the bottle and it landed on Asher.

"Ooh." Violet said, waiting in anticipation for this one.

"Truth or dare?" Griffin asked.

"Truth," Asher said, surprising everyone. It seemed someone didn't want to be dragged into one of their insane dares.

Griffin said. "If you had to swap places with another Cardinal Alpha, who would it be and why?"

He raised a hand quickly, adding, "It can't be me, obviously. I'm Violet's mate."

Everyone chuckled at that, but all eyes were on Asher now.

He wore a thoughtful expression, his jaw tight, and eyes distant for a moment. Then he answered calmly and with certainty.

"Roman Draven."

"Huh?" Roman was stunned. "Me?"

Asher didn't hesitate. "It must feel so good not having the weight of the world on your shoulders. Not having a father who hates your guts but still expects nothing less than perfection. Must be nice to be loved by everyone without needing to earn it. To laugh easily. To be carefree in a world that never lets up. Must be real good to just turn into a damn bird and fly away from your problems. Yeah," he finished, his voice husky with emotion, "how good that must feel."

Chapter 464: Please Me

And just like that, the mood was killed.

No one spoke. Not when the moment demanded silence.

Asher's words had come from a place that was too raw to ignore and too honest to brush off. And once again, Violet felt her heart bleed for him. To imagine the horrors he'd endured at the hands of Henry made her veins pulse with so much fury. One day, Henry would get exactly what he deserved.

Violet had half a mind to stand and hug Asher, to show him something real, and that she was with him.. But before she could so much as move, Roman spoke.

"Oh, you think I have it easy?"

"I don't think that's what—" Violet tried to cut in, but Roman wasn't done.

"If that's the case, why don't you try growing up with parents who care more about themselves than their own damn son? Do you know what it feels like to be the screw-up of the Cardinal Alphas?"

"I didn't say you're useless," Asher shot back.

Roman snorted bitterly. "You're the perfect strategist with powers that could mess up the mind of anyone who crosses you. Alaric's a lightning-wielding genius who probably invent stuff even while asleep. While Griffin is hella strong and mated to Violet."

Griffin raised his hand lazily. "I'm lucky to be mated to Violet, sure. But let's not act like that's solved everything. Not everyone is into the whole strong, macho guy," He didn't have to say her name, they all knew he was talking about Elsie.

Alaric spoke up as well. "My powers get out of control sometimes and I have to wear gloves so I don't kill anyone by accident. My parents love me for what I can give them, not who I am. So yeah, you can go... oh—" he added immediately, remembering. "And yes, my mother also hates Violet's ass and is probably planning to marry me off to a distant cousin." He finished, prompting silence as everyone realized how messed up his situation was.

Roman's shoulders sagged, some of that fight draining from his face. He let out a deep breath. "All I'm saying is, I don't deserve to be envied. After all, all I can do is turn into some bunch of animals—but we can all pretty much do that with our wolves. Not to mention, I couldn't even help when Violet was kidnapped. So yeah, it's pretty much like a slap in the face when you say you want to be me."

Violet took his hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. "Asher doesn't mean it as an insult. And like you just heard, no one has it perfect. And who says you're useless? You are not at all. You have your strengths and your weaknesses, and I like you just the way you are. Matebond or not, you're mine, Roman Draven." She gazed at them to punctuate her point. "All of you."

For a moment, there was silence as Violet's words seemed to penetrate into their hearts like Cupid's arrow.

Then Asher cleared his throat. "Alright. Group therapy over. It's my damn turn." he said gruffly, snapping everyone out of it.

Asher spun the bottle and it twirled, only to land on... Griffin Hale.

Griffin burst into laughter. "Dude, you have to teach me how you're doing this."

But Asher only shrugged with a lopsided smile and went straight to business. "Truth or dare?"

"Truth."

Asher asked, "How does it feel to finally be able to mindlink with your wolf and pack?"

And that was finally a question that got all three of the alphas turning toward Griffin with matching looks of curiosity. Even Violet couldn't help it either. She knew that the inability to mindlink had always been the price they paid for wielding powers that were never meant to be theirs.

"It's amazing," Griffin explained reverently. "Like a feeling of completion, almost like the Matebond, but different. I've always belonged to my people, but now it's like I'm finally part of the inner circle. Like I completed the rite to truly be one of them. I don't just hear them, I feel them, their needs, their fears, their care when they let me in. And I understand the responsibility on my shoulders now, the things I need to do to make sure they're safe and satisfied."

"As for the link between my wolf and me, it's still a work in progress. For starters, I have to differentiate the voice of my wolf from the beast. It's a nice surprise that he's not as aggressive as my alter ego. Maybe it's years of suppressed communication, but he's not much of a talker either and I haven't picked a name for him yet. Still, it's like he's an extension of me, just in animal form with his own unique personality. And yeah, I'm excited to get to know him better. So yes, it feels absolutely good."

By the time Griffin was done, the boys were impressed, but there was no hiding the flicker of envy either.

The mindlink had come as a result of mating with her. And Violet was pretty much determined to bond with the others too — even if she had to force the hand of the goddess herself.

"My turn," Alaric said eagerly, picking up the bottle and giving it a spin. It twirled in place before finally stopping on...

"No way!" Violet shouted in disbelief when the bottle landed on her again. "Not me again. This can't be a coincidence anymore. I call foul! There's got to be something you guys are doing that I don't know about!"

Alaric burst into laughter. Her reaction was so over-the-top it was comical. Nonetheless, he asked, "Truth or dare?"

Perhaps because she was already worked up, Violet felt bold. "Dare," she answered without hesitation.

For a second, it looked like Alaric was nervous. But then his expression hardened and he said, "I dare you to let us take care of you."

That was putting it mildly, but Violet understood what he meant. And not just her. The others did too, because silence fell like a blanket over the group. The only sounds left were the music on autoplay drifting from the speakers, the distant chirping of insects, and Violet's own pounding heartbeat.

All eyes were on her, waiting.

Violet leaned back on her palms and cocked a slow smile. "Sure, go on..." she said, spreading her legs just slightly. "Please me."

Chapter 465: Cry For Mercy

There was a shift in the air at once, and Violet didn't miss the way their gazes darkened, each of them staring at the way she'd spread her legs like an invitation.

The outdoor breeze was no longer enough because the temperature had spiked, and though none of them had even laid a hand on her, Violet could already feel tingles racing across her skin.

Even without the dare, the night had been bound to end like this. That had been her intention, after all.

"Fuck it, I'm game." And that single announcement from Roman was all it took to stir the other Alphas into action.

Someone kicked the bottle out of the way, and Asher's commanding voice came next.

"Lay down in the middle of the mat, baby girl."

Violet didn't even know how she managed to walk since her legs suddenly felt like jelly, but she moved as instructed, lowering herself onto the ground, her body trembling with anticipation.

She suddenly felt like a sacrifice.

The Alphas were hovering around her, and it made her pulse race faster, unsure of what they were planning.

"I have an idea," Alaric said.

"I have a million ideas in my head and none of them are patient," Roman countered.

Then Griffin grabbed her dress and tore it from the hem straight up the center, drawing a startled gasp from her lips. He didn't let up, shredding the fabric until it hung in tatters on her body, leaving Violet in nothing but her underwear.

"I think I'll do the honors this time," Alaric said with a wicked smile, a single claw jutting out from his finger. Violet's heart pounded at the sight of it.

With that sharp claw, he sliced through one bra strap, then the other. But before pulling the ruined bra away, his finger slid beneath the cup, his claw grazing her nipple ever so slightly, and sparked a sensation that made her jolt.

"Alaric!" Violet gasped at the sly move, but he only grinned, tugging the bra free with no remorse.

Before she could recover, someone ripped her panties clean off. Her head jerked in the direction of the culprit and it was Roman. He lifted the black lingerie to his nose and inhaled deeply like it was a drug.

There was something utterly wild in the way his eyes darkened, like his wolf had surfaced and was staring straight at her. Its look was ravenous. She swallowed.

Now, Violet was completely bare to them, their gazes burning into her skin so hotly she had to clench her thighs together as the heat pooled between them. The anticipation was killing her.

Then Asher, who was positioned beside her head, moved and Violet jolted when something cold and sticky touched her skin.

Cream.

Asher was spreading cream on her nipples like she was some decadent dessert.

"You look delectable, you know that, baby girl?" he said, heat smoldering in his gaze so much that Violet had to bite back a moan. God, she wanted him already.

By the time Asher was done rubbing cream onto her other breast, he sat back with a satisfied grin.

"Someone better tell me how that tastes."

Alaric moved without hesitation, his hands cupping both of her breasts like he was testing their weight. Then he dipped his head, licking a slow circle around her areola making shivers shoot down her spine.

Violet groaned, her nipples straining for more of that tongue. But Alaric took his sweet time licking, kissing, teasing the soft curves before finally pulling one into his mouth, taking her nipple with it.

She cried out, her back arching off the mat in a rush of sensation only to be pinned back down. Someone had grabbed her wrists and held them above her head.

Still, Alaric didn't stop. He kept licking, sucking, swirling his tongue with so much focused attention that Violet was left writhing beneath him, her body desperate for more.

Then Alaric shifted to the other breast, licking the cream off with such vigour it was as if she were his favorite treat. Violet groaned, gasping at the shocking rush of sensation that jolted through her nerves. And to think this was just the beginning.

While Alaric grazed her nipple with his teeth, someone moved between her legs and that alarmed her.

No, wait! Violet was about to protest. She could only take so much stimulation at once. But when she lifted her head, she saw who it was.

Roman Draven.

And then the whole of his mouth covered her.

Holy creator of the universe.

Violet's eyes widened to the size of the moon, a wild moan escaping her lips as his tongue ran the full length of her. There was no hesitation on his part. He went straight for her clit, drawing it into his mouth and feasting like a man starved of every pleasure.

Violet was screaming now, mumbling incoherently as the sensations threatened to rip her apart. There was so much a girl could take and this was too much.

Alaric was biting one nipple while rolling and pinching the other with his thumb. Roman was eating her out like he lived for it. Griffin — gods, Griffin — was pressing kisses to every bare inch of her skin he could reach, slowly branding his affection along her sides, her thighs, her belly.

And then, there was Asher.

"You like this, don't you..." His voice was low and right by her ear, the warmth of his breath creating goosebumps along her neck. "You like how we treat your body. How we handle every inch of you." His voice deepened. "You're greedy for our touch. Even now, you're wondering what it would feel like to have us inside you."

"Fuck!" Violet cursed, unable to stop the visuals forming in her head. It was of Asher finally taking her, bending her in submission, using her body exactly the way he wanted.

The thought alone made her walls clench.

And Roman... God, that guy was so damn good with his mouth that his next stroke sent her hurtling straight into that natural high. Then Alaric bit her again and Violet tumbled over the edge she'd been desperately balancing on.

But Roman didn't let up.

He grabbed her thighs tightly till his fingers were digging into her and kept teasing her through the orgasm, unrelenting, even slipping a finger inside her and drawing out a second, then a third, until Violet was trembling, gasping, and pleading for mercy.

Chapter 466: Take Your Pleasure

Violet Purple was on the floor heaving, her chest rising and falling in tandem. That had been nothing short of amazing. She felt so good she could literally die from happiness.

But her men were never short of creativity, because before she could fully catch her breath, Griffin reached for her and lifted her off her feet. He carried her effortlessly to the couch and sat down, settling her to straddle him. That was when she realized he was naked.

Then Griffin shifted her hips over his throbbing length and eased into her. Violet gasped, mouth open, as he filled her inch by glorious fucking inch until he was buried to the hilt. Griffin groaned with pure need, her channel gripping him so tightly it was as if her body refused to let him go.

"Oh my God!" Violet cried out, her nails digging into his shoulders. From this angle, he stretched her so good it hurt deliciously.

"You feel that, don't you?" Griffin rumbled, his voice deep and gruff, arms locked tight around her waist and eyes darkened with lust.

"Yes, I feel that—fuck...." Violet was still speaking when Griffin slapped her ass, drawing a sharp yelp from her lips. The sting only aroused her more, a jolt of lightning tearing through her spine as her body clenched tighter around him. She was so sensitive, every nerve on fire.

"Please?" she begged, breathless, even as her eyes searched for her other mates.

"Yes," Griffin growled, voice thick with heat. "Go on, take what you want, little mate."

Violet began to ride him, and God, it was the best feeling in the world. At first, she rocked her hips as hard as she could, each movement sending ripples of ecstasy up her spine. Her breath came in soft, surprised gasps that echoed through the garden like music.

Then Griffin's lips brushed her ear, his voice low and molten. "Go harder, love. I'm yours to use."

His words sparked a fire inside her, and Violet began to bounce on his dick, letting the motion completely consume her. She couldn't stop moaning. Thinking had long left her, and all she could feel was the ecstatic, overwhelming sensation of Griffin inside of her.

His eyes were fixed on her, watching her own her pleasure with so much adoration it could make one weep. Her head was thrown back, eyes shut, lips parted, chest heaving and breasts thrust forward as the familiar fire of pleasure built up inside her.

When Griffin moved his hand to her breast, squeezing with tenacity, the pleasure-laced pain shattered her. Violet roared his name as she came undone, her body shuddering as she broke into a million pieces.

"Yes, God." Griffin groaned as he stiffened.

Violet felt his release spill inside her, hot and sticky. Then she collapsed against him in a sweaty, breathless mess, holding him like she'd die if she let go. She kissed him hungrily, their lips moving in sync, and their tongues tangling.

A minute passed before Griffin slid out of her and turned her over, guiding her onto all fours around the armrest of the couch. He moved behind her, kneeling on the cushions, positioning himself once more.

Violet's breath hitched not because she could feel Griffin's length pressing against her entrance, but because her other boyfriends had been watching the live action play out with hungry eyes and hard clocks. Yes, they were naked.

Then Griffin slammed into her with such force it knocked the breath out of her lungs. Goddess alive. Her eyes rolled to the back of her head. He just hit a spot she never thought he could reach.

He began to move and there was nothing gentle about it. Griffin's grip was tight around her waist, his hips pounding into her fast and fierce as if he were claiming every part of her. Violet was unable to speak, gasping for air. She was slowly losing her mind here.

From her peripheral view, she caught one of her men move until he stood right in front of her.

"Roman..." Violet gasped, struggling to anchor herself against the sensations tearing through her. But the moment her lips parted to speak, he filled her mouth with his cock instead.

Fuck her life.

Violet moaned in surprise; she hadn't seen that coming at all. Roman threw his head back and groaned in satisfaction, eyes shut like he'd just tasted heaven.

From behind, Griffin slammed into her harder, forcing her to take Roman even deeper down her throat.

"God...." Roman cried out, his hand now buried in her hair and controlling her movement. "Yes, go on...."

"I think she's a greedy little mate who wants more." Griffin's laughter had a sinister edge as he thrust harder, like a man possessed.

Violet's only response was moaning and screaming around Roman, nearly choking, but craving every second of it. In that moment, she was nothing but a vessel for their pleasure and her own, utterly consumed by the overwhelming, out-of-this-world sensation.

"I—I think I'm going to come," she managed to mumble around Roman, her voice trembling with need. The animalistic growl that rumbled from Roman's chest told her he wasn't far behind either.

The combined onslaught of Griffin plowing through her while Roman fucked her mouth sent Violet falling into a depth of pleasure she'd never known. Blood rushed through her ears, and her vision edged with black. She felt Roman swell against her tongue, right on the brink of release only for someone to pull him out. Seconds later, another cock slid past her lips, and that was when her orgasm hit her, tearing through her body, mind, and soul.

Violet was on Alaric now, sucking and licking him as she rode out her orgasm. From the side, she heard Roman grunt, finishing himself with rough strokes. Out of the corner of her eye, she caught Asher on the couch, watching her with that dark, hungry stare, his hand working himself slowly. The sight was sinful, maddening, and so wickedly erotic it shoved her straight into a second orgasm, her cries swallowed by the fullness of Alaric in her mouth.

Chapter 467: The Usurper

As if Griffin wasn't already being rough, his hand suddenly wrapped around her throat, pinning her to the armrest and forcing her hips to arch higher. Then he drove into her harder and deeper, slamming against her g-spot until her vision blurred.

The pleasure was so overwhelming that Violet couldn't take it. She bit down on Alaric's length, and he cursed, the shock sending him over the edge. He came with a guttural snarl, spilling into her mouth and she took it like a good girl.

At the same time, her walls clamped tight around Griffin, who let out a growl so feral it vibrated through her bones as he buried himself deep, the two of them breaking apart in a fierce, soul-ripping climax.

Alaric's dick slipped from her mouth just as Violet collapsed on the couch completely spent, every inch of her aching with sensitivity.

Griffin eased out of her with care, his lips trailing gentle kisses along her spine, shoulder, and neck—anywhere he could reach. Behind her, Asher's deep, feral growl filled the air as he too surrendered to his release in a final, shuddering wave of carnal bliss.

Violet smiled through the haze of exhaustion, her body relaxed. She must have dozed off, because the next thing she knew, she was airborne. Her eyes fluttered open in alarm only to find herself cradled in Asher's arms.

He pressed a gentle kiss to her forehead. "Sleep now. You're safe."

And just like that, Violet melted into him, her body going limp as sleep reclaimed her completely.

Meanwhile...

Henry Nightshade stood on the balcony of an abandoned building, high above the slumbering streets of Aster City. The night air was cold, but obviously not enough to bother him. He wasn't here to enjoy the view, he was waiting instead.

His hands were resting lightly on the rusting railing, his posture relaxed when a soft click shattered the quiet and the cold mouth of a gun was pressed against the side of his neck.

"Did you come alone?" Patrick Vale asked, stepping out from the darkness, his voice calm but alert, the gun still pressed against Henry's skin.

Henry didn't panic. He didn't even blink. Instead, he scoffed. "Do you think I have time to chase after you? That job belongs to Elijah. I have better things to do with my time."

Patrick considered him, then lowered the gun and came to stand beside him as silence passed between them, thick but not uncomfortable. They stared out over the city together, not as allies, but not quite as enemies either.

"I once made you a suggestion," Henry spoke at last. "Now's the time to act."

Patrick glanced sideways. "You're finally ready to kill the cardinal alphas? Isn't that a bit hasty? They're more profitable to me alive than dead."

"Yes, it's hasty," Henry admitted. "But that girl Violet Purple is making moves I don't like. If I don't strike now, I risk losing my son completely. As for the cardinal alphas, you don't need them. United, they'll bring you ruin, neither can you hold them down forever either. That last experience should be enough lesson." He said and Patrick felt the remnant of the scar on his face.

Henry went on to say, "It is better to cut the thread now before it tightens around your neck. To compensate, you can have the girl. Violet. She won't last long once her mate is dead anyway."

Patrick was quiet for a beat. "And what about your son?"

Henry's tone didn't falter. "He'll be angry and probably resist. But he'll come around. Asher is smart and he knows better than to jeopardize his future. I'm all he has left now."

Patrick turned fully this time, eyeing him with curiosity. "You know, I never understood you. I want to wipe out your kind, and yet here you are, a werewolf, offering to help your exterminator. That doesn't sound right or should I just call you a traitor?"

Henry's jaw ticked. "We both want something, and we both can't get it alone. Call it what it is, a profitable truce."

He let the words settle before adding, "Once the alphas are dead, the East, North, and South will lose their relevance. They won't have powerful heirs anymore. Suspicion would surely fall on the West, yes, but ultimately? You'll take the fall. Patrick Vale, the mad scientist and extreme anti-werewolf activist, struck again, killed the heirs and only Asher survived. How tragic."

Patrick gave a slow, knowing smile. "So that's your plan. Alright. I'll help you but on one condition."

A low growl slipped from Henry's throat. He hated conditions. But Patrick remained calm.

"You're the one who needs my help, remember?"

Henry's lips curled. "Or I could just bundle you up and hand you over to Elijah. I'm sure he'd be delighted."

"Are you sure?" Patrick laughed as he gestured lazily toward the street below.

Henry followed his gaze only to see red dots crawl across his chest.

He had snipers in place.

But Henry didn't flinch.

"And what makes you think I came alone either?" Henry said coolly, tilting his head, and as if on cue, deep, chilling howls echoed in the distance.

Patrick's smirk returned. "Good. It's nice to know we don't trust each other."

Then his tone turned cold. "But let me ask you, would it really be to your benefit if Elijah found me? What do you think he'd do if he discovered a certain Alpha was trying to usurp the throne?"

Henry's expression thinned. "What do you want?"

Patrick answered without hesitation. "I want you to capture Violet Purple yourself. Personally. I want an experienced Alpha on the field, someone who won't mess it up. My men are efficient, yes, but they can

get carried away. I don't want her dead. Not yet. You bring her to me, alive. That's my condition for handing over my men and resources."

Henry was silent for a long moment, his jaw clenched. But eventually, with great reluctance, he muttered, "Fine. You get rid of the alphas and I'll deliver Violet Purple. Alive."

Patrick held out his hand. "We have a deal, then."

Henry took it.

"Deal."

Chapter 468: Dangerous Fever

Violet woke with a strange fever.

Last night had been nothing short of amazing, but now, she felt wretched. Her head was foggy, her throat dry and scratchy, as if she'd swallowed sandpaper in her sleep.

But worst of all was the heat.

It wasn't just a fever but a gnawing, pulsing warmth radiating through her body and settling low in her core.

Instinctively, her hand reached out for her boyfriends. She needed them. Any of them. All of them. But the bed was empty.

Violet forced her eyes open, blinking past the haze to realize that she was alone. No, it can't be. She wanted them.

Hence, Violet forced herself to rise on unsteady feet, using the wall for support. How did she become like this? The boys must have dressed her in the nightgown she now wore because she didn't remember

doing so. But even now, the clothing on her skin felt unbearable and irritating. She wanted nothing on. Just her bare skin.

With effort, Violet took a breath and moved forward, driven by instinct rather than thought. It was strange, but she could smell them. Their scents were everywhere:

Sun-soaked woods and warm amber, infused with hints of fresh summer citrus.

Smoked cedar and dark spice softened by night-blooming jasmine.

The intoxicating scent of pineapple and whipped cream.

Ozone and rain-soaked earth with the warmth of amber and sweet vanilla.

It was dizzying the way the scents wrapped around her, invading her senses. The air was so thick with it she could choke. Violet inhaled it anyway—because she needed it—and immediately regretted it. Heat stirred in her belly, and rushed between her legs. A moan slipped from her lips before she could stop it.

Goddess help her. What was happening to her?

By some miracle, she made it downstairs, clutching the railing as if her legs might give out at any moment. The scents led her like a siren's call and she followed, unable to help it.

She found them in the kitchen, gathered around the counter, deep in discussion. They felt her presence before they saw her and the conversation trailed off. Four heads turned, their eyes locking onto her and everything stopped.

Two things happened at once.

Their nostrils flared, scenting her arousal, and their eyes darkened.

But it was Roman that frightened her most.

He looked feral.

A snarl escaped from his lips, his entire body going taut with tension.

And then he rushed at her.

"Roman, no!" someone shouted.

But it was too late.

Roman was in her face before Violet could blink and then he crashed his lips against hers.

Maker of the universe.

A moan slipped from her the instant their mouths collided, her body instinctively grinding against him. His touch was fire and comfort all at once, a balm to her burning nerves, but it wasn't enough. She needed more.

So she kissed him deeper, hungrier, with raw, wanton need. Their lips and tongues clashing in a frantic, greedy war for dominance and longing neither of them wanted to escape.

But the moment was short-lived, Roman was ripped away from her.

Violet couldn't even tell who had snarled—her or Roman—but the sound was deadly and deeply concerning.

"She's in heat, you idiot!" Asher barked, shoving him back. "You'll die if you sleep with her!"

But Roman was beyond reason now, far too consumed with lust. He lunged for her again, and Violet, just as lost, was ready to welcome him back into her arms.

Consequences be damned. She wanted him.

Before Roman could reach her, Griffin slammed him into the wall with force, pinning him there.

"We have to do something about him!" he barked at the others, struggling to keep Roman in place.

Alaric glanced at Asher. "You feel it too, don't you?"

Asher's jaw was tight as he nodded. "It's the full moon. Roman's always had the weakest leash on his primal urges than the rest of us thanks to his ability."

Violet let out a strangled moan as a fresh wave of desire crashed through her. She doubled over, clutching her stomach. "Help me!" she cried, her voice hoarse and pleading.

That was the trigger.

Roman's skin shimmered, then split in patches to reveal iridescent green scales. His pupils narrowed into slits, and his tongue flicked out, unnaturally long.

"Uh-oh," Griffin muttered, eyes widening as he dove to the side just in time as a stream of paralyzing venom shot past him and hit the wall instead.

"I definitely can't handle this guy!" Griffin shouted for backup.

"We need to get him out of—" Alaric began, but the words faltered as a wave of Violet's arousal hit him square in the face. It wasn't subtle but overpowering, clawing into his senses like a drug.

"Oh no..." Alaric whispered, already feeling his control slipping as his wolf rose to the surface.

His eyes locked onto Violet.

She was leaning back against the wall, her cheeks flushed, lips parted, and one of her hands shamelessly between her legs, with the other cupping her breast. Soft moans fell from her mouth, calling onto him.

She looked like everything he wanted. Everything he needed. So why wasn't he inside her already?

Alaric didn't realize he was walking toward her until a fist collided with his face. He reeled back, dazed, blinking up at Asher, who was panting and wide-eyed.

"Snap out of it, you idiot!"

Asher tried to keep his expression neutral, but Alaric saw the lust in his dilated pupils and the tension in his jaw. Even he wasn't immune.

Chaos reigned around them.

Griffin and Roman were locked in a violent scuffle, the kitchen torn apart. Roman's eyes were glowing, his claws slashing wildly at Griffin who tried to stop him from getting to Violet.

"You're the only one who can stop him, I can't get into his head." Asher told him.

Alaric didn't wait. He summoned his lightning and hurled a bolt straight at Roman's chest.

The impact knocked Roman off his feet, and he collapsed, convulsing from the electric shock coursing through him.

Griffin staggered back, panting hard, his pupils blown wide.

The three alphas stood frozen for a moment. All of them were breathing like they'd run a marathon, sweat clinging to their skin, lust still clawing at the edges of their minds.

Asher steadied himself and pointed to Violet. "Take care of her. We're getting out of here."

Chapter 469: Run

A thunderous snarl echoed through the trees, sending the birds on flight. It came from deep within the woods, followed by the rattling clang of chains and another guttural growl.

Asher and Alaric managed to take Roman to one of the cabins in the woods which miraculously had a basement.

Getting away from Violet had cleared their heads. Her intoxicating scent that clouded their thoughts had lifted with the mountain air, but the same couldn't be said for Roman.

He was too far gone.

Asher had left Alaric in charge and driven to town to gather everything he needed to restrain Roman.

It had been reckless not to track the lunar calendar. But with everything that had happened so far, keeping tabs on the full moon had been the last thing on his damn mind. And now, this was happening.

The basement was dim, lit only by a single bare bulb swinging from a frayed wire.

Roman was on the far end of the room, shackled to the wall with chains bolted into stone. Though his eyes were no longer slitted, it still glowed with a serpent's malice. He pulled at the chains and it rattled violently while the floorboards groaned as he paced his cage.

"Easy," Alaric called, standing a few feet away from him, his hands sparkling with lightning just in case.

But Roman bared his teeth at him in defiance. He hadn't shifted completely, but the effect of the full moon had a cruel grip on him turning him half-creature, half-man, all rage.

"This is the first time I've seen him gone this feral." Asher pointed out, checking him out slowly, careful not to provoke Roman further.

"You think this is because of Violet?" Alaric asked. Not that he too wasn't suspecting it.

"Hundred percent."

"The Matebond?"

For a moment, something flickered in Asher's expression—recognition, maybe—but it was gone just as fast, when he said, "Matebond or not, we can't let him go to Violet like this. He has to be the one in control, not the animal."

As if he could understand them, Roman yanked against the restraints, his muscles flexing as growls rippled through his throat. The walls shook with the movement, raining dust on them.

"This place won't hold him. He'd bring this cabin down on us. By any chance, will we be able to take him back to the academy?" Alaric asked him.

As an academy for werewolves, it had cells built for this situation.

"You look and tell me." Asher replied, eyes never leaving Roman. "We make do with what we have. We just need to survive the night."

He added with a sigh. "We'd do everything to keep him restrained until he's back to himself."

But as confident as Asher sounded, he knew tonight was going to be a tough one.

Meanwhile back at the cabin

The heat was unbearable.

Round after round of mating, yet her body was never satiated. She was no longer herself but a vessel of wild, aching, and relentless want. Good thing, she had a werewolf mate with the stamina to match.

Griffin took her in every position he could, fucking her hard and fast while Violet matched him, every roll of her hips pulling him deeper.

Just like the many uncountable times, her climax built fast, devastating, and too much all at once.

Violet shattered, her back arching, a scream caught between ecstasy and release leaving her lips as her body pulsed around him. She was light, fire, and stars exploding behind her eyelids.

And finally, she couldn't request for more. Her body had been stretched beyond its limit. She needed rest and recuperate.

"Sleep now." Griffin told her, tugging her hair out of her face. He was exhausted himself and needed a bit of rest.

Violet drifted off in Griffin's arms, the haze of her heat finally thinning and letting her breathe. Her body ached in the most satisfying way, her breath steady against the steady thrum of his heartbeat beneath her cheek.

Griffin didn't let her go. Even in sleep, his arms stayed locked around her like he feared she'd vanish if he loosened his grip. Like that they slept off.

But peace was a fragile thing.

A low growl rumbled in Griffin's throat before Violet even stirred. His ears perked, sharp and alert, catching something she couldn't hear yet. His body tensed beneath her like a coiled spring.

"Violet," he whispered, tapping her cheek. "Wake up."

She blinked, groggy. "What...?"

"Shh." His voice was urgent now. "Something's wrong."

And then she heard it too, heavy boots on the stairs, muffled voices, and the metallic click of weapons. Thankfully, her fever had eased enough that she could think.

Griffin grabbed her hand and pulled her off the bed, tucking her behind the thick wall beside the door just as—

BANG!

The door was kicked clean off its hinges as armed men in black gear stormed in like a flood, rifles raised, faces hidden behind glass masks. Violet didn't have time to scream.

Griffin didn't hesitate and leapt at the intruders.

He was a blur of muscle and fury, his claws slashing. The first man didn't even see it coming as he was down in seconds. The second got a punch so hard he flew across the room. Violet gasped as Griffin tore through them, snarling and fighting like the beast he was born to be.

But they kept coming.

Then came a high-pitched hum, almost unnoticeable, like air tearing itself apart but Griffin froze mid-attack. His eyes widened as he stumbled backward, his body trembling violently. He screamed, clutching his head.

"No!" Violet reached for him.

"Run!" Griffin shouted hoarsely, right before his knees gave way and he collapsed to the floor.

"Griffin!" she screamed.

"God damn it! Go now!"

He managed to get to his feet and attacked the next person that had come for her, clearing a path for her to escape.

"Look for the others!" Griffin shouted, stumbling as he fought another enemy, blood dripping his nose.

Violet did the only thing he told her to do.

She turned and ran.

Chapter 470: Run Mate

At the cabin in the mountains....

It felt like forever, but night eventually came.

Strangely, Roman had settled. Though still feral, the beast within him had quieted, no longer thrashing against the walls, trying to be free.

To be honest, Asher and Alaric were tempted to return to Violet, but if earlier events had taught them anything, then they were safer out there than the inside where Violet's scent would tempt them into losing control.

The plan was to survive the night in this cabin with Roman, and by dawn, pray the fever broke. They sat in heavy silence with their backs pressed to the wall, when Roman's ears twitched and his nose flared.

A low, rumbling growl rolled from his chest.

Alaric straightened. "What now?" he muttered, already bracing himself. Just when he had started to believe Roman was calming down.

But Asher was already alert, his eyes narrowing. Roman wasn't acting up, but was reacting to something.

"There's someone out there," Asher said grimly.

Alaric focused, tuning into his werewolf hearing. Then he heard it.

"We're surrounded."

"Don't make a sound," Asher ordered, low and lethal.

Whether he was speaking to Alaric or Roman, it didn't matter because the feral Roman had already froze, motionless as stone.

For a moment there was unnatural silence as the boys stood taut, waiting in anticipation. Then Roman picked on the smallest sound and growled the warning just as Asher shouted. "Down!"

The windows shattered as bullets rained through the cabin. The floorboards cracked, splinters flying, and both boys hit the ground, shielding their heads while Roman buckled to a crouch in the darkness.

The bulletstorm seemed to last forever and when it finally stopped, dust choked the air.

"Found them!" someone shouted from above.

They moved fast, boots pounding down the stairs to the basement. But as soon as the first soldiers barged in, Alaric threw out his hands and bolts whipped across the air, striking down each soldier as they came into view.

While that was going on, a roar came from behind and they turned only to see that Roman had broken free from his confines.

"Oh shit!" Alaric barely dodged as Roman stormed past him, fully shifted, his bear form monstrous in the dim light.

He tore through the armed men like rag dolls, slamming bodies aside with guttural snarls. And they didn't stand a chance at all.

Before any of the soldiers could recover, Alaric finished them off.

Asher was the first to reach the surface but Roman was nowhere to be found. Unknown to him, an enemy crept behind him with his gun raised. Before he could fire, Alaric fried his arm with a crack of lightning and the man screamed, dropping the weapon.

Asher lunged forward and punched him through the mask, then ripped it off and locked eyes. He compelled him.

"Who sent you?!"

"We were ordered to kill the Cardinal Alphas and take Violet Purple alive!" the soldier gasped.

"Asher!" Alaric warned, hurling a bolt just as another body dropped behind them.

But more were coming. Almost immediately, a silver bullet grazed Asher's ear, fire searing across his skin. Damn it! Silver bullets.

"Kill them!" He commanded the man who nodded like a robot and picked up his weapon, spinning and opening fire on his own squad.

Asher ducked, weaving between bullets, and dropped beside Alaric behind cover.

"We need to find Violet. Now."

Alaric nodded once. Then lightning erupted from his hands and tore a path through the trees.

Together, they ran into the forest toward her while praying to the goddess they weren't too late.

"No, Violet—what are you doing?!" Griffin shouted in dread.

When he told her to run, he meant away from danger, not straight into it.

But Violet wasn't thinking, something instinctive had taken over. Her feet moved before her brain caught up. She stepped between the soldiers and Griffin, her breath shaky, her skin burning with fever and fury. The gunmen raised their weapons, but hesitated to shoot. They had their orders to bring her alive.

And then, she screamed.

A soundwave exploded from her throat, raw and seismic. It tore through the hallway like a sonic hurricane, slamming into the armed men and flinging them backward. The shockwave shattered the sonic emitter they'd used to incapacitate Griffin.

He gasped like a drowning man breaking the surface. His shoulders straightened, and then, he was back on his feet.

Violet ran to his side. "I need the beast."

Griffin didn't need a second prompt. His body contorted, bulking up rapidly, bones stretching and snapping into place until he towered over her at seven feet tall, barely containing his size beneath the cabin roof.

The soldiers groaned as they tried to get up. Griffin grabbed Violet and leapt through the broken window of the one-story building like it was nothing.

They hit the ground hard, but they weren't alone. Mercenaries on the lower level whipped around with guns raised.

Griffin didn't wait. He snatched one of them like a toy and hurled him into the others but it wasn't enough. The rest were regrouping, and aiming at them.

With a thunderous snarl, Griffin leapt and

Violet didn't scream like last time even as the bullets chased them midair. But she did fear for Griffin, especially when she heard the sharp yelp of pain mid-air, just before they landed.

They crashed into the forest, Griffin breaking through thick branches before collapsing onto the ground.

"Griffin!" Violet cried, scrambling out of his hold just as he slumped to the forest floor.

Moonlight poured through the canopy, revealing the blood on Griffin's hand as he pulled it from his side.

"Shit! You've been hit!" Violet's voice shook with fear.

It had to be silver. A normal bullet would've been pushed out by now, but this was killing him.

"We have to get it out," she said, her heart pounding.

But behind them, voices were closing in.

"They went this way!"

The beast's eyes met hers. "Mate. Run."

"No." Violet shook her head. "I'm not leaving you."

"Run. Now!" he roared, his voice trembling with command and pain.

This time, Violet ran.