

## Defy 481

### Chapter 481: Hide Her

It was impossible...

Asher, Alaric, Griffin and Roman all had dumbfounded expressions as they stared at the majestic creature lying on the charred earth. Her fur shimmered in iridescent shades of deep amethyst and twilight violet, thick and sleek like molten silk.

For a moment, the wolf was so still they feared the worst until a soft whimper escaped her lips, low and pained. Then she moved, and that's when they saw it.

Wings.

You have got to be kidding.

Massive wings stretched from her back, folding out with a low hiss. They were feathered, the same shade of violet as her fur, with glowing lines running through them like veins of light.

All four of the cardinal alphas stared in stunned silence. Just when they thought they couldn't be shocked anymore.

It hit Asher then why Violet's powers had been bound. If Angus had access to a creature like her, there's no telling what he would have done with power like this.

At that moment, Violet's eyes snapped open, glowing like molten stars, and pulsing with raw power.

But something else happened.

"Mate," Roman growled.

What?

Before any of them could react, a loud crack split the air as Roman shifted into his wolf and leapt into the crater, before any of them could stop him.

Roman's claws kicked up dust as he rushed straight to her. Violet's wings twitched awkwardly behind her, purple and regal, still foreign to her body. She looked lost, if not burned out. The fire inside of her might have burned out, but it sure left the ruin behind.

Roman felt the pain and the lingering fear from Violet as if she was still trapped in that nightmare of pain and he wanted to ease it.

So he circled her slowly with his tail lowered in submission, his massive green wolf brushing against her without forcing contact. Then he licked her muzzle, a soft, desperate sound rumbling from his chest.

Mine.

His wolf echoed in his head.

He nudged her chin gently, then pressed his side against hers. She flinched just a little but didn't pull away. Roman let her feel his warmth, presence and heartbeat.

Mine.

He licked her again, this time under her jaw as a sign of comfort and claim. She let out a small, wounded whine.

Roman growled low, possessively, then curled himself around her, shielding her with his entire body from the world. His head rested across her back, his tail swaying.

Mine.

Above them, Griffin felt the emotions through the bond.

"She's not hurting anymore," He said, watching Roman hold her like she was the only thing that mattered.

"Did the mate bond just hit Roman?" Alaric asked, even though the scene was playing out right in front of him. It was just hard to believe.

Asher balled his hands into fists. He knew he should be happy. Roman being mate-bonded meant the prophecy was real and that all four of them were destined to be Violet's mates.

But his heart still broke.

What even triggered the bond?

If anyone deserved to be mated to Violet right now, it should be him. He saw her first. He chose her first. He loved her first. So why him?

Why does the goddess test him like this?

Why dangle the one thing he wanted, only to hand it to someone else?

What did he do so wrong to deserve this?

"Holy shit," Micah muttered as he stumbled onto the scene. He was barely upright, and was using Adele's shoulder as his crutch. His face was pale, drained, as if smoke-walking through hell had torn the life from his bones.

"How...?" He was dumbfounded for two very solid reasons.

One : his sister was a damn winged wolf. Fantastic. His stress levels just tripled.

And two : why the hell was Roman sniffing around her butt like a bloodhound on heat?

Oh.

Oh no.

Oh hell no.

It hit him like a brick.

Micah glanced at the boys for answers, but one look at their faces screamed, bad idea. Yep, certified dumb question. He didn't know how their love square worked, but clearly, the goddess had just played favorites and the rest were left on read.

What in the name of confusion was he even talking about? How in the world was this possible?! No wonder Violet had been so hell-bent on trusting the boys, despite all his warnings. She knew this would happen.

What was he even supposed to do with this? He didn't sign up for this chaos!

Damn you Alice!

Asher's fists clenched. "We should be down there."

"Do you hear that?" Alaric cut in.

Asher tilted his head, and then he heard it too.

The sound of sirens in the distance. Shit. The authority was going to be here. It was not surprising though. a destruction of this magnitude was sure to attract attention.

Micah said to them. "You have to get Violet out of here."

"Already on it," Asher said, face set with grim determination.

Alaric added, "She has to shift back. There's no way we can sneak a massive purple wolf without drawing attention. We need her in human form now."

They all moved to the center of the crater. But before they could take another step, a snarl cracked through the air.

Roman.

In his wolf form, he stood protectively in front of Violet. With fur bristled and teeth bared, his stance was clear: come closer and I will tear you apart.

"Look at his eyes," Alaric warned. "He needs to mate her." It was known that mated wolves—especially males—get aggressive if others get too close to their female before the bond is sealed. Even after.

Asher's heart ached at the thought of Roman having an eternal connection with Violet. But he pushed it to the back of his mind. This was not the time for this.

Griffin took a step closer. "I think I can handle him."

Roman growled low, deep in his throat, hackles raised. But Griffin didn't flinch and growled right back.

They were both her mates. Roman couldn't deny that.

Recognition flickered in Roman's eyes, and he backed down.

Griffin instructed Roman in his wolf form. "We need Violet back in her human form. We can't get her to safety this way."

Roman turned to Violet at once. He brushed against her with his flank, whining softly. Then he licked her cheek, nuzzling her side with his snout. A soft whimper escaped her. Then, as if responding to him, her body began to shift.

The change was immediate. Her bones began to crack, her muscles tearing and reforming. Her limbs trembled violently, and she screamed in pains. Violet collapsed halfway through it, her nails digging into the dirt as her spine twisted with the force of change.

The boys winced. First shifts were always brutal, like being torn apart from the inside.

Then she was human again.

Violet lay naked in the crater, slick with sweat, and shaking like a leaf in winter. But that wasn't what made everyone freeze.

Her ears were no longer rounded. They were longer now, slightly pointed and graceful. As if that wasn't enough, her hair changed too. It was no longer short, now cascading down her back, thick and full. The black was reduced to the roots while the rest was violet.

Then talk about her skin. It was flawless like that of a new born babe. If one looked closely they would think it was nearly luminous. There was not a scar in sight.

"Fuck," Micah breathed, stunned. "This is going to be a problem."

Alaric nodded slowly. "Big problem. People don't just shift, change, and glow up overnight."

"We'll hide her," Asher said. "Until we figure out what's happening."

"Roman?" he called.

At once, the massive wolf shifted. His human form emerged, breathing hard, almost vibrating with intensity. His eyes were glowing and locked only on Violet.

Roman didn't even wait for instruction and moved to Violet, and gathered her gently in his arms. Her head fell against his chest, she was unconscious but alive.

Griffin nodded. "Take her. I'll come with you."

Asher met his gaze. "Make sure she's safe. He'll only tolerate you."

Griffin was the only one Roman wouldn't snap at.

Roman turned, already moving through the woods.

"Keep an eye on Asher," Griffin told Alaric, already knowing he was bound to make reckless decision. "He's going to take all this personally."

"I'll handle it," Alaric promised.

"Be safe," Griffin said, his voice heavy with meaning.

"We'll keep in touch," Asher said with a nod.

And then he followed after Roman,

disappearing into the smoking woods. The goal right now was to protect Violet and God help anyone who tried to stop them.

Asher turned as the sirens got louder now. They must have arrived at the property and would find them in no time.

"What's our story then?" Alaric asked.

"My father betrayed his people?"

#### Chapter 482: The Fucking Hero

"Oh, you certainly can't say that," Micah said with a laugh that didn't reach his eyes.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Asher's brow arched instantly.

Micah straightened up, though he still made sure his body brushed Adele's. That was the only thing keeping his sanity right now.

Unlike Roman and Violet, they weren't going to be dramatic about the Matebond snapping in place between them. But the bond was there, pulsing under his skin like an annoying itch and demanding he claimed her.

Soon, though.

For now, there were more critical issues to deal with than surrendering to the mating frenzy. He would fight it for as long as he could and then, when they were finally alone, he'd devour her to his heart's content.

Thankfully, Adele also had enough self-control not to tear his clothes off and rut him like an animal.

Not that he'd have minded.

Perfect match made in heaven, aye?

His voice cut through the tension. "There will be no mention of Henry's contribution to this attack."

Asher's head jerked toward him, a dangerous growl rumbling from his chest. That better be a joke. Micah had five seconds to laugh and take it back.

Sensing the shift in the air, Micah said calmly, "The moment Elijah finds out Henry was in league with Patrick, the Nightshade Clan as we know it is finished."

Alaric's shoulders went rigid. "I don't understand," he muttered, though the dread creeping into his voice said otherwise. "You're protecting Henry?"

"No," Micah replied. "I'm protecting Asher."

"Over my dead body!" Asher snapped, his eyes glowing and his muscles tensed as his wolf rose to the surface.

Adele flinched, but Micah held firm.

"My uncle has been looking for an excuse to tear the West House down ever since the alphas challenged his rule by creating you four," Micah said. "What do you think he'll do when he learns your father betrayed him?"

Asher's chest heaved with his fists clenched.

"Elijah doesn't forgive betrayal. He'll use it to erase the Nightshade legacy, accuse you of treason by bloodline. Henry might have been a horrible man but he sure knew how to hold his pack together. But with him out of the way, you're vulnerable. A scandal like this gives Elijah the perfect excuse to remove you and replace you with someone who answers to him."

"No. No, no..." Asher shook his head hard, as if trying to reject the thought completely. "I'm his heir!" he snarled. "He can't lay a hand on me!"

Micah's laugh was humorless. "You actually believe that? That Elijah cares about you? He has three other heirs. If one dies, there are three more to choose from. And between us, I think he'd sleep easier without the cleverest one around."

Asher froze on the spot. At this point, he wasn't even breathing anymore. He stood so still one would compare him to a statue.

Micah pressed on. "So here's the story. Eager to find his son who had gone off the radar with his friends, Henry tracked you here, and upon finding you mid-battle joined our side. He died in the explosion the enemy triggered, trying to protect us."

When no one spoke, Elijah added. This is the version we tell, unless, of course, you'd rather Elijah writes his own ending for us."

For a moment, there was silence.

Then Asher's lips began to tremble, the emotion boiling just beneath the surface finally breaking through. But instead of lashing out, a tear slid down his cheek. Then a second. And a third.

Alaric froze.

He had never seen Asher cry before. Not once. Not even when his mother died.

"He's a monster," Asher said hoarsely.

"I know," Micah answered softly.

"He hurt my mother."

"I know," Micah repeated, calm and steady, in the manner you'd speak to someone standing at the edge of a cliff.

"He drove her to her death." More tears welled in Asher's eyes, and he wiped them away with the back of his hand, furiously scrubbing at his face. "He drove me to the edge." His voice cracked. "And then he tried to hurt Violet too. And you want me to cover up what he did? Are you fucking kidding me?!"

His voice roared through the crater, echoing off the broken earth.

Micah didn't flinch. "I'm trying to save your life here, Asher. That's the only reason I'm still talking."

He took a step closer, his voice lowered. "Throughout history, worse men have buried what they did and crowned themselves in glory. I'm not saying we paint Henry as a saint. But for this accident, don't poke the hornets' nest unless you're ready to burn with it."

Asher's jaw clenched.

Micah pressed on. "Elijah already knows he fucked up by working with Patrick, and President Roy is breathing down his neck to clean up the mess. You think he's going to let you off easy? You're the perfect scapegoat, Asher. Don't give him the reason."

For a moment, Asher's gaze drifted. His eyes looked a thousand miles away, trapped in a memory no one else could see.

Then a warm hand clasped his.

Alaric.

He didn't speak and just held on, silently supporting him.

"Micah makes a fine point," Alaric said finally. "None of our parents can know what really happened here. Not when they'd throw you under the bus to eliminate competition. We have to bury it here. Now."

Asher blinked, slowly turning his head to face him. His expression was tired. Like bone-deep tired. And not even sleep could fix it.

"Elijah is not stupid," he murmured. "He'll never believe a word of this."

"But he doesn't have evidence," Micah pointed out. "Suspicion is all he has and that's not enough. Who would really believe Henry colluded with an outsider against his own kind? Hell, I still have goosebumps. And if there's anyone Elijah will fixate on next, it's not us..."

He looked at them all grimly. "It's Violet. This incident has exposed her. He'd have his eyes on her and I'm afraid we can't hide her secret forever."

Adele, who had been listening in silence, turned her head sharply. "Whatever decision you're all making, better make it fast. They're getting closer." She tilted her head slightly. "I hear eight, maybe ten people approaching."

The others tensed.

Alaric looked back at Asher, his voice urgent now. "For Violet's sake, you can't die yet."

That did it.

Asher took a deep breath, the air shaking in his lungs.

"Fine," he spat, every syllable bitter. "Let's make my father, Henry Nightshade, the fucking hero of today's incident."

Chapter 483: Need Or Obsession

"Hands where we can see them!"

"Down on your knees!"

"Now!"

The command rent through the night as dozen of men in black tactical gear burst out of the tree line with rifles raised and bright torches cutting through the dark.

"They're wolves!" one of the soldiers yelled into a comm.

That was all it took. A second later, the entire perimeter was filled with movement as armed units surrounded them, their weapons pointed at them, lasers painting glowing red targets across their chests.

Alaric didn't bother to fight. None of them did. They did nothing wrong. So one by one, they dropped to their knees with their hands raised and their eyes fixed ahead. The forest fell silent but for the sound of barking orders and boots crunching against leaves.

They cuffed them, the cold metal biting into their wrists. This wasn't ordinary cuffs but suppressors designed to numb the wolf, and sever the connection to their inner beast completely.

The disorientation hit them.

Asher felt it first, his shoulders sagging like someone had knocked the wind out of him. Alaric winced, his wolf's presence suddenly dull and distant, like a voice screaming underwater. The connection was gone.

"Clear!" a soldier called out, and then came the dragging.

Each of them were hauled to their feet, none too gently, and shoved toward the armored vehicles waiting beyond the trees. Floodlights hummed above the clearing, showing the way.

It wasn't until they cleared the last of the forest that the true scale of what happened hit them.

"Holy shit..." Micah stopped in his tracks.

The others saw it as well.

The Pine Ridge Lodge was gone. Yes, it was completely leveled to the ground.

Asher and Alaric shared a look of shock, unable to believe Violet had done that. However, they quickly schooled their expressions as the soldiers dragged them along.

The explosion hadn't reached the outside of the property, but the force of it had done plenty of damage. Thankfully, no one lived close by and there was no loss of human life — that didn't deserve it.

More torchlights swept across the ruins as soldiers fanned out, checking for survivors—or bodies — sirens wailing in the distance. Drones hovered overhead, cameras blinking red. The place was crawling.

Asher had no idea if any of Patrick's men survived but he sincerely hoped they all died in that explosion.

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Patrick paced up and down the room.

From the velvet couch, Moira sipped her wine lazily, her eyes never leaving her twitching son. "You're starting to make me dizzy, dear."

Patrick waved her off without breaking stride. "I think better this way."

"Think or losing it?" Vera murmured, balancing a silver knife between two fingers.

Joseph reclined with his boots on the ottoman, his expression bored as he watched the family theater unfold.

Then the knife flew without warning and

Patrick froze. The blade had grazed the side of his neck before embedding in the wooden column behind him with a satisfying thunk. A thin line of blood welled up at once.

Vera stood up in one smooth motion, her grin feral. "Oops."

She sauntered toward him, hips swaying in that dangerous way of hers, plucked the knife from the wall, then wiped the small smear of red from his throat with her thumb. Without breaking eye contact, she licked it.

"There," she purred. "That should calm you down."

Patrick, ever the analyst, recognized the message behind her theatrics.

Sit down.

And he obeyed.

Sometimes he wondered how he came out of the same womb that bore her.

Joseph chuckled and poured him a generous glass of wine. "Easy, brother," he said, handing it over. "We'd like to keep your blood inside you at least for now."

Patrick drank it all in one long gulp.

Moira sighed, resting her head back against the couch cushions. "With the number of men we pulled in tonight, they'll surely gut those arrogant pups. Once the Alphas lose their precious heirs, picking the rest of the pack off will be easy."

Vera twirled her knife again. "Tch. We should've just pumped a few of the men full of Ignis and let them rip through the forest like bombs. It would have been faster and interesting, don't you think?."

Patrick shot her a pointed look. "You do realize that drug is not your personal party favor, don't you? We need it for the bigger picture."

Vera rolled her eyes, undeterred. "You're no fun."

Joseph raised his glass again, swirling the wine before taking a sip. "Last report we got said the Hulk Alpha was down. Good riddance. If he's out, the rest won't last long. Unless they've suddenly acquired teleportation powers, there's no way they're getting out of that place crawling with our men alive."

He poured himself another drink, grinning wide. "We'll be popping bottles by dawn."

Silence fell briefly over the room, the only sound the soft clink of glass.

Patrick, however, wasn't smiling. His eyes were distant, like a man retracing steps in his mind, chasing an answer he couldn't quite touch.

His siblings didn't know the cardinal alphas as much as he knew them. Those "arrogant pups" were tenacious than they gave them credit for.

Moira narrowed her eyes at him. "What exactly do you want with that girl, Violet? She isn't even as valuable as the cardinal alphas and yet, you ordered them dead. What could you possibly gain with the girl?"

"That is what I intend to find out." Patrick said, his eyes shinning with anticipation.

His brother and sister exchanged a look, then Vera made one of her usual crazy hand gestures and Joseph laughed. They'd always underestimated him like that. But look at him now, pulling the big moves.

"There is something about her that I must confirm. She's more than she seems. I need her."

Moira exhaled through her nose. "Need, or obsess over?"

Patrick's lips smirked. "Maybe both."

Vera let out a delighted laugh. "You've officially lost it, brother. And I love it."

Joseph raised his glass. "To Violet, then. May our humble Alpha Henry bring her back in one piece or close enough."

Vera, Moira and Joseph clinked their glasses.

Then Patrick's phone rang.

A second later, Joseph's buzzed, then followed by Moira's, and finally, Vera's.

They froze, glancing at each other. No one said a word, but the decision was mutual.

Patrick answered first.

"Hello? How's it going...?"

#### Chapter 484: Controlling The Narrative

"Good morning. This is Micheal Ross, reporting live from the outskirts of Pine Ridge, where what authorities are calling a massive terrorist attack has completely flattened what was once the exclusive Pine Ridge Lodge. The secluded and private luxury estate was reduced to rubble in what investigators are describing as an 'unprecedented level of destruction.'

"At this moment, authorities have not released the identities of the survivors detained at the scene. However, confidential sources close to the investigation have revealed that the lodge had recently been booked under the name of none other than Alaric Storm, cardinal alpha of the Northern Pack.

"The exact motive and nature of the attack remain unclear. But given the devastating magnitude of the explosion, experts on site are estimating that the survival rate is 'extremely low.' The blast radius did not extend beyond the estate, but its sheer power caused structural damage to neighboring outposts and even rattled buildings several miles away.

"This level of destruction has never been witnessed before in this region and authorities are currently combing through the debris, searching for clues, bodies and answers.

"A curfew has now been officially enforced across the region. All civilians are to remain indoors between the hours of six PM and six AM until further notice. Military checkpoints have been established at all forest entries. If you witness suspicious behavior, or have any knowledge of those involved, you are urged to report immediately to the local enforcers....."

Elijah turned off the television, and the screen went black with a soft click. He sat behind his desk, fingers steepled under his chin, rubbing his jaw in slow motions. Across from him, his beta Christian stood waiting for his instruction.

The phone lines were ringing nonstop, frantic voices spilling out from the devices. But Elijah was oddly calm. The kind of calm that suggested he was just a breath from losing it.

"Brief me on what's going on," Elijah said suddenly, his voice taut with tension.

Christian straightened. "There was an explosion at the Pine Ridge Lodge."

"An explosion caused by what exactly?" Elijah demanded.

Christian hesitated before answering carefully. "To be honest, my contacts haven't located the detonator yet. But it's Patrick we're dealing with, I wouldn't be surprised if he's developed another kind of weapon entirely especially since the targets were the Cardinal Alphas."

Elijah exhaled slowly, a troubled breath escaping as he leaned back into his seat. If Patrick had pulled off a bombing of that scale, who's to say he wouldn't be next?

"And the boys?" he asked.

"Alive, at least. Asher, Alaric, Adele, and Micah are in custody. There's no sign of Griffin, Roman, or Violet Purple..." Christian paused, noting the hint of intrigue in Elijah's expression at the mention of Violet. "However, from what I gathered, the boys claimed the others were fine and left ahead of them."

"They left ahead? Why?"

"That, they wouldn't say. I've sent a team to track them down, but it won't be easy. We're stretched thin at the moment, not to mention..." He exhaled. "Henry Nightshade is dead."

For the first time, Elijah's eyes lit up with surprise but only for a second before he schooled his expression.

Christian continued, "At first, we didn't believe them. But the forensics team managed to identify what was left of his skeletal remains. DNA confirms it. Henry Nightshade is dead."

"What a loss," Elijah muttered, but there was no grief at all, just cold calculation. The words came out like good riddance. "So that makes Asher Nightshade the Alpha of the West if no one challenges him and wins."

Leaning forward, Elijah folded his hands. "I never expected any of those boys to hold real power until graduation. If Asher becomes Alpha now, it's going to create imbalance among the rest. And that boy, he's too clever to have that much power unchecked."

His voice dropped, thoughtful but edged. "Henry was an ambitious piece of shit, but we got along most times. The same can't be said for his son, Asher. I need control over those kids."

A beat of silence passed before Elijah narrowed his eyes again. "How did Henry die in the explosion and the rest survived?"

"Apparently, he held back the assassins to buy them time. According to report, your nephew, Micah teleported them all to safety at the last second. Their story checks out."

Elijah stared at him. "So Patrick tried to bomb the Cardinal Alphas and his own men?"

Christian nodded, slowly.

Elijah's eyes narrowed further. "Don't you think that story sounds a little too perfect?"

"Well..." Christian scratched the back of his head, "I don't know...."

Elijah laughed. A long, hollow sound that sent chills down the spine of anyone within earshot. But just as quickly as it came, his expression shifted.

"Find the others," he said coldly. "Especially Violet Purple. I'd like to hear their version of the story."

Then he stood, adjusting his cuffs and sleeves with controlled movements. "Where are the others being held?"

"At the Lycanthrope Intelligence Agency," Christian replied. "They took over from the military."

"Good," Elijah said, already walking. "Get the car ready. We're heading there."

"What?" Christian blinked. "What about your meeting with President Roy?"

Elijah turned, eyes hard. "President Roy can go fuck himself in the ass." His voice lowered, shape as a blade. "He needs to understand that I'm not some toy he can play with. I'm taking control of the narrative now."

Christian swallowed hard.

Moments later, Elijah slid into the backseat of the sleek black car, and Christian taking the other side and the driver drove off.

It was not long before they arrived at the Lycanthrope Intelligence Agency but what caught Elijah's attention was the crowd of reporters at the entrance. They had all gathered in front of the reinforced gates with their cameras and microphones, looking for a pieces of information like vultures to a fresh corpse.

Then Elijah said to Christian, "Make a way, I want to speak to them."

Chapter 485: National Threat

"Alpha King Elijah! What's your response to the explosion?!"

"Where is responsible for the attack?!"

"Alpha king Elijah over here!"

Security had already formed a barricade between the crowd of reporters and the entrance of the Lycanthrope Intelligence Agency. Their black uniforms and the sight of their rifles was enough to instil fear in them and keep the ruckus at bay.

Elijah was standing at the top of the steps, his towering frame rigid, commanding silence by presence alone. Christian, his beta, remained just to the side, his arms folded behind him while his eyes swept the press for any threat.

With the cameras rolling, Elijah began his speech.

"The incident that occurred last night was not an accident but a deliberate, calculated assault."

The commotion had stopped at this point. Flashbulbs continued to blink, but the reporters had fallen silent now, hanging onto every word he said.

"The target," he continued, "was not civilians, but the future of our pack. The Cardinal Alphas, four of the most promising heirs of the werewolf community. And though many fought bravely, one of ours paid the ultimate price."

He announced. "Alpha Henry Nightshade is dead."

There was a collective gasp as it came as a shock to them.

"Henry was at the scene at the time of the attack and fought to protect the younger generation. He held off the attackers long enough to ensure their survival, and for that, we all owe him a debt of honor."

For a minute, Elijah closed his eyes, a solemn nod as if paying him respect.

Then his voice turned cold as he said. "The perpetrator of this atrocity is not hidden and is none other than Doctor Patrick Vale."

Another murmuring came from the crowd. While some reporters recorded, the others were busy jotting down on their notebook as fast as they could.

"Yes," Elijah confirmed. "The same Patrick Vale who pretended to work for the betterment of students at Lunaris Academy. The same Patrick who pledged loyalty to both humans and shifters."

His lips curled in disgust.

"All while conducting illegal, inhumane experiments on werewolf students behind closed doors. He manipulated trust, corrupted science, and betrayed the sacred accord meant to keep our species at peace."

He let the silence stretch before adding, "His goal was not research. It was extinction. He sought to wipe out the backbone of our society by eliminating the Cardinal Alphas and destabilizing the balance of power. If his plan had succeeded, the future of the werewolf race would have crumbled. But the goddess has been faithful and his plans were uncovered."

Elijah increased not just his voice but the weight of his words. "You would think that after the Great War, we would have learned

that humans and shifters, both born of flesh and spirit, have come far enough to co-exist. We hurt like you. Feel like you. Bleed like you. We are not beasts in cages."

He scanned the sea of faces before him. "Racist acts like this," he said slowly, "cannot—will not—be tolerated. Not while the Accord stands. Not while I still draw breath."

He spoke directly into one of the cameras, eyes dark and daring. "So I'm calling on President Roy to step up. To remember the oath between humans and wolves. To do his job before this fire burns beyond anyone's control."

Then his tone softened, pain evident in his eyes as he said. "We will investigate this matter to its end and reveal the truth, no matter how dark. But for now, we mourn and bury our dead."

He gave a single nod to the cameras. "That will be all for now."

Then he turned.

The reporters moved forward, shouting again.

"Alpha King Elijah! Where are the other Alphas? Why aren't they in custody?"

"What does this mean for the Accord?!"

"Did you really not know about the experiments?!"

But Elijah didn't answer and simply walked through the agency doors as they parted before him, Christian right behind.

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"That son of a bitch!" President Roy cursed as soon as Elijah's interview ended. "He just put me on the hot seat in front of the entire damn country," he ranted.

Silence fell in the room.

Elijah was not alone, his cabinet consisting of six men and women were with him, their expressions unreadable. They all wore suits.

Roy scoffed, pacing. "He gave them a narrative and made me look like a fool."

"More like a bystander," Secretary Lana, head of supernatural affairs, said, adjusting her glasses. "Which, respectfully, is worse."

Roy turned on them. "He funded that bastard Patrick. He gave him resources, access under Elijah's jurisdiction. You're telling me we don't go public with that? We don't drag the his dirty laundry into the light and force him to kneel?"

Lana said. "Sir, if we expose Elijah right now, it won't just stain his reputation, it will bring an unrest we are not prepared for. The public is currently sympathetic to the woes of the wolves. Not to mention exposing him might lead to the discovery of ignis. Even Patrick was careful not to mention that."

"Not to mention Elijah already framed it as your responsibility to remove Patrick," said General Sammi, the head of Homeland Defense for both human and supernatural districts. "He's cornered you using the very language of the Accord."

His Chief of Staff, a woman named Anya, finally spoke up.

"Elijah's move was calculated. His wolves were being seen as reckless and dangerous are now the victims. If we retaliate publicly, we're the villains."

Sammi told the president. "This is about national security. Elijah may be a manipulative bastard, but Patrick Vale has become a rogue scientist with supernatural access. He already tried to wipe out the Cardinal Alphas. Who's to say he won't target you next?"

Roy sat down slowly, rubbing a hand down his face. "So what do we do?" he asked.

"Release the official statement," Lana said. "Patrick Vale is now classified as a national-level threat to supernatural and human lives alike. The Accord remains intact, and as far as the public knows, we're working hand-in-hand with Elijah to bring him down."

President Roy sighed. "Fine."

Just like that, the decision was made.

#### Chapter 486: Taken By The Alpha King

Asher, Alaric, and Micah were being held in an interrogation room.

The room was sterile and cold. Its walls were a dull, lifeless gray and soundproofed to perfection. It felt like the kind of place designed to break somebody with silence and monotony. The faint, incessant buzzing from the overhead fluorescent light was already enough to drive them mad.

There were no windows, of course, just a single reinforced one-way mirror that revealed nothing of who was watching them from the other side. A metal table sat bolted to the center of the room, and was surrounded by three uncomfortable steel chairs that seemed to have been built with intentional cruelty.

From the corners, cameras blinked red tracking their every move. Occasionally, an unseen vent groaned somewhere in the ceiling, the only sound breaking the silence when no one spoke.

They had been uncuffed upon arrival. But now, the cuffs were kept right in front of them on the table, the device light dulled now it wasn't in use. If this was a tactic meant to rattle them into talking, it was laughable because they weren't that easy to break. If only the detective knew they had been through worse, they would have given up at this point.

For hours, they had been interrogated by so many officers they'd lost count. At some point, they were separated, a clear strategy to test the consistency of their stories. But it was pointless. There was nothing to lie about.

Nothing—except the fact that Violet had caused the explosion. And the fact that they refused to say where Violet, Griffin, and Roman had gone.

Eventually, the truth would come out. But if the authorities wanted to put a knife to their throats to get it, they'd have to try a lot harder.

"What's wrong with him?" Alaric asked, nodding toward Micah.

Micah was slumped against the far wall, his forehead pressed to the mirror, groaning like a cat in heat.

Asher turned towards Micah, his jaw tight. "The mating fever," he muttered bitterly. "The goddess decided to bless someone who wasn't one of us with a mate bond."

"Oh," Alaric said slowly, realization settling over him. He should've seen it, the signs were all there: the sudden magnetic pull between Micah and Adele, the way Micah's pupils had blown wide, and the low, dangerous growl rumbling from deep in his throat.

After they'd been separated for individual interrogation, Adele hadn't returned to their room. She'd requested to be kept elsewhere.

Micah hadn't believed the detective at first and nearly tore the poor man's throat out until they showed him a short security clip of Adele herself making the request.

Alaric could not exactly blame Adele. He means, being mated to a half demon? That was crazy even by their standards. Not to mention, Micah's reputation preceded him.

A healer mated to an incubus, that was one crazy combination.

But then the moon goddess makes no mistake. Still, even if Violet turned out to be some sort of demon? Yeah, he was never letting her go. Ever.

Suddenly, the door opened.

Micah's head snapped up with lightning speed, hope flaring in his eyes, thinking it was Adele.

Except it wasn't.

Alpha king Elijah stepped into the room in his full glory, power clinging to him like a second skin.

Silence swallowed the space.

No one moved nor said a word as Elijah's gaze swept over each of them, weighing, measuring, and judging.

Then he said, flatly, "You're coming back with me." And there was no room for debate in his voice.

Micah stood straighter, the hope returning just as fast. "What about Adele, Is she coming too?" he asked, eyes locked on Elijah.

Elijah lifted a brow. "Adele?" The name left his lips with mild surprise.

Of all the people, he hadn't expected Micah to ask after her. The boy had never shown interest in any female, until now. Not to mention, Adele was of no real consequence to him. He had come for his nephew and heirs, not some healer.

"Why do you ask?" he said slowly, scrutinizing Micah now. "She was just freed moments ago. What about her?"

"No." Micah roared, realizing what the woman had done.

He tried to bolt but Christian, Elijah's Beta, stepped in, raising a hand. "You heard His Majesty's order, you're coming back with us."

Micah bared his teeth at him and then one moment, Christian was standing firm, and the next, he was airborne as Micah tossed across the room like paper. Asher and Alaric barely had time to duck before Christian slammed into the wall behind them, falling with a groan.

"Micah!" Elijah barked, stunned.

But the boy wasn't listening.

Micah let out a guttural roar, eyes gleaming with a light that made the hairs on Elijah's party stand on edge.

And then he was gone in a blur.

Elijah was frozen on the spot, speechless. What the fuck just happened? Did Micah just disobey his order?

"It's the Matebond," Asher answered the question in his mind.

Elijah turned to him. "What?"

Then he groaned, pinching the bridge of his nose like he could physically crush the oncoming headache.

With the lack of pure blooded she-wolves, Matebond was supposed to be rare. Since when did the goddess begin to hand over Matebond like freebies?

Almost immediately, Elijah's gaze hardened, the momentary lapse in control gone and was replaced by the familiar cold command.

"Both of you're coming with me now."

Alaric and Asher exchanged a look. There was apprehension in their eyes, but neither of them said a word and fell in line.

Christian groaned behind them, standing with what dignity he had left. His suit was wrinkled and his pride injured, but he resumed his duty like nothing happened.

By the time they walked out of the agency, it dawned on them that Micah was nowhere to be found and had probably gone after his runaway mate. This was going to be interesting.

The reporters came alive at the sight of the cardinal alphas, but the other officers kept them at bay while Christian guided them towards the car and they drove off.

#### Chapter 487: Elijah's Support

There was nothing but tension in the car.

Elijah hadn't said a single word since they left the agency, and the boys had not bothered trying to break the silence either. Every one of them was swallowed by their own thoughts, buried too deep in what had happened, and what was to come.

The car glided through the quiet streets of Aster City. Alpha Elijah had been around recently, handling the growing crisis around Patrick Vale. And while most would've stayed in a hotel or government facility, Elijah preferred his privacy and control. Hence, he'd taken up residence in his private estate in the city.

As the black vehicle pulled into the estate's gated perimeter, the reinforced electric gate recognized the car's license and slid open with a mechanical whirr.

Inside, the driveway stretched in elegant curves under a canopy of manicured trees, and the car slowed to a smooth stop at the front entrance.

Then Christian stepped out from the front passenger seat, adjusted his jacket, and rounded to the side. He opened the rear passenger door and Elijah emerged, composed as ever.

Asher and Alaric exited the vehicle on their own without waiting for permission. Elijah looked at them and said. "We'd talk in the living room." Then he walked ahead and the boys followed him.

As expected of an Alpha king's residence, the house was nothing short of grand. It had high ceilings crowned with intricate molding, dark-paneled walls accented with modern art and marble floors that gleamed like still water under warm ambient lighting. Everything smelled like power.

Elijah led them inside without a word, his gait calm, and assured, as if this was just another ordinary day.

"Take a seat," he said, gesturing towards the luxurious couches before veering off toward the mini bar tucked in the corner. The bar was small but fully stocked with amber and gold bottles.

He selected a dark decanter and set it on the glass table, only to return moments later with three tumblers.

Alaric eyed the bottle warily. "Don't you think it's a little too early to be drinking?"

Elijah met his gaze without blinking. Then, without a word, he popped the stopper and began pouring.

"I'd say," Elijah said, "after everything you guys went through last night, a drink is exactly what you need."

He filled the glasses halfway, then lifted one, and raised it ever so slightly in Asher's direction.

Elijah said coolly, "My condolences on the death of your father." He knocked back the drink in one motion, finishing it without a flinch, and returned the glass to the tabletop.

There was a sharp tick in Asher's jaw. Without replying, he snatched his glass, downed it in a single motion, and slammed it back on the table.

Alaric, never one to be outdone, followed suit with his own tumbler. The moment the liquid hit his throat, he winced. God, what drink was that? It was hard stuff.

Was Elijah trying to get them drunk to get the truth out of their mouth? Well, that was not beyond him. Alaric made a mental note to not have the stuff a second time.

"How did Henry die exactly?" Elijah inquired.

And there they go. Alaric could see this for what it was. An interrogation.

Werewolves were good at detecting lies. But since they were so good, it also meant they were able to tell their own lies without being caught.

"Why are you so curious?" Asher said casually. "Didn't you get the whole report at the agency? We already told them all we know. What more do you want to know?"

Elijah offered a smile. The kind that didn't dare touch his eyes. He rose, walked slowly over, and perched on the armrest of a chair, his stare unwavering. "I just find it interesting that a man like your father, selfish to the bone, would suddenly decide to die for someone else." His gaze fell on Alaric's. "For all of you."

But Asher didn't so much as blink. "Henry was a prick," he said evenly. "But sometimes staring death in the face forces you to realize what actually matters. Maybe he did have a heart after all."

"Mhmm," Elijah hummed, unconvinced. He poured himself another drink and downed it in one smooth swallow.

He asked again. "Pray tell. What about Roman, Griffin, and Violet? If I wasn't so careful, I'd think they committed a crime and are on the run. At least that's what the authorities think. It'll do you well if your friend is found."

"Roman is having a fucking spree with Violet right now."

Elijah choked on his drink. "What?!" he coughed.

"Oh yes," Alaric confirmed. "Violet is mated to Roman Draven now."

The Alpha King's hand trembled around his tumbler. He masked it poorly by shifting his grip and pretending nothing happened. It wasn't exactly impossible to have more than one mate, but it was rare. Incredibly rare.

But most of all, why Violet Purple?

Asher continued without mercy. "The bond hit them hard in the middle of the disaster. We knew if the authorities caught them, Roman would snap and then attack them, and make the situation worse, so we decided to send them ahead and prevent the disaster."

He added, "I suggest you also call your men off. We already know how dangerous mated pairs can be. I mean, you saw it firsthand with Micah."

Asher was smug as hell as Elijah absorbed the blow, his face hardening as if the floor had vanished from under him.

"You should go rest. Both of you," he said suddenly, trying to take charge of the situation that was getting out of control.

"Of course. That would be lovely, Your Majesty." Although his words were polite, it was the arrogance of his tone that pissed Elijah off.

Elijah's gaze darkened slightly. "I'll take it that you're grieving, but you will respect me. Because trust me, you want me on your side if you want to be the next Alpha." He commanded, "Leave now."

Alaric bowed slightly, unlike Asher, who sauntered out of the place with sass.

Elijah watched them go, his jaw tight, and his grip on the empty glass dangerously white-knuckled.

Christian came into view at that moment and he turned asking him.

"Tell me, what have you found about that girl, Violet Purple?"

Chapter 488: Finding The Heirs - 1

North Pack Territory....

Ace Storm stopped at the entrance of his parent's room with furrowed brows, watching as his parents' things were hauled away by the servant.

That could only mean one thing, they were traveling which was impossible. Today was supposed to be for him.

He stepped into the room. "What's going on?"

Zara Storm got off a call right at that moment.

"What are you talking about?" She asked him.

"Where are you going?" Ace asked even though he already had an inkling. He felt this churning feeling in the pit of his stomach.

Zara Storm told him. "We're leaving for Aster City. Your father and I need to check on Alaric."

"What?" Ace said. "But you got off the phone with him not long ago and he's fine."

Zara's steel-blue gaze locked onto her eldest. "We're still concerned about your brother. I need to see my son face to face and be sure he's alright."

Ace's face fell.

Then almost immediately, his expression shifted and his jaw tightened. "Then go. Fine. Go check on your golden child but Dad can stay. He promised he'd be at the Launch."

Zara paused, her lips parting as if she just recalled.

"Wait," Ace asked carefully, "You did not forget what tonight is, right?"

Zara storm said nothing.

Ace scoffed. "Of course, you don't."

Caspian scratched the back of his head, saying timidly. "We remember, Ace. It's just that we trust you'll present the Healer Drone System perfectly."

"But that's not the point!" Ace's voice rose with fury and desperation. "I've spent the last six months building Healer."

Healer was a fleet of AI-powered drones that was designed by Ace to recognize wounded werewolves by scent, heat, signature, or heartbeat patterns. They weren't just flying bots, but autonomous medics. They were made to inject adrenaline, administer stabilizers, and keep injured werewolves alive long enough to get help.

Ace wiped his hand down his face with a frustrated groan. "You know how many simulations it took to get the dosage right for shifting bodies? How many sleepless nights it took to teach the drones to

distinguish blood rage from actual death throes?" His voice cracked. "Healer could change everything for werewolf survival in the field especially those little packs who don't have access to elite healing centers or gifted healers."

There was silence. Then he added bitterly and quieter this time, "But of course, Alaric gets involved in an incident and suddenly the whole fucking family is packing bags."

Zara's expression hardened. "Don't be childish, Ace. You know we have no other choice."

"Then Dad should stay," Ace demanded. "You don't both have to go. Alaric isn't dying, he's safe at the Alpha king's place."

That way, one of you can stay and just for once, show up for me."

The moment the words left his mouth, silence swallowed the room.

Zara slowly walked over to him, her heels echoing against the floor. By the time she stood before him, Ace's spine straightened instinctively.

"Your brother nearly died and this... this is what you have to say?"

Ace stood his ground.

"You want us to pick sides when your sibling just escaped an assassination attempt?" Zara drew a deep breath. "I think it's time you learned to stand on your own, Ace. Stop seeking validation from everyone around you and be your own name."

She turned, brushing past him. "Now, that aside, your father needs me. We're two machines that don't function without the other."

"Yeah, sure," Ace muttered, bitter. "Father can't be an independent machine because you boss him around and cling to his side like a pest."

The air froze and Zara stopped walking.

Caspian's eyes darkened. "Take that back."

But Ace just stared at them, the fire in his eyes burning. "You know what? No. Fuck you all."

"Ace!" Caspian barked, his voice rising.

But the boy was already gone slamming the door behind him with a thunderous bang.

The silence that followed was tensed.

Caspian moved to Zara's side, his arms slipping around her shoulders. "Are you alright?"

Zara shrugged him off, her voice cool, and detached. "Yeah. Let's go find our son."

And with that, she headed toward the door, and left.

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South Pack Territory....

"So let me get this straight," Alpha Leon said slowly, his voice cold and biting, "you're trying to tell me my son was not a victim in the explosion but he also can't be found. And you're calling me to check if he's 'hiding' back home?"

There was a hesitant pause on the line, then the responder's voice wavered through. "We're just trying to be sure, Alpha Draven—"

"Dude," Leon cut him off, pure disbelief in his voice, "get the fuck off my phone."

And with that, he hung up.

"Goddamn it." Leon cursed, running his hand through his hair in frustration. What has Roman gotten himself into this time?

Then he pushed off and strode out of his office, to find his wife.

Down the corridor, he came to her door and knocked once.

"Alexa."

But there was no response.

He waited half a beat, then turned the knob and walked in. The scent of alcohol hit him first, and then he saw the empty bottles lay scattered across the floor, along with a lingerie, stilettos, and leather pants.

Leon stepped over a lacy red thong and moved into the bedroom.

And there she was.

Alexa Draven was sprawled across the bed like a spoiled goddess, naked and tangled between the two warm bodies of a pretty girl with smeared lipstick and an equally very young man who looked like he might've just graduated recently. All of them were naked in bed.

The woman stirred lazily, sensing her husband even before she opened her eyes.

"Mmm... morning, sweetheart" she purred, blinking into the light. Then she groaned, rubbing her temple. "Or is it afternoon? God, I partied hard last night."

Leon didn't even blink at the scene. He wasn't surprised. This was normal considering their marriage was an open one. He had long gotten used to his wife's hookups, the same way she's gotten used to his flings.

But at that moment, Leon's eyes were like steel as he commanded. "Get the fuck off the bed. We're going to Aster City. Our son's missing."

Chapter 489: Finding The Heirs - 2

East Pack Territory....

"Are you sure you don't want either of us to come along?" Arion asked his wife as she prepared to leave for Aster City after the news broke.

Aeron leaned silently against the doorway, watchful and deeply concerned.

"No," Irene said firmly. "If Griffin calls and needs help back home, then you both should be ready. Elijah will have his eyes on me the entire time and I won't be able to help from there."

Aeron finally stepped forward. "You think he's okay?"

"Our son is strong. He's probably protecting Violet and Roman."

"They could have just surrendered to the authorities and been given space to deal with the mating fever," Arion argued. "Now they're on the run, drawing unnecessary attention."

"Unless there's something else they're hiding," Aeron said, locking eyes with his brother.

Then he turned to Irene. "Let me come with you. You can face Elijah while I'll find our son."

Irene placed both hands on her hips, studying him. "Are you sure about that?"

"If there's any chance our son might be in trouble, then I need to find him first."

"Fine," Irene agreed.

"And I'll stay back. As usual," Arion added with a sigh. He would've loved to be part of the action.

Irene walked over, wrapped her arms around his neck, and kissed him softly as a gesture of thanks. "I recognize your sacrifice as well, my love."

Arion suddenly grinned. "Well, when you put it like that, I'd say I have no regrets." He punctuated the words by sliding his hands down her sides until they found her buttocks and squeezed.

Irene laughed against his lips, her mouth curving wickedly before she slipped her tongue into his, letting it tangle with his own. They took turns playfully sucking, and teasing each other.

"Alright, that's enough playing around, Arion," Aeron said, a tick in his jaw. Not out of anger, but restraint. Temptation was clawing at him, and he was supposed to be the voice of reason here.

This was not the time for distractions. Especially not ones like this.

"I'm going to miss you," Arion smooched her lips.

"I will too," Irene replied, catching the kiss with a smile.

"Come back as soon as you can," he whispered, still peppering her lips with soft, lingering smooches.

"I'll try," Irene said, laughing gently, overwhelmed and a little breathless from the affection.

At the sight of that, Aeron let out an exasperated sigh and then he was moving. Before Irene could react, he lifted her off her feet and threw her over his shoulder, making her squeal in shock.

"What are you doing, Aeron?! Put me down right now! I'm your Alpha!"

"Yes, Alpha!" Aeron said with mock obedience, then gave her a sharp smack on the ass.

Irene gasped, scandalized. "Aeron!"

But Arion burst into laughter. "Get that ass, brother!"

From her upside-down position, Irene shot a death glare at Arion.

That rascal!

She'd get back at him soon.

Aeron didn't let Irene down, at least not yet.

As they moved through the hallway, a few members of the pack caught sight of them and chuckled, looking away. They were already used to the antics between their Alpha and her husbands. This was just another day in the Hale household.

Aeron didn't stop until he reached the waiting car. He opened the door and, with no ceremony, dumped Irene inside.

She glared at him from the seat, her hair tousled. He just ruffled it more. "Good girl."

Then he shut the door, circled around, and climbed into the passenger seat just as the driver pulled away.

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West Pack Territory...

"Luna Patricia," a servant called gently from the doorway. "Beta Dominic is here."

Henry's widowed wife turned around. She didn't look a day over twenty-four. She had red hair, striking blue eyes, pouty lips, and was devastatingly beautiful. If not for her eyes, one could've mistaken her for Alpha Irene of the West Pack.

Patricia slowly moved away from the window. Dressed in black, her expression was somber. After hearing of her husband's death, she had gone into mourning immediately.

"Let him in," she instructed.

Beta Dominic stepped inside. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man with a face that was definitely not handsome, yet not bad to look at.

"Leave us," Patricia said to the servant.

Once the door shut behind them, the air thickened.

"You heard?" Dominic asked, studying her expression.

"I did," Patricia replied, her voice hoarse like someone who'd spent the night crying. "Is he really dead?" She said it like she was still waiting for the punchline.

"Yes. He's dead," Dominic confirmed, his voice certain.

Then in the blink of an eye, like gravity between wolves, Dominic and Patricia crashed into each other, their mouths colliding. They clawed at their clothes, desperate to feel each other.

Within seconds, Patricia was bent over the desk, her dress hiked up as Dominic rammed into her from behind, each thrust shaking the table.

Henry thought he was clever and never suspected his beautiful, trophy wife had been screwing his beta behind his back. Patricia didn't feel guilty one bit. This was reward for surviving the nightmare Henry had been.

"We should throw a party," Dominic groaned, still pounding into her with wild satisfaction.

Patricia moaned with delight. "This feels like a party to me," she purred, her gaze lifting towards Henry's portrait on the wall, his cold stare watching them as they fucked.

"Oh yeah..." Dominic let out a broken laugh between ragged breaths. In his mind, he was spitting Henry on the face.

"I'm going to come," Patricia moaned breathlessly.

"Then come for me, my Luna," Dominic said, driving into her faster, harder.

She screamed as she shattered around him.

Later, they lay together in the silk sheet while his hand lazily traced the curve of her waist.

Then Patricia whispered, "It's time you start preparing to be Alpha."

Dominic looked at her. "What about Asher?"

Patricia scoffed, the sound like bitter wine.

"Don't worry about him. When the time comes, you'll challenge him, and you'll win. You'd be surprised how many are done with Henry's bloodline ruling this pack. No one wants another tyrant."

#### Chapter 490: Fighting The Matebond

Blessed was the wolf with a Matebond.

But the same couldn't be said for Adele at the moment.

"Are you okay?" the front desk manager asked.

Adele was sweating profusely, looking like she might collapse at any second.

"I'm good," she snapped, irritation in her voice. "The keys?" She held out her hand stiffly.

"Fine. Room thirteen," the manager said, handing over the keycard. "Down the hall, last on the left."

Adele turned without another word. Right now, her hormones were so all over the place she could snap somebody's head.

Big fat thanks to the mating fever.

She had never imagined coming to a place like this, but desperate times called for desperate measures.

After being released from the agency, she'd used a diffuser to mask her scent so Micah couldn't track her. And then she came here.

A motel was the last place Micah would think she'd hide. After all, what was a wolf with a Matebond doing in a dump like this?

Yes, she was running from her mate.

Mate? That was hilarious. Was the moon goddess seriously fucking with her?

Of all the werewolves she could be mated to, it had to be him. Why? She didn't want an incubus who had slept his way through the school. He just wasn't her type. How could they possibly be a perfect match?

But she couldn't reject him either. It was said that rejecting one's mate was hell. Like tearing out your own soul and living with an ache that never vanished. No matter where you went, no matter what you did, you'd always yearn for that one person.

Adele might not like her choice of a mate, but she couldn't reject him. Not yet. Not until he gave her a damn good reason to. For now, she had to ride out the mating fever and get her mind back before making any decisions.

One might ask, why run if she wasn't going to reject him?

Because most mates marked each other during the throes of passion triggered by the fever. They didn't plan it. It wasn't a choice. It was instinct. Wired into their DNA to claim and be claimed.

That was why mates who hated each other had to reject fast. Because once the fever hit full force, there was no reasoning. Just heat. Just the overwhelming, primal need to fuck like animals.

It was even more laughable that the whole damn point of the fever was procreation.

Adele wasn't ready for a child, especially not with him.

What if the baby took more of his demon traits than werewolf? What if they weren't accepted?

She'd heard about Micah's childhood, the abuse, and the isolation. Even now, he should've taken his place as the next Alpha King, but he was denied the throne because of what he was.

Elijah still watched him like a threat. As if he was something he needed to put on a leash.

Would her child grow up that way as well, rejected by society, feared and suppressed?

No.

She couldn't bring a child into this world just to watch them suffer. She would rather suffer herself.

So Adele dragged her already weak body down the hallway that reeked of bleach, alcohol—and sex.

It didn't help that the place had thin walls. The next room she passed filled the air with the unmistakable sounds of a woman's moans and flesh slapping against flesh.

"Yes, baby... You have a big fat dick... Aww! Fuck!" The woman's vocal moans seemed to echo straight from the room and right into Adele's ears.

Fuck her life.

Adele groaned, using the wall for support as another surge of heat rushed between her legs.

She moaned in tortured pain.

Thanks to those words, her already messy thoughts conjured a mental image of Micah's big fat dick plowing through her.

"No!" Adele wailed, dragging herself forward even as her wolf protested loudly in her head. It wanted Micah. It wanted to go back.

But fuck the horny wolf. She was in control of this body, not her.

With a burst of strength, Adele managed to finally reach her door and slammed it shut, locking it behind her. With her back pressed against the door, she sank to the floor, breathing hard.

She had no doubt she looked like a total wreck right now.

As expected of a cheap motel, her room was just as depressing as the rest of the corridor. The air was stale, while the bed was a queen-sized creaking thing with mismatched sheets tucked too tightly over a mattress that had seen better days. A chipped wooden desk stood under the lone window, its blinds half-bent and crooked.

The walls were a faded beige, cracked in some corners, and the carpet felt sticky under her shoe. However, she had come here to escape from her mate so she wasn't complaining about the quality.

Forcing herself to her feet, Adele staggered toward the bathroom, one hand gripping the wall for balance as the other pushed open the creaking door. The bathroom light flickered twice before staying on, casting a sickly yellow hue across the space.

The single, grimy mirror above the sink greeted her with a distorted reflection of her flushed, fever-stricken face.

But that was none of her business.

Adele reached into her pocket, pulling out a small foil packet with shaky hands and white pills spilled into her palm. It was suppressors in pill form.

She'd bought them on her way here, knowing what she might be up against.

Four pills was an overdose by normal standards and though it wouldn't kill her and do it's work of suppressing her wolf, it still had side effects : Nausea, heart palpitations, and temporary sensory loss.

But she'd survive.

So Adele tossed the pills into her mouth and dry-swallowed them with a wince. The

bitter taste hit the back of her throat and stayed there.

There was no fixed timeline for the Mating Fever. Some wolves rode it out in a day; others battled through two, maybe three days while the longest known fever on record lasted a full week.

But the most common duration was two days. Adele thought if she could sleep through today, perhaps she'd have a fighting chance tomorrow.

So Adele dragged herself back to the bed, each step like wading through fire. Her wolf roared in anger but she could feel its influence dwindling.

She collapsed onto the sheets, curling in on herself like a wounded animal as the fever pulsed in her veins, hot and angry.

Her hands gripped the pillow like it was an anchor. May the goddess help her.