

Defy 501

Chapter 501: Father

"Doctor." Micah shot to his feet the moment she stepped out.

The woman in the white coat didn't even get a full breath in before he demanded, "What's going on?"

She paused at first, then exhaled like someone about to deliver bad news. "According to the scan, she took suppressors."

Micah blinked. "What?"

"She took too many of it from the look of the result" the doctor clarified. "However, we've flushed her system, and pumped her stomach clean."

"What?!"

Micah was still trying to wrap his head around it. Suppressors? Was Adele out of her mind? Was he really that horrible?

The doctor said, "It's a good thing you brought her in when you did. Any later, and it could've gotten worse. Possibly even fatal."

Micah dragged a hand through his hair, ruffling it in frustration. He was clearly losing his mind, unable to process Adele's reckless choice.

She went on to explain. "Suppressors are mainly to help feral wolves manage surges by silencing the wolf entirely. However, even such an act is unnatural. Think of it like rejecting a limb. Uncomfortable, right?"

Micah couldn't speak. He didn't trust what would come out if he did.

"In Adele's case..." The doctor adjusted her coat nervously. "Her wolf didn't react well and lashed out against the drug itself, probably aggravated by the mating fever. You know how active wolves get during that time."

Then came the kicker.

"Who in the world takes suppressors during mating fever?" the doctor muttered, mostly to herself. "If I wasn't so careful, I'd think she was trying to—"

She stopped dead when her gaze collided with Micah's. He hadn't moved, but the look in his eyes made her blood run cold.

The doctor swallowed, cleared her throat, and stepped back quickly. "You can see her now, Your Highness."

She turned and scurried down the hallway like her life depended on it.

Without wasting time, Micah went in to see her.

The room didn't look like a hospital at all, and it was his doing.

Micah ordered that she be treated privately and quietly. The room was large, almost too large for just one person, and painted in warm cream tones with soft, ambient lighting.

There was no beeping monitors, no smell of antiseptic, no scratchy sheets or ugly white tiles. Instead, the floor was polished wood, and a deep-blue armchair sat near the wide window, overlooking the city beyond. The place could pass for a penthouse suite if not for the IV line hooked to her arm.

Adele was asleep, wrapped in soft ivory sheets, her breathing steady and even. Her dark hair was spread across the pillow like ink, and her lashes fanned out over pale cheeks. She looked peaceful.

But that peace twisted something sharp in Micah's chest because beneath it, he saw the vulnerability. The kind that only came after nearly dying.

Micah closed the distance between them, standing before her. Then his eyes fell on the mating rune.

Etched into her skin at the base of her neck, the ink-black mark stared back at him. Three intersecting lines, vertical and diagonal, met at the center, forming an "X" with a spine and two more offshoots branching like fangs.

Micah reached up and touched his neck. His own mark was two thick lines slashed in an "X," with two crooked prongs climbing out of the top like claws. It was different shapes but of the same bond.

He let out a slow breath, his hand dropping.

They called the mating bond a blessing. Micah almost laughed.

Blessings didn't feel like shackles. Blessings didn't hurt like this.

Even right now, staring at her asleep and breathing, his chest burned not with love, but sour and raw bitterness.

She had taken suppressors during her mating fever knowing full well what it could do. She would rather poison her own body than be bound to him. Did she hate him that much? Was the thought of being his mate that unbearable?

Micah's hands balled into a fist this time.

She could've died.

She could've died!

And where would that have left him? Alone and eternally heartbroken?

The bond didn't just break when one mate died, it shattered everything with it. The soul, will and the reason to live. The death of one usually took the other. Some by suicide. Some by grief. While some just withered away, unable to breathe in a world where the other didn't exist.

She would've left him like that.

Did she even understand what she had risked?

She should have just rejected him.

That pain would've been mercy compared to the idea of holding her cold in his arms, watching her slip away because she couldn't bear to be his.

Micah groaned, dragging a hand down his face and then gripping the edge of the bed to steady himself.

No. He wasn't going to recover from this anytime soon.

How was he supposed to love someone who hated him?

The mating bond wasn't meant to fix things, rather it was supposed to seal the love that was already there.

But between him and Adele? There had never been any of that. Maybe lust. But that wasn't enough to survive a bond this deep.

He let out a bitter laugh under his breath. "What a fucking joke."

Perhaps Adele was right and the moon goddess did make a mistake this time.

And then without warning, Micah vanished into a dark mist, his body scattering like smoke. And before he could even react, he was slamming back into solid form, face first.

Micah hit the ground hard, the wind punched out of his lungs.

"Shit," he groaned, pushing himself up on his forearms, breath wheezing in his throat.

His head snapped up, scanning his surroundings and realizing it wasn't the hospital room.

Oh, he knew exactly where. Fuck his life.

A figure was standing before him with eyes like steel and power radiating off him in thick, suffocating waves.

Micah's stomach dropped.

"Father," he acknowledged him, voice tight with tension.

Chapter 502: Angus Family

"You do know sending for me is better than dragging me out like this," Micah said through gritted teeth as he pushed himself off the cold floor, the impact still rattling through his bones.

He dusted himself off and finally looked up only for his breath to hitch.

Micah recognized Elijah's palace at first sight. He had grown up here, running through these halls as a boy thinking the world was his until life had taught him differently.

But that wasn't what rooted him to the spot. It was the sight of Angus sitting on Elijah's throne. Or more precisely, what used to be his throne.

The throne was carved from a single slab of obsidian, its surface polished so dark it devoured the light around it. The back rose high in jagged peaks, crowned with gold inlays. The armrests curved into snarling wolf heads, fangs bared as if forever guarding the one who sat there, their eyes set with tiny shards of moonstone. Crimson leather cushioned the seat, stitched with crescent patterns marking the Alpha King's divine right. At the base, the moon goddess's sigil was etched deep into the floor, worn smooth by centuries of Alpha kings who had ruled before.

And Angus had draped himself across the seat of power like it belonged to him.

Of course, he wasn't alone.

"Hello, brother."

"Ziva." Micah spat the name like it was poison on his tongue.

Ziva stepped out from behind the throne, her fingertips crackling with magic, each spark leaping and dying against her pale skin. She was his father's third child and the one who had dared to summon him here as if he were some obedient servant to appear at their every whim.

Born of his father's union with a powerful witch, Ziva was easily the most dangerous of them all. She had slit her own mother's throat and drained every drop of her magic just to claim that power for herself—an offering to their father and his endless hunger for dominance.

She practically worshipped the ground Angus walked on, hanging on his every command. From what Micah found out, she had even shared his bed in the hope of bearing him an heir.

Yes. Their presence together was as nauseating as it was unholy.

"To what do I owe this... abduction?"

Micah's words dripped with venom, because this was far from a visit and they had yanked him here against his will.

His eyes didn't leave Ziva as he spoke, but his tone carried to Angus as well. Micah's shoulders were squared, the set of his jaw daring either of them to push it further. The air between them was thick, and charged like the moment before lightning struck.

However, Ziva's smile was all teeth, her magic humming in the air like a predator's purr, while Angus simply sat back and watched him, measuring and waiting.

Unlike Ziva, Micah was the very image of his father, a living photocopy, save for the eyes he'd inherited from his mother. Beauty ran strong in their bloodline, serving as an inescapable curse and weapon all at once.

And if there was one thing the men of this family excelled at, it was bedding women. Elijah had scattered his seed with nothing to show for it, but Angus's selective breeding was ruthless, and fruitful. Every child he sired was crafted for his purpose.

What unnerved Micah was how easily Angus had gotten into the most protected place in the palace. Even now, he could hear the steady footsteps of guards patrolling outside the throne room yet no one came in to check. As if they couldn't hear a thing or worse, as if something was keeping them away. And Micah knew without a doubt that it was Ziva's doing.

"Why am I here?" he asked again when no one bothered to answer the first time.

When Violet had once asked if he was in communication with his father, she had been asking the wrong question entirely. It was never him reaching out, rather it was Angus who knew exactly how to find him whenever he pleased.

Ziva moved closer to Angus, her fingers trailing over his arm with slow, deliberate strokes that were far too intimate for a father and daughter. Her touch was a claim, and when she finally spoke, her voice was that familiar low, rasping purr that could make even the bravest man flinch.

"You knew our sister all along," she accused him, "and you didn't bother to tell Father?"

"Oh," Micah realized what this was all about. They'd found out the lock on Violet's power was gone.

Micah answered calmly, his voice edged with deliberate emphasis. "Which of the sisters? If I recollect, there seems to be quite a lot."

He wasn't exaggerating. Whether it was the lingering curse of Admodeus that somehow prevented the birth of more males in their bloodline, or simply Angus being very particular about the gender he bred, Micah couldn't say for certain but deep down, he suspected the latter.

Electra complex, they called it. A father's unnatural hold over his daughter. In Angus's case, it wasn't some accident of psychology, it was intentional. He preferred daughters, girls who could be molded from birth, made pliable and loyal, taught to obey his voice as if it were law. Females who, under his careful grooming, became both weapons and worshippers, bending to his will without ever realizing they were being used.

"Don't play games with me, brother!" Ziva snapped at him. Then almost too quickly, she calmed, saying. "You always know everything." A smile curved her lips, sly and knowing. "The same way I do, too."

"Yeah," Micah replied flatly. "Spying on people with your little voodoo mirror. What a creep."

Instead of taking offense, Ziva laughed. "That was a nice one." She turned toward Angus, her fingertips brushing his side. "Father, go on, tell him why you summoned him."

Finally, Angus spoke up. "Does Violet know about me?"

Micah's mouth curved into a humorless smile before the laugh escaped him. "Oh, she knows," he said, his tone dripping with mockery. "And she can't wait to end your life, this time for real."

Chapter 503: Bring Violet To My Side

What happened next was Ziva snapping. "No one threatens my father like that!"

Her magic rose, a blinding pulse of heat and light that slammed into Micah's chest and hurled him to the floor. The impact stole his breath, pain lancing through his ribs as he groaned.

"That's enough!" Angus thundered.

"But, Father—" Ziva started, her voice loud and indignant.

"I said enough!" Angus's bellow rattled the very walls. "You will not touch my son again!"

For a moment, one could almost think Angus cared — or maybe he did, in his own twisted, blackened way — but Micah wasn't about to feel flattered.

Ziva's lips pressed into a pout, her magic still sizzling faintly at her fingertips before she forced it to fade. With a sharp exhale, she stepped back, subdued but glaring at Micah like she wished she could finish the job when no one was watching.

Micah forced himself to his feet, saying, "You shouldn't bother with Violet. You can't sink your twisted claws into her."

"But you can," Angus countered without missing a beat.

He rose from the throne and walked towards him, every step a slow assertion of dominance. He stopped just in front of Micah, close enough that Micah could see the faint, cruel smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"You can convince her," Angus said, his voice brimming with conviction, like it was already decided. "Convince her that I'm not so bad, that what I'm doing is for the well-being of the wolves."

Micah snorted, his lip curling. "Is that what you tell yourself so you can sleep at night? That all this madness is for the future of the wolves and not your own ambition?"

But Angus' gaze was cold, and terrifyingly sure. "I am creating the next generation of were-kind. A kind with no limitations, and full of power. The kind that will stand up to humans, because they are not our friends."

Something in Micah snapped. "Everything has order, and what you're doing is tearing it apart!" His voice rose, raw, the cracks of old wounds bleeding into every word. "You have no business intentionally creating children who belong to no one — children caught between worlds, never truly claimed by either!"

He took a step closer, his chest heaving, the memories he'd buried clawing their way to the surface. "You don't know what it's like to be a victim of someone's madness and still move on with life as if it's nothing. I lived it, and I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy, especially not on Violet. So you can go fuck yourself, father."

The silence that followed afterwards was charged, as if even the walls had absorbed those heavy words.

For a long moment, Angus just stared at him. There was no sign if Micah's words had landed anywhere near his heart.

Then, slowly, that cruel smile returned, stretching with unnerving calm.

"You mistake me for someone who builds for love, Micah," he said almost like a father soothing an ignorant child. "I don't care if they feel they belong. I care that they survive and that they are strong enough to crush anyone who dares to stand in their way."

He began to circle Micah like a predator, his tone low and poisonous.

"You speak as if pain is the enemy. But Pain shapes us. It breaks the weak and tempers the worthy. You would rather they live soft lives and die soft deaths."

Angus stopped behind him, leaning in close enough for Micah to feel the heat of his breath at his ear. "I am giving my children power. Never again will humans win a war against our kind, and that is why I need Violet. Her mother was powerful, so you can imagine the kind of force she would wield."

"I am powerful!" Ziva cut in from her spot, lifting her chin like a spoiled princess demanding acknowledgment.

"Of course you are, my darling," Angus replied with a dark chortle.

Even without dipping into his own power, Micah could feel the manipulation rolling off this man. He knew what he was doing.

"What's your plan, exactly? Wipe out all the humans? Humans and werewolves have come too far for this and you want to shatter that peace?"

Angus gave a derisive snort. "Peace? Is that what you delude yourself with?" His eyes gleamed with mockery. "Do you even know your precious President Roy is working with Patrick Vale? How do you think he managed to keep his identity hidden from my foolish brother, Elijah?"

Micah froze, the words hitting harder than he wanted to admit. President Roy was working with Patrick? It was absurd. It had to be. Angus was a master at twisting truths to suit his games, and yet Micah couldn't brush it aside completely. He would dig into it later.

"That still isn't a reason to start a war," Micah said evenly, keeping his voice calm, though his pulse was a drumbeat in his ears.

Angus grinned. "Who said I'm starting a war? I might as well rule them."

"What?" Micah stared, not quite sure he understood that comment. Rule them?

Angus's gaze slid deliberately to Micah's neck, and something in his expression shifted. "Oh... interesting. The Matebond."

Micah's entire body went rigid. A growl rolled up his throat, his teeth bared instinctively at the man who'd sired him.

But Angus only laughed, savoring the reaction. "So it seems my son finally has something to lose." His amusement vanished in an instant, replaced by steel. "Don't test my patience, boy. You know what to do."

But Micah didn't flinch. "I'm not lending a shred of help for whatever twisted plan you're running."

For a moment, Angus actually looked surprised as if he hadn't expected his son to plant his feet so firmly. "I have a soft spot for you, Micah," he said slowly, almost thoughtfully, only for his voice to harden. "But this will be the last mercy you'll ever get from me. Next time, we will meet as enemies."

Micah's reply was instant. "Have it your way."

Angus's eyes flicked to Ziva. She only rolled her eyes, clearly unimpressed with the exchange. "Goodbye, brother," she said, her voice dripping with mockery. "Till we meet again."

And then, without warning, the air swallowed him whole.

Micah hit reality with a jolt, standing once again in the hospital room. Adele was still there and he let out a relieved breath.

That was close.

However, the battle lines has been drawn.

Chapter 504: The Witch

Night fell faster than expected, and just as promised, Mother Thessara arrived with the witch in tow.

"Listen carefully," she said, her voice edged with warning. "You work quickly, and you work once. She will not come back a second time."

Her eyes narrowed. "Do nothing to draw attention. If you stir the wrong eyes, I will not shield you. When you're done, she'll be nearby to take her home." She meant the Nova who had accompanied them.

Thessara's gaze lingered a beat longer. "As I said before, do not make me regret this. Now go."

"Follow me," Griffin told the witch, and she obeyed without hesitation.

She was dressed in a full cloak that hid her entirely, the hood shadowing her face, and making her indistinguishable from the Novas who served in the temple. Hence no one spared her a second glance even if they were to encounter her.

They walked until Thessara and the Nova were only fading silhouettes behind them. The corridor narrowed as they approached the quarters and were almost at their destination when Griffin's voice cut through the silence.

"How good are you at glamouring?"

"Glamouring? Is that what we're doing?" the witch asked curiously.

Griffin stopped dead in his tracks. In the next heartbeat, his hand clamped around her neck, lifting her clean off the ground. His eyes burned amber, his wolf rising just beneath the surface, the growl in his chest vibrating through her bones.

"You are here to serve me. When I ask you something, you answer. And if you so much as breathe a word of what you see in this room to anyone—" his grip tightened, "—you're already dead. Are we clear?"

The witch's face flushed red, her hands clawing at his wrist, nodding frantically to show she understood.

Griffin released her, letting her collapse onto the floor. She gasped and coughed, dragging in air as though she'd just been drowning and just broke through the surface of water.

Towering over her, Griffin asked again, his tone as sharp as a blade. "How good are you at glamouring?"

"Quite good," she rasped.

Satisfied, Griffin turned and stepped into the room. She didn't need to be told twice and scrambled after him.

The scent of sex hit her hard. Although Griffin had tidied up the place and Roman and Violet had been at their best behavior, knowing they were expecting a visitor, it still didn't erase the scent entirely. In fact it seemed to cling to them, announcing to the whole world they were under the influence of the mating fever.

As soon as the witch's gaze fell on Violet's gaze, her breath hitched and she froze on the spot. That slightly pointed ear. There was only creatures with such detail —

Bang!

She nearly jumped out of her skin. Griffin had slammed the door shut with enough force to make the walls hum. The message was clear: stop staring and start working.

The witch quickly lowered her hood, raven-black hair spilling free. "Hello. I'm Janice."

"Nice to meet you, Janice," Violet replied evenly, making no move to offer her own name.

It was obvious to everyone that Janice was confused as hell the moment her gaze shifted to Roman who sat close beside Violet on the bed, one arm wrapped possessively around her waist. She'd already seen the mating rune on Griffin and Violet's necks and assumed they were mates. So why was another man sitting that close, acting like he belonged there? Mates were territorial.

What Janice didn't know was that Roman and Violet were wearing shirts that hide the rune on their body. Without that mark visible, she could only guess. Still, she kept her face carefully neutral, choosing not to ask questions that might get her killed.

"I'm guessing you want me to hide the ear," Janice said cautiously. The memory of Griffin's hand crushing her throat was still fresh enough to make her weigh every word before it left her mouth.

"Not just that," Griffin replied. "Hide her scent, dull her eyes, make her hair shorter, and her skin less shiny. Simply make her human."

"This is what she looks like." Roman pulled a folded sketch from his pocket and handed it over. They'd lost their phone in the fight—a blessing in disguise, since it meant they couldn't be tracked.

Janice studied the sketch, then nodded. "I can work with that."

She stepped forward, but froze when Roman's low growl rumbled through the air. His eyes locked on her with distrust and warning. She was a witch, after all, and witches and werewolves had never been a comfortable mix.

"If you don't mind," she said carefully, "I need to work my magic."

"It's alright," Violet squeezed Roman's thigh, a gesture the witch saw as well and kept her mouth shut. Then Violet's eyes were on Janice now. "Don't worry, she won't try anything stupid."

Janice seem to be about Violet's age, but she still shuddered from the look in Violet's eyes.

The witch calmed her breath, forcing herself to sound professional as Violet rose and faced her.

"What do I do?" She asked.

"You do nothing but concentrate. As I work, I don't want you moving at all because it'll disrupt the glamour. Closing your eyes usually works best."

Violet didn't wait for further instruction; her eyes slid shut.

"You might feel my magic as a strange pull or tingle. Don't resist it." Janice hadn't even begun, still explaining the process, when, call it instinct, Violet suddenly pictured herself exactly as she used to look.

A sharp inhale broke the air.

"Holy shit..." someone breathed.

"Is she—?" another voice began.

"Glamouring," Janice answered, her voice edged with disbelief.

The air around them shifted, alive with unfamiliar energy. Violet opened her eyes to find everyone staring at her as if they'd just seen a ghost.

"What?" Violet asked.

Roman smiled. "You just glamored yourself, baby."

"I did?" Violet was surprised, her hands flying to her face. She touched her ear only to find out there was no difference.

"It's still pointed." She frowned.

"But we don't see it that way," Griffin said, a hint of pride in his voice.

A small grin tugged at Violet's lips. She was starting to get the hang of this.

Suddenly, Janice said, "You're more powerful than I thought, Violet."

Chapter 505: Angus Intention

The air shifted instantly and every muscle in the room went rigid, especially Violet's. She was certain she hadn't told the witch her name.

Her voice was taut, eyes narrowing to sharp slits. "What did you just say?"

The once-timid Janice now wore an unsettling smirk. "You heard me, Violet."

She dragged out the name intentionally, savoring it. Then her lips curved wider, her voice dipping to a mocking purr. "Father says hi."

The words landed like poison and Violet's chest tightened, fury rushing in to fill the space. She moved without thinking, her palm shooting forward as a raw surge of power exploded from it.

The blast struck Janice dead-on. The witch flew backward, hitting the wall with bone-jarring force. Stone and plaster shattered, collapsing outward in a cloud of dust and debris. The crack of impact reverberated down the corridor, leaving a jagged, gaping hole where the wall had stood.

Violet crossed the wreckage in two strides and burst into the corridor but Janice had already vanished.

"Where did she go?" she demanded to no one in particular, scanning both ends frantically.

Griffin and Roman were at her side, their heads lifting, and their nostrils flaring as they sniffed the air.

"She's gone," Roman said with a clipped voice. His eyes glowed an unnatural green as his wolf sight searched farther ahead.

Almost at the same moment, the Nova assigned to escort the witch back appeared at the far end of the hall. She froze at the sight of the destroyed wall, her jaw dropping. "What in the world—"

She didn't get the chance to finish because Griffin's eyes flashed amber, and in the blink of an eye he was in front of her, one hand around her throat as he lifted her clean off the ground.

"Where is she?!" he thundered.

"Wh-who?" the Nova gasped, her legs kicking frantically.

"The witch you sent here!" Griffin's voice was a growl edged with fury.

"I—I don't know..." she wheezed, desperation plain in her eyes.

"Don't play games with me!" His grip tightened.

"Griffin!" Violet called his name. "She's telling the truth."

Griffin released her instantly and The Nova fell to the floor, coughing and rubbing her bruised neck.

"Go. Get Moonmother Thessara, now." Griffin ordered.

The young Nova didn't wait to be told twice, and bolted.

Violet turned to him. "Whoever that was, I don't think any of them knew her."

"You're saying the witch was working alone?" Griffin asked, disbelief flickering across his features.

"Father says hi," Roman said quietly, repeating the words Janice had left behind.

Violet's jaw tightened. "Angus."

Roman and Griffin exchanged a troubled look at the mention of that name.

"How did he even find you here?" Griffin asked.

"The seal over my power is gone. Maybe we weren't as careful as we thought." Violet answered, running a hand through her hair.

"So, he sends a witch to...what? Drop a message?" Roman's brows furrowed, his voice thick with confusion.

Violet shook her head. "I think it was more than that. I can't shake the feeling she was testing my magic. She could have attacked me but she didn't. Instead, she took my strike instead." Her voice went up a notch, a dangerous heat lacing her words. "And I hope that was enough of a taste to burn in her memory."

The air between them was taut when the sound of hurried footsteps echoed down the corridor. Mother Thessara came into view only to freeze at the sight of the wrecked quarters.

"I told you not to draw any—"

She didn't finish because Griffin was already in front of her, his towering frame casting her in shadow, his voice a deep, rumbling threat.

"Did you even investigate the witch you brought here?"

"W-what?" Thessara's composure cracked, her breath faltering under the oppressive weight of his Alpha authority.

"The witch you sent here came after my mate!" His growl rumbled through the hall.

Thessara's eyes widened, darting to Violet—she was unharmed, thank the goddess—before flicking back to Griffin. "I had no idea. I contacted her in secret based on a recommendation, nothing more."

She hesitated, then muttered with a bitter edge, "This is why witches can't be trusted. I warned you and yet—"

Her words died off under the sharp glare Griffin leveled at her, and she didn't need to be told that the next sentence might cost her.

"I need everything you know about that witch, especially where she lives. I'm going to track her." Griffin told her.

Violet stepped in immediately. "You can't go after her alone. It's dangerous."

"Who said anything about going alone?" Griffin turned and hooked his finger at the young Nova lingering by the corridor wall. The blood drained from her face as if he'd just signed her death warrant.

She gulped. "I... I can't—"

"Oh, You can," Griffin said flatly. "And you will."

Violet still was not comfortable with the idea and reminded him. "She's a witch."

"I'll rip her throat out before she even thinks about summoning a spell." His tone left no room for doubt. Then he added, "Besides, Angus is after you, not me. That's why Roman will keep you safe until I'm back."

Roman nodded once. "Fine, be careful. To ensure Violet doesn't die from worry, I'll keep an eye on you."

As if to punctuate his words, a shadow streaked from the trees outside. A black bird swooped down, talons clicking lightly against Griffin's shoulder before it climbed to perch on his back.

"He'll be my eyes and ears," Roman said, the corner of his mouth twitching.

Griffin glanced over his shoulder at the bird, then back at Roman. "Bird surveillance, super chill."

Finally, his amber eyes locked on the trembling Nova. "Let's go."

She hesitated long enough for Griffin to tilt his head in silent warning and that was all it took for her to follow him.

"Ensure my mate's comfortable." That was the last instruction he gave Thessara and left.

Meanwhile, Violet watched them disappear down the corridor, her gut twisting. How did they go from having a great time together to this?

Chapter 506: The Animal Story

Roman was full of surprises.

"So, you can control animals?" Violet arched a brow at him. "How did I not know? You don't seem to invest in that particular skill."

They sat on the bed with their backs to the wall. Sure, the room was wrecked, but where else could they go? It was just a gaping hole in the wall, not the apocalypse. Outside, night air slipped through the break, carrying the faint hum of the temple beyond. The bed at least was still intact, and that was enough.

Besides, the mating fever had cooled to a dull ember, no longer suffocating her thoughts. By morning, she'd be out of here. She couldn't wait another hour. After that witch's attack, Violet needed to see the rest of her men and make sure they were alive, breathing, and preferably not doing anything stupid. Then she'd figure out the rest of this madness.

One thing was clear: Angus hadn't made a move until her powers were free. That alone made her pause and dulled whatever anger she'd been holding toward her birth mother. If Angus was this insane, she could only imagine the kind of fear her mother had lived with, probably the kind that drove her to bind her own daughter's magic.

So yeah, Violet couldn't exactly blame her.

Roman said, "My mother didn't like it."

At the mention of his mother's name, Violet shifted on the bed, bracing herself for the bitter turn this story was about to take. Alexa Draven had never been a steady presence in Roman's life, and Violet could only imagine what she'd done to make him avoid honing this skill altogether.

She leaned in until her head rested on his shoulder, their fingers intertwining. A silent gesture meant to anchor him and offer the support she knew he probably wouldn't ask for. Roman wasn't Asher and would have taken it regardless, even if she hadn't offered.

Roman continued. "My powers practically made me an animal magnet. I could walk past a pet store, and the animals would go haywire—not in a bad way though. It was like they could sense a kindred spirit..." He gave a careless scoff. "Probably a god. I was the fucking god of animals."

Violet couldn't tell if the laugh that followed was genuine or if it was the kind of laugh people used to cover a bruise they didn't want touched. It was too quick, and thin around the edges. She didn't call him on it though, and stayed quiet, letting him hold onto the humor if that was all he had right now.

"They all wanted to leave with me and wouldn't calm until I touched and soothed them. Unfortunately, this only worked on the caged ones, so you can imagine the animals that were free..."

Although the story was edging into sad territory, the way Roman said it made a small laugh escape Violet's lips.

He smirked at her reaction and went on, "I turned our home into a fucking zoo. There wasn't a week when the pack staff didn't find one or two raccoons raiding the kitchen. I once walked into my room to find a deer asleep on my bed. Don't even get me started on the birds? Flocks would follow me like I was Snow White, only they were louder and far more annoying. I opened the bathroom door once, and there was a fox sitting there in my tub as if it paid rent."

He shook his head at the memory. "And then there was the day a lion decided to 'drop by.' The pack had to full-on evacuate the pack house. The deltas were panicking because there I was, sitting on the porch feeding it raw steak like we were old friends."

Violet tried—she really did—to keep a straight face, but the mental image of all of those encounters was too much. Before she knew it, her shoulders shook, and finally she burst into full-blown laughter, leaning into him as the sound broke out, unrestrained and warm.

"This is crazy," Violet said, wiping the tears from her eyes, still catching her breath from laughing.

"Oh, there was worse," Roman replied, savoring the memory until his expression suddenly soured. "And then it happened."

Violet's smile faded instantly, her posture straightening. She could feel the story was about to turn, and whatever came next had ended the laughter for good.

Roman scratched at his scalp. "I think I was about ten at the time. My mother was dead tired of my 'antics' and decided it was better to give me a space of my own where I could entertain my 'friends.' So they moved me into this smaller quarters on the estate, far enough for her peace of mind, but close enough to keep an eye on me. I had all the space I wanted."

A faint smirk tugged at his lips. "And... I was also crushing on this girl in my pack. I went to confess and impress her with a grand gesture."

Violet's brows lifted, amusement gleaming in her eyes. Someone had a crush.

Roman kept a straight face as he went on. "It sounds crazy, but I was a kid, what were you expecting? I planned this concert where the birds would sing a mind-blowing orchestra, and the smaller animals would do a little dance. The way I had it all in my head, it was going to be out of this world.

"Then I decided to invite my mother to witness the event firsthand. Except when I walked into her room, I saw something that would change my life forever."

Violet's expression shifted, already sensing where this was going.

"My mother was in bed with another man," Roman said in a hollow voice.

It was a difficult confession, obvious in the way he licked his lips and swallowed. "I didn't know the nature of my parents' relationship at the time, so you can imagine what went through my head when I saw another man naked beside my mother. A man who wasn't my father."

He paused. "Betrayal."

The word hung between them.

"I lost it," Roman admitted, his voice tightening. "And I set my animals loose on them."

Chapter 507: Janice Is Dead

"I was too angry to see what I was doing. In my childish mind, my mother deserved to be punished not just for betraying my father, but for betraying me.

"So this was why she sent me away? Not because of my animals, but because she wanted to have her fun. She chose that man over me.

"Even when the room swarmed with animals—birds clawing at their faces and hair, rodents biting at their feet until they bled—I didn't stop. I could hear my mother's hoarse, panicked voice begging me to call them off, but I was already gone, swallowed whole by the rush of my own power.

"It's easy to give in to the thrill when you're emotional. In that moment, you feel untouchable, like a god, while everyone else is just an ant you could crush between your fingers. And at that moment, I wanted to crush them all."

Roman's gaze shifted to Violet, testing her. He was searching for the flinch, the judgment, the fear anyone else would have shown. But she met his stare head-on, unshaken.

If he thought that was enough to scare her, he was in for a loss.

Violet's steady gaze didn't falter, and when she offered no condemnation, he finally looked away. Then Roman went on.

"Thankfully, my father arrived in time and snapped me out of it with his Alpha command. The animals scattered, and when the chaos settled, I realized the gravity of what I'd done. My mother's lover was dead.

"I'll never forget the sight of those empty eye sockets clawed away by birds, and the strips of flesh torn from bone. It was a grotesque sight, one I couldn't move away from.

"My mother was lucky. Or maybe, somewhere deep down, I'd gone easier on her than on him. But that didn't change the fact that I hadn't meant for it to go that far. I hadn't meant to hurt her like that.

"After that day, I shut that part of me off. The part the animals were drawn to. I told myself I'd be a normal kid again... whatever 'normal' meant for me. So I stuck to morphing into my favorite animals instead. The one that was safe and controlled.

"Because every time I even think about using that ability again, that scene comes back. And it's like I'm standing in that room all over again. It's something I'll carry for the rest of my life. So maybe you'll think I'm weak for not developing it. But I'd appreciate it if you didn't push me." Roman's voice was tight, tension radiating off him.

Violet shrugged. "I didn't force you to keep an eye on Griffin through the bird, did I?"

Roman gave a sheepish grin, scratching the back of his head. "Yeah, sorry. It's just, most people who find out I can control animals think it's way cooler than turning into one."

She rolled her eyes. "No one gets to tell you how to use your powers as long as you're not hurting anyone. Besides, you did the bird thing on your own, so I believe you'll get there someday."

Her lips curved into a sly smile. "They're only saying that because they haven't seen you turn into a dragon yet." She tilted her head, studying him. "You have turned into a dragon, right?"

"Not yet." Roman's smile turned almost boyish. "Mystical creatures are harder. I've never seen one in real life, only in movies and books. I have to get every detail right. The only one I've managed is a yeti.

Always been obsessed with them. Plus, it rivals the height of Griffin's hulk form, so it drives him insane." He chuckled, clearly savoring that last part.

Violet laughed too, because if there was one constant in the world, it was the ridiculous rivalry between Roman and Griffin over who was stronger.

"A dragon's more intricate," Roman went on, "and it would drain a lot of power..." Then his gaze softened, locking on her. "But for you, I'll pull it off one day."

Her chest warmed at the sincerity in his voice. "Aww, that's so sweet," she said, smiling despite herself.

Then without warning, Roman's eyes changed, and the beautiful warm green eyes was replaced with the glassy black of a bird's. The transformation was so abrupt that Violet instinctively tensed, her fingers twitching as though ready to stir her power. But when he didn't move, and his breathing stayed steady, she forced herself to relax.

"They're in," Roman said, his voice quite low as if he was speaking from somewhere far away.

Violet's gaze lingered on him, noting how his pupils seemed to dart as though following something she couldn't see. Roman had told her before that when he linked with an animal like this, it was like borrowing their vision, and everything the bird saw, he saw.

The only catch was in that state, he was distracted, and his focus tethered there entirely. Hence, he was extremely vulnerable to attack. Her job right now was simple: protect him, or snap him out of it if things went wrong.

"Griffin's looking around the house... there's sight of her," Roman murmured, his tone almost conversational but his eyes fixed on an unseen world. "There's a shack behind the house. Looks like storage. He's just opened it, there's no—"

Roman stopped suddenly and the air in the room seemed to still.

Violet straightened, frowning. "What is it?"

"Oh, wait..." His voice dipped, then hardened. "What the hell?"

Her brows knitted tighter. "Roman?"

His jaw clenched. "Griffin's found the witch, Janice, and her throat is slit."

"What?" Violet was stunned. She didn't recall slitting the witch's throat.

Roman's gaze stayed distant, still seeing through the bird's eyes. "Griffin's reaching for her now, and he's saying, 'This doesn't make sense. She's been dead for hours, long before the attack.'"

"Wait," Violet said slowly, "If Janice is dead, that means—"

"The other witch killed her and took her place," Roman cut in, his eyes snapping back to normal.

Chapter 508: One Big Family

"Ahhh!"

The agonized scream split the silence of the secret village in the dead of night. It came from deep inside the large compound at the heart of the settlement, but no one dared to go near.

The rest of the village lay in silence, every door bolted with the curtains drawn tight. Lamps had been snuffed out hours ago, leaving the streets in suffocating darkness and turning the village into something that might be mistaken for a ghost town.

The air was thick with the kind of fear that seeps into your bones, the kind that tells you to stay quiet, stay still, and pretend you heard nothing at all.

"No please, stop, it hurts!"

The man's voice was hoarse from hours of screaming. But the girl in front of him who couldn't have been more than fifteen, didn't so much as blink at his pleas. Instead, she clipped away the last of the finger nail, slow enough for the agony to linger.

His cry of agony regenerated through the room once more, blood streaming down his arms to his inverted face, and dripping onto the stone floor. The man's body swayed gently from the rope suspending him upside down, each swing sending a fresh wave of pain through the deep slashes and gouges that marred his skin.

The door creaked open at that moment.

"What is taking so long, Hannah?" Commander Ziva—though Hannah would only ever call her that in her head—stepped into the room. She was flanked by the twins, Lauren and Layla, her true-blood sisters. Not half-sisters like the others.

Hannah's birth had been an experiment. All of them were, in a way, but hers was on purpose—a curiosity project for their lovely father, Angus, obsessed with creating the perfect bloodline. He'd wondered what might happen if he gifted a human with his "esteemed" werewolf DNA. So he'd chosen her mother, a human woman, and bred her into existence.

And here she was. A half-blood, as werewolves tend to call hybrids like her. Offspring of a human and a werewolf, often possessing mixed traits. Except in her case, her werewolf side had been watered down, her mother's genetics smothering the wolf until it was barely there at all. Thanks to that, it made her the "runt" of the pack.

Unfortunately, in this family, it was survive — or be survived by.

So, as the least useful of all the sisters, Hannah had taken what little skill she had and honed it into a lethal one. She trained herself as an assassin and became the go-to girl when they needed to infiltrate places without magical detection. She had proven her worth, and that made her far from disposable.

"Perhaps her skills are getting rusty. She's human, after all," Layla, the twin Hannah liked least, said with a mocking laugh.

Hannah's jaw tightened. "I'm done for now. Was just having a bit of fun with him before you showed up," she replied through gritted teeth, sending Layla a glare sharp enough to cut.

They might share blood, but there was no love in it. The only thing binding them together was the mission ahead and, more importantly, the fear of their father.

"What did you get? Was he working with anyone?" Ziva asked, stepping closer to the prisoner, whose low, pained groans echoed through the room.

"No. He wasn't," Hannah said without hesitation. "He was only trying to escape the village. Nothing more."

"How can you be so sure? For all we know, he's lying to you," Layla challenged, her eyes narrowing.

"Really?" Hannah arched a brow and gestured at the man dangling before them. "Be my guest. Do your witchy twin thing." Her voice dripped sarcasm.

Lauren, the more responsible twin, spoke up. "Layla, calm down. Hannah's good at what she does."

"Yes, I know," Layla purred. "But I don't like to leave any stone unturned." She placed both hands on the man's head, her magic slipping beneath his skin.

Lauren gasped as she was pulled with her sister into the shared mindscape, the man's memories revealed to them.

Lauren and Layla were telepathic twins. As half-werewolf, half-witch hybrids, their mental powers ran deeper than most witches. Contrary to popular belief, witches weren't all-powerful. No witch was equally skilled in every discipline as most mastered one or two primary arts and only dabbled in the rest.

Hybrids were rare and unpredictable. They could be brilliant or self-destructive; something in werewolf blood didn't take kindly to being mixed with witchcraft. But Angus had a talent for breeding the

impossible. The twins could throw a few spells, but elemental control wasn't in their arsenal, not like their sister, Ziva.

Ziva had control over fire, water, wind, and earth, though there had to be a natural element to draw from. Witches after all drew from the natural cycles of the world to cast their spells. Her spellcasting was impressive, but everyone knew that wasn't enough for Ziva. Not after she used a dark spell to kill her mother and steal her bloodcraft ability.

Hannah swore the twins should sleep with one eye open. One day, Ziva might decide their powers looked better in her hands. That sister of theirs was crazy.

Not long after, Lauren and Layla snapped out of it, gasping for breath, sweat coating their foreheads. They looked like they'd walked a million miles, even though all they'd done was dive into the man's mind. Hannah knew exactly how much energy that drained from them, and wasn't apologetic in the slightest.

"So?" she asked with a raised brow, her posture dripping with sass.

Layla glanced at Ziva who stood waiting with her arms folded, and her expression carved from stone.

"What did you find?" Ziva's voice was calm, but there was a razor's edge beneath it.

Layla swallowed, knowing how much their sister loathed disappointment. "He was only trying to escape the village."

Ziva's gaze froze her in place. "So, in one word, you wasted not just my time and your energy over a meaningless triviality?"

"I'm sorry," Layla murmured, bowing her head and Hannah smirked at the sight. That was so satisfying.

For a moment, everyone held their breath, waiting to see what Ziva would do. But she turned to Hannah.

"Feed him to Bree."

"What?" Hannah's eyes widened. Layla messes up, yet somehow she gets off free—while she gets stuck with the dirty work instead. Perfect.

Sibling partiality at its finest.

Ziva was already walking away.

Layla shot Hannah a victorious smile, sauntering closer. "You should remember your hierarchy in this family," she whispered. "Have fun with Bree."

Then she skipped off after the others, leaving Hannah glaring daggers at her back.

She hated this family.

Chapter 509: Duskmoon Hollow

Girls her age should be sneaking out of the house to secretly attend a party where she would kiss her crush, not dragging a prisoner as prey to her cannibalistic-eating sister.

Angus' breeding obsession had never stopped at demons, Fae, witches, or humans. No. This time, he'd aimed for a perfect, pure-blooded werewolf heir. But what he got instead was much worse.

The goddess had cursed him.

Bree was no wolf. She was a wendigo.

Wendigo were cannibalistic-eating creatures. No one knew the true story of how they came to existence, but in the old stories, they were beings twisted by hunger until they devoured their own kind. In Bree's case, she was more feared since she's a wendigo born into a werewolf bloodline.

Bree had done nothing to deserve it, but the sins of her father had simply been visited on her.

As expected, Angus had been furious with the outcome, but he hadn't killed her. Wendigos were dangerous, but they could also be useful. Her appetite for raw flesh made her a threat even to her own family, so she was locked away in an underground cell.

The twins, Lauren and Layla, were mostly in charge of Bree since they used their mental powers to control and groom her to their father's will. And right now, Hannah had been sent to do the one thing she hated most. Feed her.

The man's head lolled forward as Hannah dragged him by the rope binding his ankles, his body leaving a smeared trail of blood on the floor. He was still breathing, but not for long. By the time Bree was done with him, not even the bones would be left.

The corridor to Bree's sublevel dungeon was narrow and steep, lined with stones that seemed to drink in the torchlight. The deeper she went, the colder it became, until her breath began to mist in the air.

That was Ziva's doing. The rune carved into the arch above the final door exhaled a constant, unnatural chill that weakened Bree, slowing her enough to keep her from tearing through the walls and slaughtering them all.

Every few weeks, Angus ordered her moved to the hunting grounds, where she can tear through whatever "prey" he throws inside. The preys were mostly traitors from his people and her hunts were as much execution as entertainment. After each hunt, she's dragged back to the Frozen Chamber, where she paces like a caged animal until the cold slows her again.

In one word, Bree was the perfect instrument to keep the villagers in check and anyone else that dared to betray him.

By the time Hannah reached the bottom, the frost on the walls had thickened into jagged spines. The guards moved aside without a word, none of them volunteering to help her.

One of them unlatched the first gate, then the second, while the man's eyelids fluttered, a groan escaping his cracked lips.

"Lucky you," Hannah muttered sarcastically, just as the third gate was unlocked. She stepped close enough to feel the cold prick her skin.

Inside was gloomy as Bree rose onto her haunches with slow, animal grace, barefoot on ice. Her hair hung in a tangle, her eyes lit like coals under ice. She tilted her head, listening to the approaching body and scenting them. Her lips peeled back and she revealed too many unnatural, sharp teeth.

"Behave sister, or you won't get a meal next time." Hannah warned her.

The twins claimed Bree was tamed enough not to hurt any of them, but she was going to be careful here.

"I'm hungry." Bree's voice was low and ragged.

"Well, bon appétit," Hannah said with no emotion.

The man stirred fully now, panic showing in his expression when he looked around his environment.

He started thrashing, but it was useless because Hannah shoved him inside with a hard kick, the sound of his body hitting the frozen floor making her jaw clench.

Bree crouched low, the cold slowing her but not enough to dull the instinct. She moved on all fours, her joints bending in unnatural ways, with her head tilting at an odd angle as she stalked him. The rune might sap her strength, but it couldn't starve the hunger out of her.

The man's cries became pleading. "Please—please—"

But the sound was cut short by a wet crunch as Bree's hands locked onto him. Her fingers curved like talons, digging into his flesh. She lowered her face, inhaling deeply before sinking her teeth into his throat with a tearing sound that ripped through the silence. Blood steamed against the cold air, splattering across the ground.

His screams was high and desperate, before turning into choked gargles.

Hannah didn't stay to watch the nightmare, she had already stepped back and let the guards seal the door. By the time she got to the first door, the screaming had stopped.

She shouldn't feel anything for him. Sympathy was a weakness in this family, yet Hannah couldn't help it. Maybe it was because all he'd wanted was to leave this hell hole and explore the wonders of others places.

But Angus with his festering paranoia and trust issues didn't forgive wanderers. In his mind, a man who left could talk, and a man who talked could ruin everything he was working hard for. So, like all loose ends, he had to be tied up and fed to Bree.

The village of Duskmoon Hollow had not exactly been popular even before Angus claimed it. Its people had been a strange mix of humans and witches who thrived in isolation. Not a single werewolf in sight... until him.

Here, he had lived with Ziva's mother and turned the village into his base of operations. Slowly, he bent Duskmoon Hollow to his will as the witches became his tools, and the humans his servants.

And perhaps it was the magic the witches wove into the air that cloaked the village from prying eyes, but no one dared disturb Duskmoon Hollow. Not the neighboring towns. And especially not the government.

Chapter 510: Rose

"The threat has been eliminated," Hannah reported to Ziva.

"Good." Ziva didn't look up, her attention fixed instead on their youngest sister, Enya.

A dead rat lay on the table before them, and Ziva was coaxing Enya to bring it back to life.

After the disaster with Bree, their father had stopped experimenting with his own kind and had turned to witches — and demons.

Enya was the last of them, at least that they knew of for now. Not even the growing crisis in the village or the looming threat of discovery could dampen Angus's appetite for reproduction. For all they knew, he could appear tomorrow with another sister they'd be expected to raise and groom for him.

The rumors around Enya's birth were murky. Ziva had supposedly summoned a lesser demon from hell. They had been careful not to repeat the mistake with Micah since higher demons were famously defiant and loathed being bound to mortals. Whatever bargain was struck, it ended with Angus offering his seed, and months later, a child was placed in his arms.

Enya was Hellspawn, gifted with necromancy. She could one day raise an army of the dead for him, and that alone made her invaluable, and it was no wonder Ziva cared for her especially.

Ziva had always been attracted to the powerful, although that didn't explain the softness in her eyes and the maternal affection she showered on Enya.

Everyone knew the nature of Ziva's relationship with their father. As a powerful witch, their dear sister believed a seed with their father would produce the all-powerful heir — even more than the rumored Fae sister. However, three of her pregnancies so far had resulted in a miscarriage. Perhaps in Enya, she saw the child she'd been denied.

First was Bree. And now three miscarriages. Couldn't they see it? The goddess was not happy. But Hannah did not dare say it out loud. No one could be trusted here. Especially her sisters. Not even the seemingly good Lauren who would sell her out in a heartbeat and serve her as a meal to Bree if she sensed even a hint of rebellion against their father from her.

The story of their sister Rose was one every sibling should have learned from, even though few seemed capable of it. Ziva had not been the first; no, there had been one before her. Angus's first dalliance with Ziva's mother's coven was not with her, but with another witch, Rose's mother. Rose arrived before Ziva but both arrived in the same moon cycle.

Where Rose was cheerful, Ziva was the gloomy one. Everyone naturally liked her, and even their stone-hearted father could not refuse her. Of course, Ziva never liked that and was jealous of their relationship.

Rose's fall began the moment she dared to fall in love. The boy was from the village, a mortal, kind, and utterly unsuited for their world. When she found herself pregnant, she knew Duskmoon Hollow was no place to raise a child. So she and the father of her baby escaped the village.

Ziva was the first to notice her absence. She scoured for Rose's trail but came up empty; Rose had hidden herself well. The only one who could have found her was their mother, Sarah, with her rare bloodcraft magic that could track kin across any boundary.

But Sarah refused. She told Ziva to leave Rose be, that this was her sister's choice. Unfortunately, Ziva did not like that answer. So she killed her mother, took the ability for herself, and found her sister, Rose.

Angus did not forgive traitors. Especially not his own blood. He had a pregnant Rose thrown into the hunting grounds alongside her lover. Rose fought well, but the game was rigged, and she did perish alongside her lover. On the other hand, Ziva was rewarded, becoming Angus's confidant, his favored witch, and his bedmate when it suited him — a part she seem to relish the most.

As far as everyone in Duskmoon Hollow was concerned, Angus was their god and the one who would usher them into a new era where supernaturals would rule and humans would be under their feet forever.

Hannah, very much human, wondered where that left her.

"Are you even listening to what I'm saying?" Ziva said, snapping her to reality.

"W-what?" Hannah stuttered.

"Have you seen Lilian? She's supposed to be back by now," Ziva asked, a slight frown on her face.

"No, I haven't seen—"

Hannah was still speaking when a figure

appeared in the doorway and collapsed onto the floor, cutting her off.

"Lilian?" Hannah said, surprised to see her in that state. There was blood at the corner of her mouth, and her hair was disheveled.

"Violet..." Lilian rasped, clutching her side. "She's... powerful..." The last word bled out with the same urgency as the red pooling beneath her.

Hannah's eyes widened. "She's injured."

Ziva was already on her feet. "Call my sisters. Now."

Hannah didn't need to be told twice whom she was referring to the twins Lauren and Layla. They were the ones with the healing skill. Ziva's ability was so corrupted she could just as well drain the life out of Lilian than heal her.

But even as Hannah rushed down the halls, one word kept echoing in her head.

"Violet... she's powerful."

Had their eldest sister finally awakened? Would they finally have a family reunion? But most importantly, was she powerful enough to get her the fuck out of here? Unlike the others, Hannah knew she had no use in their father's new world.

What side was Violet on? She honestly wanted to know.

But even with that excitement bursting inside of her, Hannah kept her face neutral and burst into the twins' room without knocking. There she found Lauren and Layla sprawled out on the couch kissing. This was no sisterly peck on the lips, but a full-blown make-out session.

For a moment, Hannah just froze on the spot. She had not seen that coming at all.

They finally seemed to have noticed her presence because Layla lifted her head and barked, "What?!"

Hannah ignored the invitation to judge them and swallowed. "Lilian's injured. Ziva needs you. Now."

That got them moving.