

Defy 581

Chapter 581: Died Here.

Finn let out a strangled sound of agony, collapsing to the floor, clutching his crotch. The dagger slipped from his hand as he writhed in pain.

Zara didn't waste time and bolted for the door. But just as she pulled on the handle, a whistling sound ripped through the air and before she could react, a searing pain exploded in her back.

She screamed in pain, her body slamming against the door. The silver-laced dagger protruded from her back and a wave of burning agony coursed through her veins.

That little bastard.

Behind her, Finn staggered to his feet, his lips twisted with satisfaction.

"You're getting old, Luna Zara. You should've run faster," He taunted her.

With her lips pressed together in grim determination, Zara reached behind her, and grabbed the dagger's hilt.

"Ahh—!" she groaned, her teeth gritted as she yanked the blade free from her back.

Hot pain seared through her body, and her vision became double but she forced herself to stay upright. Blood stained the spot, some trailing down her back.

Zara turned to face Finn with defiance. She bent her legs, squared her shoulders and grabbed the dagger firmly this time. She might not have her wolf, but she still had her will, and that was enough.

Finn saw her fighting pose and threw his head back with a mocking laugh.

"I don't beat women," he sneered, "but for you, Luna Zara, I'll gladly make an exception."

Zara didn't flinch.

"Come then," she hissed, her voice like steel. "Let this old woman teach insolent pups like you a lesson."

Finn's lips curled into a dark smile. "We'd see."

And with that, Finn charged at her with all the rage of a bull, intending to barrel her straight into the wall.

Zara twisted at the last second, dodging him. Thanks to that, his shoulder slammed into the empty space where she'd been, and he stumbled forward with a snarl.

Finn turned, his eyes blazing with anger.

Again, he lunged at her, but like before, she slipped past him, barely evading his grasp.

If she could keep dodging him long enough, Finn would tire himself out. Wolves always underestimated patience and strategy.

Finn lunged for the third time, missing her by just a hair's breadth. Zara danced backward, her chest heaving, a plan forming in her head. If she could bait him into overexerting himself, he'd make a mistake.

But Finn wasn't a fool.

A sinister smile spread across his face as he suddenly halted mid-charge, reading her like an open book. "Ah, I see what you're doing. You certainly didn't think I'm your son's beta for nothing."

Before Zara could react, Finn lunged again, but this time, he feinted left, then suddenly cut right. As expected, Zara miscalculated and Finn tackled her full force to the ground, the air knocked from her lungs.

"No!" she snarled, stabbing upward with the dagger.

Finn's reflexes were faster, and he knocked the blade clean from her grasp. The weapon fell far from her reach, at the same time, Finn's fist connected with her face.

Pain exploded through Zara's skull, and she swore she heard a splitting sound in her ear as her world tilted violently. Stars burst behind her eyelids, while the room spun, and blurred. For one horrifying moment, Zara thought she might pass out.

Before she knew it, Finn's hand closed around her throat. Zara's eyes bulged as he began to choke her, his full wolf strength pressing down on her neck mercilessly.

She clawed at his wrist, her legs kicking uselessly, wanting air. But without her wolf, she was nearly human and defenseless against him.

Finn's face twisted into a mask of pure cruelty as he leaned down, his breath hot against her face. "I wonder what Alaric will think when you wind up dead," he taunted her.

Zara thrashed harder, her vision starting to blur at the edges.

"I mean, you did try to erase his memory," Finn continued, relishing every word. "Would he even care for the mother who tried to rip him away from his mate? Or would he simply let you rot in the ground?"

He laughed, "Would anybody even miss you?"

Then Finn plunged his claw deep into Zara's side, tearing her flesh open.

"Aaahhh!" Zara screamed as white-hot

pain rippled through her. She could feel the warm gush of blood spilling from the wound, pooling beneath her body.

Finn grinned darkly, savoring her suffering. "All you've ever caused everyone is pain. Your sons, your husband, your pack, you've destroyed them all. Now you get to feel the same."

He twisted his claws deeper and Zara's cry turned into a broken sob.

She was going to die. And worst of all, Finn was right. Who would miss her? Caspian? No. Alaric? He despised her. Even Ace, her youngest, had grown to resent her.

Would anyone even shed a tear when she was gone?

"No..." Zara gasped, desperation flooding her. She didn't want to die like this. Especially, not at his hands.

With a scream, she summoned the last of her strength and drove her fingers straight into Finn's eyes.

"Arrghhh!" Finn howled, his grip loosening.

But that slip was all Zara needed.

Gritting her teeth against the blinding pain, Zara rolled to the side and lunged for the fallen dagger. Finn, half-blind but fueled by rage, reached for it at the same time.

But Zara was faster, and with a ragged scream, drove the blade into his throat.

Finn froze.

His eyes widened in shock, mouth opening and closing like a fish out of water. Blood bubbled up past his lips, and for one fleeting moment, disbelief flickered in his gaze.

"Shit..." he croaked.

But Zara wasn't done.

She yanked the dagger free and with all the pain, fear, and fury inside her, stabbed him again. And again. And again.

Zara kept stabbing Finn long past the point of death, such that not even a miracle could bring him back.

By the time her rage finally ebbed, she was drenched in blood, and the dagger fell from her hand.

Zara stared blankly at the lifeless body beneath her, and broke into tears.

Dear lord. She was a horrible person.

She didn't want to lose her family, or her pack.

Staggering to her feet, Zara pressed a blood-soaked hand to her wound and stumbled toward the door.

She would not die here. Not today.

Chapter 582: Its Okay Not To Be Okay

An ominous bell tolled throughout the West Pack at intervals, its resonant sound reminding everyone that today was Alpha Henry's burial.

The streets were lined with pack members who had left their homes early, standing shoulder to shoulder along the roads where Henry's body would pass. Everyone was dressed in black, their solemn expressions reflecting the gravity of the day.

The procession began at the entrance of the packhouse. Four Deltas emerged, carrying Alpha Henry's "supposed" body on a stone slab etched with the West pack's sigil.

The truth was, there had been no body to recover. The explosion was so consuming that not even a single bone had been salvaged from the incident. All Asher had been able to gather were the ashes left at the site of his father's death.

But Alpha Henry was still an Alpha, and tradition demanded he be given the full rites of burial. To honor this, the pack had constructed an effigy, shaping the outline of Henry's body using straw and clay. This form was then wrapped tightly in pristine white cloth, before being enveloped in thick wolf pelts, a final sign of his rank and status as Alpha.

As soon as the delta took a step out of the pack house, the women were the first to break into a wail. The men all lowered their heads with a grunt, bearing their grief on the inside.

While the deltas moved on, Asher was right behind them, bearing a picture of Alpha Henry Nightshade. Elijah and the others were right behind him. They were all heading to the West pack's sacred ground where Henry's body would be burned on the pyre.

As soon as the crowd caught sight of Asher, the women's wailing intensified. However, while some were busy crying, some others began tossing flowers onto his path, a final tribute to their fallen Alpha.

Asher didn't let himself get distracted. His face was unreadable as he walked forward, following the procession accordingly.

It wasn't long before they arrived at the Sacred Field.

The field stretched wide, encircled by towering stone pillars etched with the packs sigils. It was said that the first wolves had built this place during the Great War, when the death toll had been so high they needed a ground sanctified by the Moon Goddess herself.

Over time, it became a hallowed earth reserved for the most honored dead. Now, only Alphas and those of high rank were buried here. To be laid to rest on this soil, one had to earn it through deeds and rank.

At the center, a raised pyre awaited, while a Moonmother, dressed entirely in white ceremonial robes, stood solemnly at the side of the wooden frame.

The Deltas stepped forward in unison, carefully lifting Alpha Henry's "body" onto the pyre. Once they stepped back, a heavy silence fell over the clearing, so deep it felt as if the very earth was holding its breath

Then it was the Novas turn to step forward. They were dressed entirely in flowing white garments, and in their hands, were shallow bowls filled with incense and fragrant herbs.

Moving in perfect harmony, the Novas began a ritualistic dance, their bare feet gliding across the sacred ground. The mist followed their movements, swirling around them.

No one dared to speak or move. Even the smallest children stilled, knowing this dance was for Selene herself, the Moon Goddess. This was a holy offering of devotion and guidance for the departed Alpha's soul.

When the dance reached its peak, the Moonmother raised her hands high, and the Novas froze in place. Then, she began to chant in a language so ancient that none among the crowd could understand it.

It was said to be the first language of their kind, spoken long before their people were forced to adopt the tongue of humans through centuries of assimilation. Now, only the servants of the Moon Goddess were taught this sacred speech.

The moon mother's voice was hauntingly beautiful, a melody so strange and deep that even without understanding a single word, every listener felt shivers down their spine. It was like listening to the heartbeat of the earth itself, ancient and eternal.

After the final note, the Moonmother bowed her head and exhaled deeply. Then, in a tone everyone understood, she spoke the sacred blessing: "Moonlit path, guide his soul."

"Moonlit path, guide his soul!" Everyone in the crowd repeated, already familiar with the words.

One of the Novas came forward, kneeling as she offered the moon mother the ceremonial torch, its tip glowing with the heat of the flame.

The Moonmother accepted it with reverence, then stepped before the pyre and lowered the torch. The dry wood caught fire instantly, flames roaring to life.

The moment the pyre ignited, Luna Patricia let out a raw, guttural scream of grief. She was not alone as her wail was joined by the voices of every woman present, their cries rising together until it became a sea of mourning.

Roman reached out and patted Asher gently on the shoulder. Though Alpha Henry had been an absolute bastard in life, he was still Asher's father. And somewhere, buried beneath all the anger and resentment, Asher was hurting. Losing Henry meant losing the only family he had left—even if that family had been nothing but pain and control. Yeah, Roman understood it all.

His own family wasn't great either.

But Asher wasn't alone anymore. He had him. Roman thought with fierce pride. He would be Asher's family from now on. Not just him, both Violet, and Griffin and Alaric. They would be there for him.

While the crowd still mourned, Alpha King Elijah rose to his feet. Just like that, the wailing stilled. His presence always brought about awe and fear.

His gaze swept across the gathered wolves before his deep voice rang out.

"Alpha Henry Nightshade," Elijah began his dramatic speech, "lived an enviable life. He forged the west pack with his hands and made it what it is today. And that legacy will serve as inspiration to his son and the next Alpha of the West pack, Asher Nightshade."

What the fuck? Roman's neck almost snapped with the speed he turned. Not just him, a collective gasp swept through the sacred field.

Asher was the most stunned. What was this old man up to now?

Dominic's expression was the most comical. He looked like someone had just tossed shit on his face. He couldn't believe it.

Was Elijah really declaring Asher his successor?

But Elijah, as always, moved on before anyone could dwell too long. His lips curled into a small smirk as he continued, "Of course, before we crown our next Alpha, we must honor the one who has passed. The installation of Henry's monument will proceed as planned."

Asher groaned under his breath. Just when you think there was hope for this asshole.

Elijah went on to say, "Our enemies thought they would cripple us by striking down Alpha Henry," he thundered. "But today marks not our end, but a new beginning! A stronger, united West pack will rise from these ashes! Let the celebration begin!"

The crowd erupted, howls of approval echoing in the arena. It was tradition that after mourning came celebration, signalling that the West pack never stayed down when beaten.

Preparations had already been underway. The celebration would be held in the pack square since the packhouse could not hold the entire crowd. Already at the square, massive bonfires blazed to life as the smell of roasting meat filled the air. Musicians had taken their position, the sound of drumming echoing as they played festive music known to the people.

One by one, the mourners left the sacred ground, retreating toward the festivities. Until finally, only Asher remained. Well, Asher and Roman.

The pyre had burned down completely, leaving nothing but glowing embers and the acrid scent of smoke. Even though it hadn't been Henry's real body, it still felt final.

Asher silently stared at the blackened remains. Roman studied him carefully.

"You know," Roman said, "it's not a crime to cry."

Asher's jaw tightened. "I won't cry for that man." His voice was cold, and clipped.

"You don't have to cry for him, Asher," Roman told him, "Cry for yourself. Cry for your newfound freedom."

Asher's head snapped toward him, eyes narrowing. "Freedom?"

Roman reminded him. "You're free now. Henry can't hurt you anymore, Asher. Not ever again."

The words hit harder than any blow. Asher stared at Roman for a heartbeat, then two. And just like that, the dam broke. His lips trembled, and before he could stop himself, tears poured down his face.

All the years of abuse, of torture, of carrying scars no one could see, came crashing down.

Roman didn't hesitate. "Come here," he said firmly, wrapping his arms around Asher.

Asher collapsed against him, his shoulders shaking as he wept bitterly for the first time in years.

"It's alright brother. Just let it all out. Let it go." Roman comforted him all through.

Chapter 583: The Challenge

By the time they joined the others at the celebration, Asher Nightshade now had a smile on his face. The moment the people saw him, they broke into deafening cheers.

"Alpha Nightshade!" They hailed, while

the dancers—women in skimpy outfits, or who were we kidding here, barely outfits at all—rushed toward him.

The dancers' so-called costumes were nothing more than strips of cloth. A ragged piece tied across their chests barely held their breasts in place, leaving their stomachs bare, while another small strip covered the front and back of their nether regions.

The sides were completely exposed, and

whenever they performed certain dance moves, the fabric would flip up, flashing their asses without a shred of modesty. But the women didn't seem to care, and the pack members certainly weren't complaining, in fact, they clapped and catcalled with wild enthusiasm.

Their bodies were covered in tribal paint, streaks of color running across their faces and limbs. Their braided hair swung wildly as they moved, their

hips swaying and rolling with mesmerizing fluidity, as if they had no bones at all.

At the height of the dance, they slapped their palms over their mouths and let out trilling cries that sent chills down spines. The sound mixed with the drumbeats made their dance primal, untamed, and seductive all at once.

One by one, the dancers touched Asher, running their hands all over him. It was an invitation to join them in the dance—except Asher knew this particular dance was explicit as hell and only performed for an unmated Alpha.

As a new Alpha, he was expected to be spoiled rotten tonight. And that kind of indulgence often, though not always, ended in an orgy. Which explained why, at this very moment, a dancer was bent over, shamelessly grinding against him while the pack members roared their approval.

Behind him, Roman cleared his throat.

Asher went still, knowing exactly what that meant. If a certain purple-haired girl had been here, he'd be dead—or, at the very least, have some serious explaining to do.

That vivid reminder seemed to jolt his brain into gear, and he started pushing his way out of the writhing mass of dancers.

"Sorry, sorry," Asher muttered each time he managed to slip free of their grasping hands and gyrating hips.

Roman snickered from the sidelines, thoroughly enjoying the show.

Asher shot him a glare. Couldn't he see he was trying here? Although he was going to swear Roman to secrecy later. Not. A. Word. of this would ever reach Violet.

Roman only smirked wider, his green eyes gleaming with mischief. This was going to be fun.

Asher was almost clear when Dominic suddenly appeared in front of him. He stumbled to a halt, the expression falling right off his face.

"Asher Nightshade!" Dominic shouted above the noise of the music and cheered, "I challenge your position as Alpha, in front of these witnesses!"

The drums stopped so abruptly it was almost comical. The dancers froze mid-movement, and then, one by one, the members of the West Pack fell silent until a chilling stillness blanketed the arena. The crowd was stunned. They had barely begun celebrating their new Alpha, and now he was already being challenged.

Only the pack members looked truly devastated. The sub-alphas and ranking officials, on the other hand, showed little surprise—they had seen this coming. They understood the politics at play here.

Alpha King Elijah, seated on his exclusive chair, didn't so much as flinch. He leisurely swirled the wine in his glass, and took a slow sip.

So it begins.

All eyes shifted to Asher. His jaw was clenched hard, and tension rolled off him in thick waves. The pack members seemed to hold their breath, until he exhaled and said with a calm, steady voice.

"I, Asher Nightshade, accept your challenge."

A great murmur rippled through the pack members, exactly as expected.

This wasn't just any fight. Dominic was Henry's seasoned beta, carrying a wealth of experience, while Asher, though a born Alpha, was still untested. No one could predict how this fight would end, and that anxiety mounted in every heart present.

But before the whispers could die down,

Asher's voice thundered across the square. "Only on one condition!"

Dominic's eyes narrowed, suspicion flashing in them.

"And what is your condition?" he demanded.

"This will be a fight to the death."

The arena erupted with gasps.

Challenges were traditionally fought until the ruling Alpha was defeated, after which he was either integrated into the pack at a lower rank or exiled entirely.

No pack could harbor two Alphas without constant tension and the looming threat of another challenge. Unless the defeated Alpha submitted fully for the rest of his life—which was nearly impossible—the situation always remained volatile.

But a fight to the death was a brutal, ancient move that was rarely invoked, at least in the current world. It meant there would be no second chances for the loser.

"What is he doing?" one of the human dignitaries whispered, wide-eyed.

"Taking care of a lifetime of problems," Elijah answered, almost lazily. Then, with a hint of amusement, he added, "Though let's hope he's capable of following through with that threat. Otherwise, I might soon be down one heir. What a shame that would be."

Irene glared at Elijah seated arrogantly before her, then exchanged a troubled look with her husband, Aeron.

Asher was strong—no one could deny that—but compared to Dominic, he was like a child stepping into a lion's den. The odds terrified them.

"Asher," Roman muttered, nudging him, "are you sure about this?"

It would have been so much easier if Asher had won the Alpha title first, then dealt with Dominic later for his treachery. But now, this was a fight to the death. Dominic would fight with every ounce of desperation he had. Who wanted to die, anyway?

Asher didn't answer Roman. His gaze stayed locked on Dominic as he said, cold and firm, "Take it or leave it."

A chilling smile curled across Dominic's lips. He sneered. "That proud confidence of yours will lead you straight to your death. Say hello to your father when I send you to join him in hell."

Asher's response was, of course, cutting.

"For a man, you talk far too much like a woman. Let's get this over with."

He turned his back on Dominic with deliberate disrespect.

Dominic's low growl rumbled in his throat, his muscles tightening at the insult. But he forced himself to remain calm, his eyes glinting with malice.

The reign of the Nightshade bloodline was finally coming to an end, and he would be the one to see it fall.

Chapter 584: Witnesses

In a while, the arena for the fight was set up. It wasn't much, just a rough, fifty-foot-wide ring marked out and bordered with sandbags.

"When you go in there, crush him completely," Roman said, playing the role of a hype man as he massaged Asher's shoulders, kneading out the tension.

Asher was stripped down to only his shorts, his slitted gaze fixed on the ring ahead—the circle that would determine either his victory or his death.

"If it gets too hard, remember Violet and all the mind-blowing sex you won't get if you die in there," Roman added like it was a perfectly reasonable motivational speech.

Asher tilted his head, staring at him in stunned disbelief.

Roman's face was deadly serious as he went on, "What? It's the truth. I'll take her in positions you've never even imagined while you sit up in heaven watching us."

Then, as if reconsidering, he muttered, "Would that even matter in heaven? You'd probably be too busy chilling or playing harps or something."

He suddenly frowned, "Actually, that does sound like I'm losing out here."

Then, with a sudden spark, Roman said louder, "Fine! I'll enjoy being with her on earth before heading to heaven. Ha! Whose loss would that be?"

Asher just stared at him blankly for a long moment before breaking into a genuine smile.

"Thank you. For everything." And he meant it.

Roman's chest bloomed with pride at the words. Then, true to form, he immediately ruined the moment. "Oh, I meant every word. You better win this fight," he warned with a wicked grin, "or I'll screw our girl right right in front of your grave!"

"God, Roman. You need help!" Asher was flabbergasted.

Roman only grinned, shamelessly owning his madness like a badge of honor.

Meanwhile, across the arena, Dominic was surrounded by his supporters, his expression stoic as he prepared himself for the coming fight.

"You know what's at stake here," Alpha Marlow subtly reminded him in a whisper.

Dominic's jaw ticked in irritation. "I know. You don't need to educate me," he growled.

Marlow glared at him. The man wasn't even Alpha yet, and already his arrogance was suffocating. Still, he schooled his tone and said, "Nonetheless, good luck to you."

Dominic didn't respond, only watching as Marlow walked away. Luck? He scoffed inwardly. He didn't need luck. Not when Asher's fate was already sealed.

He rolled his shoulders, feeling the unnatural rush of strength coursing through his veins. It was beginning to wane, but that was to be expected. He couldn't let anyone suspect that he had taken the red pill.

The red pill was a banned drug, outlawed by all packs. It temporarily augmented a wolf's physical strength to terrifying levels, pushing both body and wolf to their limits.

Of course, it came with brutal side effects: fever that wouldn't break, hallucinations, potential organ failure, and even permanent damage to the wolf itself. Most wolves who took it never fully recovered.

But Dominic didn't care. This was the price he was willing to pay for absolute power. Once he was Alpha, he'd have the resources to heal, or at least to rule before the consequences caught up to him.

A loud bell rang through the arena, silencing the buzzing crowd. It was time.

The two opponents stepped into the ring: Asher Nightshade, the last living son of Henry's bloodline, and Dominic Reigua, his father's former beta turned challenger.

At the center of the arena stood Elder Kent, the oldest living member of the West pack. His lined face was etched with centuries of wisdom, and his presence commanded immediate respect. As officiator, he would ensure this duel was bound by their ancient law.

He announced, "By the rites of our ancestors and the law of the West, this battle shall determine the rightful Alpha. Witnesses, take heed. The blood spilled here is sacred, and none may interfere."

Chatters and murmurs rippled through the crowd of pack members. Mothers clutched their children tightly, shielding their eyes from the violence to come, though it did little to dampen their morbid curiosity. The younger wolves, restless and eager, pressed forward with hungry eyes, craving the spectacle that was about to unfold.

The warriors moved into position, forming a solid barrier around the ring to ensure no one interfered. At the front, Alpha King Elijah and his entourage were given prime seats, where they could clearly view and judge the proceedings.

"Heaven and earth bear witness," Elder Kent began, "Asher Nightshade, do you accept this challenge from Dominic Reigua, knowing you would forfeit not just your role and obligations to the west pack, but your life as well?"

"I do," Asher answered without hesitation, confident as hell.

Whispers rose amongst the audience again, awed by Asher's resolve. But Elder Kent ignored the commotion, his gaze shifting to Dominic.

"Heaven and earth bear witness. Dominic Reigua, do you continue with your challenge to Asher Nightshade, knowing you would take responsibility for the lives of the West Pack should you win, and forfeit your own life should you lose?"

"I agree," Dominic said, his head lifted high with pride.

Elder Kent's gaze swept over the crowd. "Heaven and earth bear witness. Who among you will stand as witness to this match?"

A heavy silence fell. No one dared step out, not with the Alpha King present.

Then Elijah lifted his hand, casual and commanding, and Elder Kent gave a solemn nod of acknowledgment. "The Alpha King bears witness."

"Sun at day. Moon at night. Heaven and earth bear witness to the rise of a new Alpha," Elder Kent proclaimed. "This is a wolf-only match, and no weapon is permitted. Both opponents will fight to the death and prove worthy of the position of Alpha. Goddess lead you. Let the fight begin."

The elder stepped away as soon as he was done.

The moment the bell sounded, signaling the start of the fight, Asher bent low, muscles coiling like springs. His transformation was so seamless it left the crowd breathless.

In the blink of an eye, his human form vanished, replaced by a massive wolf. His fur was as dark as midnight, his teeth gleaming with a deadly, feral light.

The entire pack broke into applause, impressed by his raw power and speed.

Dominic merely smirked, completely unbothered. Then his body snapped and contorted as his own transformation began. Bones cracked and reformed, the grotesque sound echoing through the arena.

That final, chilling grin on Dominic's face before he fully shifted was disturbing, almost as if he enjoyed the pain.

Moments later, a massive brown wolf stood in his place, ready to strike.

Chapter 585: Tide Of Battle

The black wolf and the brown wolf circled each other, ready to strike. Low snarls rumbled from their throats, vibrating through the arena. Their sharp teeth were bared in a primal show of dominance and challenge.

As if their growls weren't enough to set their audience's nerves on edge, the drummers began to play a dark, ominous rhythm. The war sound heightened the frenzy in the air, wrapping around the audience, pulling them into the moment until every heart seemed to beat in time with the drums.

The atmosphere grew suffocating, thick with tension and raw anticipation. No one said a word, suspended on the edge of chaos.

The two wolves charged at each other with bone-crushing force.

Dominic's brown wolf pivoted at the last second, using the momentum to deliver a devastating kick to Asher's side. The impact was so powerful it sent the black wolf hurtling through the air.

Boom!

Asher's body slammed into the edge of the ring, crashing against the sandbags with a sickening thud before rolling across the ground. Dust exploded into the air.

"What the...?" Roman shot to his feet, shock etched across his face. The hell was that?!

Even Irene had risen, her hand gripping Aeron's arm tightly. That didn't seem normal. Was Dominic always that strong?

She wasn't alone. Elijah's wineglass froze midair, his gaze narrowing with instant suspicion. Something about Dominic's strength didn't feel right.

Inside the ring, Asher staggered to his feet. Sand clung to his black fur, his chest heaving as a low, guttural snarl vibrated from deep within him. His already slitted eyes narrowed into razor-thin lines as they locked on Dominic. That strike had hurt more than it should have. Just as he had suspected, Dominic came prepared.

As if reading his thoughts, Dominic bared his teeth in a silent taunt.

Asher lunged again, this time moving with lethal precision, refusing to leave his flank open. Their bodies collided once more as they fought for dominance.

The crowd held their breath as the battle raged, knowing only one outcome awaited the wolf who ended up pinned beneath the other, and it was death.

Asher fought with everything he had, but Dominic was far stronger, his strikes carrying an unnatural force that threatened to overpower him.

He barely slipped free before Dominic could pin him, rolling across the sand in desperation. But he wasn't fast enough because Dominic's claws slashed across his side in a brutal swipe.

The crowd gasped in unison.

Three deep, bleeding claw marks marred Asher's ribs, vivid against his black fur. Whispers rippled through the pack like wildfire. It was becoming painfully clear that Asher was losing this match.

Roman shot to his feet, moving over to where Elijah sat. "Dominic's cheating! Surely, you don't see that?"

Elijah lifted his head. "And Asher's not prepared for that?" their eyes met, daring Roman to refute him.

Elijah might appear like an unconcerned king, but when it came to his heirs, he was more than dedicated. He knew Asher to the bones and that one was always prepared. If Dominic had cheated, then Asher no doubt had his own secret move. That was a fair fight, wasn't it?

Roman was stunned into silence. Without another word, he stalked back to his seat, though his jaw remained tight. He didn't relax, if anything, he perched on the edge of his seat, nervous as hell. He could only hope Asher's "preparation" was enough.

Inside the ring, the brown wolf lunged again, relentless. This time, Asher didn't meet him head-on. Instead, he dodged, rolling, spinning away, again and again.

It became a deadly dance with one wolf attacking with feral strength, and the other evading with desperate precision.

The crowd began to grow restless.

"Oh, come on already!" Alpha Marlow bellowed, his voice booming across the arena. "Give us a real fight!"

He turned on the gathered pack members, sneering. "Is this the so-called Alpha you've been pinning your hopes on? A coward who runs?!"

Boos and jeers broke out with half the pack howling their support for Dominic while others shouted back in defense of Asher.

The noise rose into a deafening howl of divided loyalties, their chants clashing with the already pounding drum beats.

But what they didn't know was that Asher's retreat was on purpose. He wasn't running away, rather he was studying Dominic. If the bastard used some help as expected, then he needed to understand exactly

what had been done to him, how it worked, and most importantly, how to counter it. So far, it seemed like Dominic's strength was augmented, nothing else.

When they clashed again, there was no testing the waters. Dominic lunged with full intent to end the fight, while Asher met him head-on, prepared this time.

The two wolves collided in a violent blur of fur and claws, snarling and snapping, their howls echoing through the arena. Asher ducked low and managed to rake his claws deep across Dominic's flank, drawing blood at last, but victory came at a steep cost.

Dominic retaliated with vicious speed, slamming his body into Asher and pinning him to the ground. His jaws snapped dangerously close to Asher's jugular. The crowd roared as Dominic's fangs hovered a hair's breadth away from ending it all.

With a guttural snarl, Asher summoned every ounce of strength and shoved upward with his hind legs. The move saved his life by mere inches, but Dominic's teeth tore deep into the muscle at the base of his shoulder as he twisted free. Blood poured down Asher's black fur, the pain nearly blinding him.

Asher roared, fighting through it. He clawed desperately, his movements wild and brutal. Dominic matched him, their bodies crashing together in a frenzy.

Then it happened.

Dominic stumbled for just a second. His pupils dilated unnaturally, and Asher instantly recognized the signs. A fierce, savage grin twisted his lips.

The venom he'd planted was finally working its way through Dominic's system.

The tide of the battle had just turned.

Chapter 586: Love For Violence

He hadn't drunk Roman's venom these couple of days for nothing!

Asher didn't wait for Dominic's sudden lethargy to be noticed by the crowd. He moved instantly, slamming into him with the full weight of his black wolf. Dominic hit the ground hard, and Asher began to claw at him relentlessly, strike after brutal strike, giving him no room to recover.

"What?!" Marlow shouted, his face going pale. "What's going on?" He had been so sure Dominic would win. This wasn't right.

Dominic tried to fight back, but his limbs felt like lead, heavy and unresponsive. Terror flashed in his amber eyes as realization sank in. This wasn't normal. He thought he had been clever by taking the red pill to guarantee victory. But someone had been smarter.

The whine that tore from Dominic's throat was almost human, as if he were crying out in disbelief. Asher didn't give him time to drag this out or let anyone suspect what he had done.

With one final, savage move, Asher lunged and sank his powerful jaws into Dominic's throat. Blood spurted, hot and metallic, coating his muzzle. Dominic howled in agony, his body thrashing beneath Asher's hold. But Asher didn't let go. His jaws locked tighter as he pinned him down, pressing his paws against Dominic's chest, forcing the life from him.

The brown wolf's struggles weakened, then went still. The light in his eyes dimmed, and finally died.

A beat later, his body shifted back into human form. Dominic lay lifeless in the dirt, eyes frozen wide in horror as though, even in death, he still couldn't comprehend how he had been outplayed.

Then Asher shifted back into his human form.

He looked like something dragged straight out of a horror movie — standing naked before the crowd, his skin streaked with dirt and blood, his mouth smeared crimson. Blood dripped from the deep wound Dominic had carved into his flesh, tracing dark rivers down his torso.

As if that weren't terrifying enough, Asher crouched beside Dominic's corpse, his chest heaving, and plunged his hand deep into the lifeless body. With a wet, sickening sound, he ripped out Dominic's

heart. It wasn't just a display of dominance, this was insurance. If that bastard had any last trick up his sleeve, Asher was making damn sure he stayed dead.

Raising the still warm organ above his head, he crushed it in his fist. Blood spattered across his hair and face, a gruesome crown of victory.

The sight was nothing short of demonic. Several mothers gasped, scrambling to cover their children's eyes — though the little monsters still peeked through the cracks in their fingers, morbidly curious.

With that single act, Asher sent a message to them all: He would bathe in the blood of his enemies if he had to.

For a heartbeat, silence reigned. Even the wind seemed to pause, as if the whole world was holding its breath. If someone had dropped a pin, it would have echoed.

Then Roman's fist punched the air. "Yes!" he roared.

And just like that, the wild, ruthless nature of the West pack broke free like a dam bursting. The arena exploded with unbridled cheers. Their new Alpha had proven himself, and he had done it in the most West-pack way imaginable.

Elijah muttered in amusement, "Finally, the West pack shows their love for violence."

However, even he underestimated just how joyful they truly were. A surge of West pack members rushed forward to celebrate their new Alpha, their numbers so overwhelming that it was nothing short of chaos. The ground trembled beneath their stampede, and Elijah had to brace himself, nearly thrown off his seat by the sheer force of their momentum.

At once, the guards closed ranks around Elijah, forming a tight barrier to shield him from the wild, overzealous crowd.

Some of the other Alphas were not as fortunate. People crashed into them in their excitement, toppling chairs and sending them to the floor. The chaos was unrelenting.

Aeron reacted instantly, pulling Irene into his arms and shielding her with his own body. His eyes burned with a protective rage as he shoved aside any pack member foolish enough to get too close.

"I think this is the time to return to the pack house," he growled, his tone brooking no argument.

"Protect the Alpha king!" Christian hollered to the other guards. "To the pack house." He too came to the same conclusion.

The guards immediately cleared a path, forcing the crowd back to create a narrow corridor for the Alpha King to move through. Elijah walked with measured strides, his dark gaze sweeping over the sea of frenzied pack members. They had all gone mad! Mad people! He ranted inwardly.

The other Alphas and dignitaries were quick to follow his lead. They weren't about to linger and risk being swallowed up by the stampede.

The celebration would continue in the packhouse anyway where food, drink, and music awaited, but for now, this part of the square was left to the crazy people and to their new Alpha.

The ring was filled to the brim with members of the West pack, their excitement reaching a fever pitch as they surged toward Asher. Rough hands grabbed him, hoisting his naked, bloodstained body high into the air.

"Alpha Asher! Alpha Asher! Alpha Asher!" they chanted.

Unlike Asher, who was being celebrated like a god, Dominic's corpse was treated with absolute disdain. His body was trampled beneath their feet, stomped on until it became unrecognizable. Even his staunchest supporters had quietly slipped away, their loyalty dissolving the moment their champion fell.

Now that Asher Nightshade wore the title of Alpha, everyone understood one thing: change was coming — and for most of them, it meant trouble awaited them.

While Asher was tossed higher and higher into the air, Roman's voice suddenly pierced the chants.

"What about me?!" he shouted over the noise, grinning wickedly. "I'm his cardinal brother!"

The crowd paused for a heartbeat, then erupted into laughter. At once, half of the pack split off and moved toward Roman.

"Roman! Roman! Roman!" they chanted, lifting him up with just as much enthusiasm.

Unlike Asher, who kept his body tense and his expression fierce even midair, Roman sprawled dramatically, arms flung wide.

"Yeeeeeah!" he howled with glee.

BEST DAY EVER!

Chapter 587: Just The Two Of Them

Alaric Storm was wide awake, his piercing gaze locked on Violet with an intensity that might have felt unsettling to anyone else. But between mates, that look was completely normal, and if one dared to peer deeper into those stormy blue eyes, they would see the fierce, unshakable devotion burning brightly.

He just couldn't help it. To be honest, it still felt like a dream to him.

Although the prophecy had always said all four of them would one day be mated to Violet, doubt still crept in like a thief. Not to mention those ugly, jealous moments that gnawed at him whenever he saw the mating runes etched on Griffin and Roman's skin. Proof that they were bonded to their girl in a way he hadn't been yet.

To be fair, Alaric had always thought Asher would be next, and that he, Alaric, would probably be the last. Not that his love for Violet burned any less — he was crazy for her — but Asher? Asher would walk through hell and back, over and over again, for their girl. That man had fallen in love with Violet long before they'd even met.

And yet, ironically, it was clear now that Asher would be the last to claim his bond.

For the longest time, Alaric had wondered what activated the Matebond. What moved the Moon Goddess enough to intervene? Now, lying there with Violet's scent all over him, he finally understood.

The Matebond didn't just fall at random. It came in moments of dire trial, when their love for her was tested, when they had to prove they were worthy of her.

For Griffin, he'd had to unleash the wild alter ego he usually kept caged, break free from a suppressor bond, and rescue her from the rogues.

For Roman, it had been standing toe-to-toe with Alpha Henry — who was terrifyingly stronger — and protecting Violet from her twisted father-in-law — in Roman's words.

As for him?

He had faced his mother. And Alaric knew better than anyone, that was no small feat. He had been willing to end her life if that was what it took to protect Violet and keep her by his side.

It hit him then that each one of them had to sacrifice something to be with the Goddess' daughter.

And that realization carried a darkness with it. It could only mean that this peace they were enjoying now was fleeting. For Asher's bond to fall, Violet would have to face danger again.

Alaric's chest tightened at the thought, but he forced it away. Until that day came, he was going to savor every moment. He would love, worship and remind her, over and over, that she was his.

Unable to help himself, Alaric reached out and slowly traced the mating rune on the side of her belly. Through their bond, he felt the exact moment the sharp thrilling

sensation hit her. Violet shivered, her breath catching as her body responded instinctively. His eyes darkened with intrigue as her nipples pebbled, tightening under his gaze.

A slow, dangerous smile curved Alaric's lips.

He let a faint crackle of lightning dance across his fingertip, then dragged it along the rune's long vertical line, branching off to one of the diagonal marks at the top left before gliding back to the second.

The reaction was instant. Violet's back arched off the bed, a throaty, unrestrained moan spilling past her lips as her eyes fluttered open. The pleasure surged through her like a raw rush of power, the kind that blurred the line between pain and ecstasy. Alaric knew exactly how that felt — like a hit of the most addictive drug, his own personal brand of heroine.

"Good morning, my beautiful mate," Alaric murmured, his voice thick with possessiveness and pride.

Violet lay sprawled beneath him, her purplish-black hair fanning out across the sheets, a rare softness lingering on her face from sleep. With her completely naked in his bed, her skin glowing from their night together, she was sin incarnate — and she was his.

"If this is the way you intend to wake me up everyday, then I might become lazy at this rate, mate," Violet replied, satisfaction in her tone.

"Oh, that's exactly the point," Alaric said with a sly tone, "You don't need to lift a finger, just let me do the work."

And to punctuate his point, Alaric gently slid between her legs and lifted her hips, positioning her exactly where he wanted.

Violet's breath caught in her throat, her body trembling in anticipation. That was exactly what Alaric desired — she was his queen, and was to be served properly.

Slowly, deliberately, he pushed into her.

Violet's head fell back against the pillow, a broken moan spilling from her lips. The sensation was overwhelming, bliss surging through her veins until she could barely breathe.

Alaric groaned, the sound raw and guttural, as her wet heat welcomed him perfectly, like a glove made only for him. Goddess above... This was heaven. This was his home. He could lose himself inside her forever and never tire.

Holding her gaze with his blue eyes, he began to move, slow and deep at first, drawing her into a steady, intoxicating rhythm that was equal parts possession and worship.

"God, Alaric..." Violet gasped, her voice breaking as pleasure raked through her in crashing torrents, dragging her toward the edge of madness.

Alaric gripped her waist tightly, his fingers digging into her skin, but it still wasn't enough for Violet. She wanted more.

With a moan of frustration, she wrapped her legs around his waist, pulling him closer than they had ever been. The intimate connection sent a shiver through both of them.

"Yes," Alaric growled, his voice thick with hunger, "take your pleasure, my queen."

He increased the pace, his thrusts deeper, more insistent — but still restrained. Not as fast or as rough as he wanted. First, he needed Violet's pleasure to be complete, to wring every gasp and cry from her before surrendering to his own.

Violet squealed and mewled beneath him, her fingers tangling in her hair as the pleasure dragged her under. Alaric was hitting spots inside her that made her see stars, her entire body trembling with ecstasy.

She began to grind against him, wild and unrestrained, chasing the mounting tension building inside her like a storm ready to break.

"Alaric..." she gasped, her voice breaking. She was close — so close.

"Yes, love," he urged, his tone a dark, reverent command. "Go on... take what you want."

Violet threw her head back, gasping for breath as tingles spread across her skin like fire.

Then she dragged Alaric down, smashing her lips against his. Her moans turned into incoherent murmurs against his mouth, lost in a world of pleasure that swallowed her whole.

Alaric felt her clench hard around him, and it took every ounce of control not to come right then and there. A moment later, Violet screamed his name, holding him tightly as she bucked beneath him.

He rode out her orgasm with her, moving slowly to ease her down from the peak. When at last the storm passed, Violet collapsed back against the bed, thoroughly spent and utterly satisfied.

But that was where Alaric's pleasure began.

With a guttural growl, he pulled out of Violet in one swift motion and flipped her over. Violet squealed, caught off guard, her body twisting beneath his powerful hands until she was lying flat on her stomach.

"Alaric—" her breathless protest turned into a strangled moan as, without a moment's hesitation, he drove into her with one rough, claiming thrust.

Violet clutched the sheets so tightly her knuckles turned white. The air was punched out of her lungs, her scream echoing through the room as the overwhelming sensation consumed her.

Alaric didn't slow down. He pounded into her, hard and brutal, giving in completely to the primal hunger he'd been holding back. His rhythm was relentless, each thrust rocking her forward as the bed groaned beneath them.

Violet broke into desperate pleas. Her body burned, her core tightening with unbearable tension.

Then Alaric's strong arms wrapped tightly around her waist, lifting her hips and dragging her back to meet his every thrust. The position forced him deeper, until there was nothing left but wild, reckless rutting, his groans of absolute bliss blending with her screams of ecstasy.

"Alaric!" she sobbed, her voice shattering as pleasure detonated inside her. Her walls clamped around him like a vice, her orgasm crashing through her with blinding intensity.

But Alaric wasn't done. Even as she trembled violently beneath him, he kept moving, claiming her over and over, pushing her past the edge again and again. Violet's body quaked, overwhelmed by pleasure so intense it was almost pain.

He roared his own release, emptying completely inside of her before collapsing over her body. Thoroughly spent and breathless, Alaric buried his face against her neck, holding her close.

Nothing else mattered but the two of them together.

Chapter 588: Interrupted Fever

They took their lovemaking to the bathroom, where Alaric worshipped her body in so many ways Violet could no longer walk. By the time he was done with her, every inch of her ached, a delicious soreness that made her breath hitch with every tiny movement.

She was so sore it hurt.

Alaric, thoroughly pleased with himself, scooped her up in his arms like a princess and carried her back to the room, his grin full of dark satisfaction.

They were not alone in the room. Servants were bustling around, and Violet had no idea if they had been standing outside waiting for them to finish. Still, the evidence was clear: the sheets were changed, the bed neatly arranged—well, until Alaric tossed her onto it.

"Alaric...!" Violet squealed, half laughing, half protesting as she tried to scramble away. But he was already pinning her down, his weight caging her in.

To make matters worse, they were still not alone. Two servants were hurrying to finish the last of their cleaning, moving like their lives depended on it, clearly desperate to leave before another show began.

Violet's gaze snagged on one of the maids, and something about the girl felt off. There was a strange aura around her that felt off, almost like she was carrying dark shadows around her. Violet blinked, thinking maybe it was exhaustion messing with her senses. But when their gazes met, the girl flinched slightly, startled.

Violet's instincts screamed at her, a prickling sensation crawling along her skin. She was about to look deeper when Alaric's mouth captured hers.

"Wait—" Violet tried to protest, her words muffled against his lips.

But Alaric wasn't having it. He deepened the kiss, and every coherent thought in her brain promptly disintegrated. Heat surged through her as she melted into him, one hand wrapping around his neck, the other tangling in his silky white hair.

A moan slipped past her lips when his tongue teased the roof of her mouth, coaxing hers to dance with his. Goddess, he was so good.

When they finally broke apart, breathless, Alaric's eyes were glowing with unrestrained happiness.

"Wow," Violet whispered, stunned.

For the first time since their sex marathon began, she saw him blush. It was a flash of the sweet, slightly nerdy Alaric she'd fallen for—though she wasn't complaining about this wild, passionate version that Roman had clearly corrupted.

Then Violet remembered the strange maid. She turned quickly, scanning the room but there was no one there, only a steaming tray of breakfast they had clearly left behind.

"You must be hungry," Alaric said, noticing the food as well.

As if on cue, Violet's stomach growled, betraying her. Alaric chuckled, then rose gracefully from the bed and lifted the tray.

The warm and savory hit Violet first and she nearly moaned.

Alaric set it on the bed carefully, as though serving a queen. Well, his queen. There was a spread of food fit for royalty: steaming bowls of rich venison stew, warm buttered rolls, slices of sweet honey bread, a platter of roasted root vegetables glistening with herbs, and a small dish of wild berries dusted with sugar.

Violet's mouth watered instantly. She reached for a spoon, but before she could even touch it, Alaric's hand shot out, stopping her mid-air.

"Oh, that's not happening, cupcake," he drawled with mock sternness. "I'm feeding you."

Violet groaned, throwing her head back dramatically. "If you keep this up, I'll turn into the laziest woman alive."

Alaric was not moved. "I don't care at all," he said firmly. "You can be lazy all you want. You have four mates, and we'll take care of you for the rest of your life."

Violet frowned, "And who takes care of you guys, huh? I don't want to be that mate that just takes and takes without giving anything in return."

"Being our mate is enough of a gift." Alaric said, his thumb brushing against her cheek.

Violet stared right back, unyielding. "And all four of you being my mates is a blessing too. So I'll take care of you all, just like you take care of me."

Alaric let out an exaggerated groan, falling back slightly. "Fine," he surrendered. "But just for now, let me spoil you."

Violet grinned mischievously. "Fine, young master Alaric."

Alaric rolled his eyes, muttering under his breath. He had no idea how the nicknames "Prince Alaric", "Young Master Alaric", got associated with him, but he suspected it had something to do with the strict way his bloodline operated— they were almost monarch-like in their traditions.

Alaric began to feed her gently, as if afraid he might somehow hurt her with the spoon. It was almost comical the way he treated her as though she were made of porcelain, carefully blowing on each spoonful of warm venison stew before bringing it to her lips. If even a drop spilled over, he would immediately dab at her cheek with a napkin, his face scrunched in concentration. When he tore off a piece of bread, it was always small, as though terrified she might choke on anything bigger.

Violet lifted a brow, watching him fuss over her. "You do know I'm not a baby, right?" she asked challengingly.

"You're my baby girl," Alaric replied smoothly without missing a beat.

Violet burst into laughter, nearly spilling the stew herself. "Gods, that is so corny!"

Alaric only grinned sheepishly, clearly proud of his line. Violet rolled her eyes but let him continue, secretly touched by how tenderly he cared for her.

Then a wicked idea struck her. When Alaric fed her a ripe berry, Violet parted her lips slowly, drawing it in with an exaggerated sensuality. Her tongue intentionally brushed over his finger as she sucked the juice away, her gaze locked on his.

Alaric froze. His pupils blew wide, and Violet swore she could feel the exact moment his cock came to life. The air between them grew heavy, the sexual tension sharp enough to cut. Neither of them breathed as they stared at each other, caught in that dangerous moment.

The door slammed open.

Both their heads snapped toward the intruder to find Griffin standing there, his expression unreadable.

As soon as Violet saw him, it was as if her system went into overdrive. Her mind flitted back to their time in the temple where he and Roman took her together, driving her to the edge of madness. The mere memory had her core clenching in desperate want.

Before the fantasy could get out of hand, Griffin's voice cut through her haze.

"I hope you both got enough sex because we have a fucking problem."

Chapter 589: Under Attack

If you thought having blue balls was bad, then try having the fading throes of your mating fever interrupted. It was like being starved while the food sat right in front of you—close enough to touch, yet untouchable. The frustration was maddening, leaving Violet in a sore, seething mood.

But even the relentless ache of the mating fever couldn't hold a candle to the cold, jarring shock of seeing your evil mother-in-law teetering on death's door.

In that instant, Violet's arousal didn't just fade, it was snuffed out like a candle.

Zara Storm lay motionless on the hospital bed, looking nothing like the evil mother-in-law Violet knew. Her face was a mottled canvas of purple and blue, as though someone had punched the daylight out of her. Angry red bruises circled her neck, stark evidence that someone had tried to strangle the life out of her.

The beep-beep of the machines monitoring her vitals filled the room, but it was the sheer number of wires and tubes attached to her body that made the sight even more unsettling. Zara's usually proud presence was gone, replaced by a pale, fragile figure teetering between life and death.

Violet's eyes quickly shifted to Alaric. His expression was full of shock and disbelief. Sure, he'd wanted to kill his mother with his own hands more than once, but this sudden, brutal attack was jarring, even to him.

"What happened?" Alaric asked numbly, his voice hoarse, as if he still couldn't believe what he was seeing.

Alaric's gaze slid to Ace, suspicion in his blue eyes. It wouldn't surprise him if his brother also wanted revenge on their mother after everything she had done.

Ace caught the look and immediately scowled, his brow furrowing in offense when he decoded what that accusing stare meant.

Alpha Caspian noticed the tension between his sons and intervened before it escalated. "Your mother was attacked," he announced, his tone heavy with restrained fury.

Alaric froze, his tone sharpening instantly. "Attacked? By who?"

He wouldn't have cared if Ace had done it. Family vengeance was one thing. But an outsider? Absolutely not. If members of the pack started believing they could punish the Luna and walk free, then anarchy was just around the corner. Today it was his mother—tomorrow, it could be him, Ace, or his father or even Violet.

When his father didn't answer right away, Alaric pressed, his tone cutting through the tense silence. "Who. Did. This?"

Ace broke the silence. "Your beta."

"What?!" Alaric was almost certain he'd misheard.

Ace didn't flinch. "Finn attacked our mother, Alaric. Or, like I believe, he intended to kill her."

Chills ran down Alaric's spine, sinking like ice into his veins. Finn?

When had Finn even returned to the pack?

Alaric had grown so used to isolating himself and keeping Finn at arm's length for so long that it was almost easy to forget he even had a beta.

Now that neglect had come back to bite him. Hard.

The reality hit like ice water, numbing his veins and choking the breath from his lungs.

His most trusted wolf.

His second-in-command.

The one sworn to guard his back had gone for his mother's throat.

For a moment, Alaric made an excuse for Finn. Perhaps his beta had been furious over what Zara had done and had simply gone to avenge his Alpha.

But Finn hadn't even been around when it happened.

And when his father laid out the full details, every last excuse Alaric had built for him vanished like vapour.

Caspian said grimly, "Your beta returned last night, almost at the same time I arrived. When I interrogated him for his negligence, all he gave me were flimsy excuses. I told him his role as your beta would be reviewed."

His jaw tightened, regret in his eyes. "I let him go, not knowing he would retaliate in the worst way possible. He used wolfsbane gas on the guards stationed both inside and outside your mother's holding cell, then forced his way in."

"Like Ace said, his intention was likely to kill her," Caspian continued, his voice bitter. "But your mother... she's a strong woman. In times like this, I suppose her resilience finally pays off." Though his tone carried resentment, the raw relief in his eyes showed how deeply he'd feared losing her.

Violet asked, "Why isn't she healing?"

Ace answered gravely, "She was stabbed with silver badly. When we found her, she had practically crawled her way to the passageway before collapsing. The wolfsbane in the air weakened her further, and the suppressor cuffs cut off whatever natural healing process she had left. Above all, it's a miracle she's even alive. Her healing will be slow but she will survive."

"That's relieving, I guess." Violet tried to sound sympathetic. She was sorry for what happened to Zara, but her feelings for the woman weren't going to change one bit.

"It doesn't make sense," Alaric muttered, shaking his head. "It doesn't make sense that Finn would attack my mother just because you threatened his beta position. If there was anyone he'd go after, it should be you. Something isn't right here."

"Something isn't right," Griffin echoed, his expression tight and unreadable.

"You see!" Alaric pointed at Griffin. "He agrees something's off—"

He didn't get to finish because Griffin suddenly moved, striding toward the window, his entire body taut.

Violet sensed his sudden apprehension. "Griffin, what's wrong?" she asked cautiously.

Griffin tilted his head, his eyes narrowing. "Do you hear that?"

The room stilled instantly as a strange tension thickened the air. At once, everyone tapped into their wolf senses, their eyes glowing faintly. Then they heard the screams, faint at first but rising, swelling into chaos.

Griffin's head snapped toward them, his voice a bark of command. "We're under attack!"

No sooner had the words left his mouth than a deafening bang erupted, followed by a violent rush of wind and fire exploding inward as a massive blast engulfed them whole.

Chapter 590: The Loss Of A Mate

Violet woke groggily, hurting like hell. The last thing she remembered was the explosion and the fiery flames engulfed them whole. She jerked upright, only to feel a crushing weight pinning her down.

"Ugh..." she groaned, pain tearing through every part of her body. It hurt to move even a finger, not to mention dust clogged her throat and eyes, making it hard to see.

Violet coughed until her lungs burned, wiping grit from her lashes. The morning should have been bright, yet smoke turned everything a choking twilight.

Then she saw what held her down. It wasn't a thing, but a person.

Griffin Hale.

He had thrown himself over her, shielding her from the blast. But he wasn't lucky because Iron beams from a shattered pillar jutted through his chest. His eyes were closed, his face slack.

"No, no, no..." Violet's voice broke as she tried to shove him off, but he was too heavy.

"Somebody help!" she screamed. There was no answer, just fire, rubble, and silence. Not one atom of life.

She tried to tap into the bond, but it was gone. Cold emptiness met her when she reached for Alaric. Her lightning prince was nowhere to be seen, probably buried beneath the rubble. She knew instinctively what that meant and a great wail left her lips.

It felt like a great fusion had split her soul into two. The pain was so raw she wanted to die with it.

"No..." Violet screamed, the sorrow choking her. She couldn't live without her mates. No, she might as well die with them.

But her anguish didn't stay inside her. The elements mourned with her. The wind picked up, pebbles lifting and spinning; the temperature climbed until the air simmered. It was almost like the time at the Pine Lodge, except this time Violet wasn't losing control — she was ready to self-destruct.

Griffin's body disintegrated into dust as Violet rose to her feet, floating in midair, still screaming in agony. Blood, not tears, streaked her cheeks. Everything around her began to crumble into ash.

And then, suddenly, the world froze. Debris hung midair, fire turned to glass, and the sound vanished. Violet's scream echoed off into nothing, confusion cutting through her rage.

A figure in a cloak stepped out of the stillness, walking toward her through the suspended embers.

Violet squinted, trying to make out the figure. The cloaked silhouette drew closer, step by step, until it stopped right in front of her. Then slender hands lifted the hood, and a cascade of raven-black hair spilled free.

"Goddess daughter," the woman said, bowing her head in solemn acknowledgment.

Violet's breath caught. Recognition hit her hard. "Seer Alice?" she whispered. She had never met the woman in person, but Alice's face was famous enough across the East pack to be etched into memory.

Alice's gaze swept over the frozen wreckage around them. "I see you received my message."

"Message?" Violet frowned, glancing at the destruction.

"This," Alice said, her tone heavy, "is what will come to pass, unless you stop it."

Violet's breath stuttered, hope building in her chest. "Wait, are you saying this is a vision?"

"Yes." Alice's voice was urgent. "I had no time to send a proper warning. Only you would understand the gravity of this. Forgive me for tearing you from your mating fever, but the situation is dire."

"So this will happen?" Violet's voice cracked, tears burning her eyes. "I'm about to lose my mates?"

Alice's expression was grave. "Everyone will die. Unless you act."

"Who's behind this?" Violet demanded, rage in her tone.

"Patrick Vale," Alice answered. "His people are already inside the North pack. I bought you a sliver of time, but what you do with it is up to you." Her gaze sharpened. "Be warned, Violet, prepare yourself for loss."

Violet's stomach knotted in dread. "Whose death?" Griffin and Alaric's lifeless forms still haunted her vision.

Alice shook her head. "By telling you this, I've already shifted the course of events. But remember, to whom much is given, much is expected. You are the goddess daughter, your role is to protect this world, not destroy it."

"Then tell me how! What am I supposed to do in so little time?" Violet shouted, desperate.

Alice's figure began to blur. "Move fast. Every action counts. Trust your instincts. Most of all, remember, this is not a dream." She lifted her chin with pride. "Good luck to you, Goddess child."

"Violet!" someone screamed her name, and a violent force slammed into her, shattering the vision and tearing her back into the waking world.

Violet woke to find Alaric hovering over her, fear etched into every line of his face.

"What the hell, Violet?!" he cursed, visibly shaken.

Disoriented, Violet stared up at him. "What do you mean by that?"

Alaric's tone cracked, frustration bleeding into desperation. "We were just kissing—one second you were fine, and the next you passed out. I tried waking you, but you wouldn't move. I swear, Violet, I thought you died!" His voice softened, realizing he shouldn't pass his frustration on her. "What happened to you?"

"What happened..." Violet muttered, trying to make sense of it herself. Then her gaze snagged on the steaming tray of food nearby: rich venison stew, warm buttered rolls, slices of honey bread, roasted root vegetables glistening with herbs, and a dish of wild berries dusted with sugar.

Her breath hitched. No way.

"The food... it's exactly the same from my dream."

Alice's face flashed in her memory, along with the chilling words: "Most of all, remember, this is not a dream."

"Holy shit!" Violet shot to her feet, heart pounding as everything clicked into place. The vision hadn't been a dream at all. It was a warning.

Everything was happening just as Alice had shown her. And if she was right, then while they were here having their cozy little breakfast, Patrick was orchestrating their deaths.

Her eyes darkened, fury igniting in her veins. That fucking bastard.