

## Defy 601

Chapter 601: Good Dream

"You should rest your mind, Alpha," the healer told Asher as he kept lifting his head, trying to catch snippets of Roman and Irene's hushed argument by the doorway.

But Asher was stubborn. Call it instinct, but something was going on. More than once, he caught Roman peering at him, as if trying to ensure he wasn't listening in. That only made Asher more determined.

He pushed his senses outward, calling on his wolf, straining to tune in when — smack!

The healer's palm landed hard on his stomach, right above the wound. Pain shot through him, and Asher hissed through his teeth.

"I said rest yourself." The woman fixed him with a disapproving glare, the kind reserved for children caught misbehaving.

"How dare you!" Asher snarled back, his slitted eyes flashing with anger. "I am your Alpha!"

But the older woman was not moved one bit. If anything, she pressed the medicine deeper into the wound.

The arrogance of the boy. Threatening her just because he was now Alpha. He had been in diapers when she was already at the peak of her craft. Tsk. Children these days.

"Yes, there. The medicine is doing its work," she said calmly, as if he hadn't threatened her at all.

At that, Asher gritted his teeth. He could only endure her rough hands and blame his own cursed luck. Nonetheless, he had to find out what was going on.

He asked her, "What are they talking about?"

"None of your business, young Alpha. You've fought your battle and won. You can't carry the world's problems on your shoulder. Now let the others share a part of that burden."

Asher groaned, rubbing his temple. He knew it. Something was going on, and they were hiding it from him. He could hear from the woman's dismissive words.

"You should rest." The healer told him with a tone of finality.

"I can't rest," Asher said, almost pleading. "Just tell me."

"Don't worry, you will." The healer said with confidence. "There's a sleeping draught mixed into the poultice. You don't have to worry yourself."

"What?"

It hit Asher then that the warmth crawling through his body was the drug already doing its work.

"Fuck my life," he muttered bitterly.

Before before the fog could claim him fully, he asked quickly, "Did anyone die?" That had been his first fear. It was the only reason they would keep him in the dark.

The first face that came to his mind was Violet's. The thought of her lifeless made his chest seize. But if anything had happened to Violet, Roman would have felt the searing pain through the bond. That gave him hope, and it was the only reason he didn't tear down the doorway demanding answers.

"No one died," the healer answered calmly. "At least not anyone of importance to you. Now sleep, Alpha Asher. You have a long night ahead of you."

Relief slid through him, loosening the tension in his chest. "Thank you," Asher whispered, his voice ragged.

This time, there was no fight left in him. He closed his eyes and let the effect of the drug drag him under, surrendering to the darkness.

The last face Asher had in mind before the drug dragged him under was Violet. Which was why waking to see her in bed with him, nearly knocked the breath out of his lungs.

His lips parted, disbelief in his voice. "This has to be a dream, right? Because there's no way you'd plan a surprise trip back to the West pack, and Roman of all people would leave you with me without hoarding you for himself."

Violet's lips curved into a knowing smile. "Roman would be so delighted to hear you know him that well."

Asher couldn't help the chuckle that escaped his lips. But the laughter died quickly as it dawned on him. "Wait." His tone dipped dangerously. "Didn't I warn you about the danger of dreamwalking?"

Violet didn't argue back, instead she whispered, "I missed you."

At once, the anger vanished, leaving behind only raw ache. Though he was still mad—damn her for risking herself like this—but it was drowned by the hollow emptiness her absence had carved in him these past days.

He moved before he could stop himself. His calloused hands cupped her face, and kissed her hard. It was a silent confession of how badly he needed her.

Violet answered with equal fire, her lips moving fiercely against his while her fingers dug into his shoulders, anchoring herself to him.

When they pulled apart, breathless, Asher's forehead rested against hers. His voice, though rough, carried the softest edge of worry. "Are you okay? Tell me." His breathtaking slitted eyes searched hers. "Did anything happen in the North pack?"

Violet tilted her head at him. "Didn't you hear? Patrick attacked the North pack."

Asher's whole body went rigid, and he pushed himself up on his elbows. "What? So this is what they didn't want to tell me?" He looked genuinely furious, his chest rising with shallow, angry breaths.

"They probably didn't want to worry you," Violet said gently, trying to soften his expression. "We're all good here. Griffin gave me the news." She flashed him a teasing grin. "Or rather, should I call you Alpha Asher now?"

Asher narrowed his eyes at her, catching her attempt at humor. He appreciated it, but it still gnawed at him that Roman, Irene and the others had hidden something this serious from him. "I'm coming to the North pack first thing tomorrow morning," he said with no room for argument in his tone.

Violet immediately rolled her eyes. "This is exactly why they kept the news from you. You might have eliminated Dominic, but there are still others who'd strike the second they sniff weakness. You need to solidify your position before making reckless moves, Asher."

Her words stung, mostly because she was right. Asher exhaled slowly. "Then I'll close up every loose point here as fast as possible, and when I'm done..." His eyes locked with hers. "I'll hurry to the North pack, so we can be together." He took her hand and intertwined them together.

"Sure." Violet held onto him tightly.

"And no more dreamwalking," Asher commanded.

"As you wish, Alpha Asher," Violet said with a little bow of mock obedience.

That made him smirk, the anger melting into sly amusement. "Good. But..." His hand shot out, tugging her closer, his grin wicked. "Since the mistake's already been made, we better make the best of it..."

Violet's eyes widened. "Asher—!" she squealed as he suddenly tackled her back into the bed, his weight pinning her down, laughter rumbling low in his chest.

Asher's voice was almost a growl against her ear. "The last time you dreamwalked, the others were here. But now..." His lips brushed her temple. "...we're all alone."

Before Violet could answer, his mouth was on her throat, trailing slow kisses down the slope of her neck. She gasped, her back arching instinctively, shivers racing through her body.

His lips moved lower, over her collarbone, then dipping toward the swell of her cleavage. Every brush of his mouth drew a helpless sound from her, as if he knew every weakness she tried to hide.

Then, before Violet could catch her breath, her eyes widened in shock. Her clothes were gone. Not just hers, but his too. The both of them were naked, his bare skin pressed against hers.

"How did you...?" Her breath caught.

A smug smile formed across Asher's lips. "In the dream world, anything is possible." His eyes glinted with mischief and hunger all at once. "And that means I could do anything to you without risk of dying."

Violet's heart stuttered, her breath coming faster at his words. She knew exactly what he meant, and her body trembled with anticipation.

His lips covered hers again, this time slower, deeper, as though he had all the time in the world to savor her. The kiss devoured her, and she melted into it, surrendering to him.

Then, without warning, a gasp tore from her lips as he slid inside her. It was only a dream, but it felt devastatingly real. Asher's grin was feral now, satisfied.

"Feels great, even for a dream, right?" he murmured against her mouth.

Violet could only nod, her breath short, while her body was alive with sensation. "Yes..."

Asher began to move, slow at first, then deeper, harder, until she clutched at him with no thought but the fire consuming her. Violet let go completely, giving herself to him body, mind, and spirit. Her cry split

the air when release hit her, and Asher groaned with her, collapsing against her chest, both of them shaking.

For a while, there was only the sound of their ragged breathing. Then his lips moved again, planting small, tender kisses along her shoulder, her collarbone, the corner of her mouth, as though he couldn't stop worshipping her. Finally, he pulled her into his arms, holding her close with a satisfied smile.

Meanwhile, in the real world...

Roman stood at the foot of Asher's bed, arms crossed, and his expression twisted with curiosity.

He muttered to Jeremiah, who stood beside him. "Why is he smiling in his sleep?"

Jeremiah glanced at the sight of Asher sprawled out, the faintest grin tugging at his lips even in unconsciousness.

He shrugged. "I have no idea."

#### Chapter 602: Know About Violet Purple

For the first time, Elijah looked stressed out of his mind, his hands gripping his hair as Christian narrated what had gone down in the North pack.

"...Apparently, Patrick had his claws deep into Finn, Alaric's beta. He attacked Luna Zara in her holding cell, where she awaited trial for her actions against Alaric. He destroyed evidence and even killed his own kind just to get to her—only to be killed by her hands. Though they say Luna Zara barely survived. Nonetheless, while the North is shaken, they've never been stronger than now. Your heirs are safe, and so is Violet Purple, the goddess daughter, as she's fondly called right now." Christian finished with emphasis.

For a moment, Elijah was silent, his eyes darting around as he processed the information. Then he muttered, "This is a mess."

He lifted his head, his face darkening. "Who is going to be held responsible for this? Me?" He slammed his hand on the arm rest.

"Put a call through to the Office of the President."

"Of course, Your Majesty." Christian bowed slightly and proceeded to dial the secure line that connected directly to the Office of the President.

"This is Christian, Beta to Alpha King Elijah. Put me through to President Roy. It's urgent," he said with a taut voice.

There was a pause, then a crisp response: "Hold for transfer."

Several tones clicked on the line, the call bouncing through encrypted channels until a deep, calm and authoritative voice answered.

"This is President Roy."

Elijah stood to his feet at once, the tension in his shoulders pulling taut like a bowstring. His voice was as cold as ice as he said. "President Roy, we need to talk about the attack on the North pack."

Christian stepped back, giving Elijah the illusion of privacy — though he could still hear every word of the conversation.

Roy didn't bother with condolences. "I'm aware, Elijah. My people briefed me. I understand the situation is volatile."

Elijah's jaw tightened. "You said you were going to find Patrick Vale. Where is he? Why haven't we had results?"

"Of course, I did. My people are still on it."

"Really?" Elijah scoffed. "How hard can it be to find one man? If it were a werewolf terrorist, I'm sure it'd be all over your human networks by now, and every law enforcement unit would be at your command."

Roy snapped. "Because I'm trying not to cause mass hysteria, Elijah. What do you think the public would do if they found out there's a drug out there that can make them feel powerful? They'd riot in the streets for a taste of it. And if I recall correctly," his voice dropped coldly, "Ignis came from your carelessness. So don't you dare pressure me into cleaning up your mess."

The edge in his voice warned Alpha King Elijah that he'd pushed too far. Roy's patience was wearing thin, fraying like the last thread before it snapped.

But Elijah was not intimidated. Instead, he chuckled mirthlessly. "It's quite interesting though, I hear rumors that you've been in communication with Patrick Vale."

From the tense silence that followed, it was obvious Elijah had hit a nerve. When Roy finally spoke, his voice came thin and cold.

"Alpha King Elijah," Roy said, each word precise and dangerous, "do you dare accuse me of working with the enemy?"

A small, triumphant smirk tugged at Elijah's lips. "Of course not. Like I said, those were rumors. Surely you're not getting bothered over a few careless words whispered in secret?"

Both men were playing a dangerous game, and they both knew it. If they could see each other right now, there'd be electricity crackling in the air.

"Patrick would be captured soon," Roy said through gritted teeth, clearly reaching the end of his patience.

But Elijah pressed on. "I lost twelve wolves, President Roy, and a whole lot more injured. Don't just give me promises, I want results. And that's why my people will be joining the search as well. We can't rely on your word anymore."

"The same way I can't rely on yours, either," Roy retorted coolly.

Elijah's brow furrowed. "What do you mean by that?"

"Violet Purple." Roy said her name deliberately, and Elijah expelled a long breath that did nothing to relieve the tension in his chest.

"We've seen what she can do like rending a whole warehouse to dust," Roy continued after a beat. "My kind will panic if they think her existence was hidden from them, or worse, used as an unsanctioned asset. The Accords were supposed to prevent a second wave of cardinal power, yet you kept her from oversight. Should we take that as a move against the treaty?"

"What's a move against the treaty," Elijah countered darkly, "is you ignoring the deaths of my people. Violet is an oversight — one none of us knew about — and you know it. So stop poking unnecessarily, President Roy."

Silence fell between them, the call tensed.

Finally, Roy spoke up, "To make sure your kind is not being armed against humans, we'll look into Violet Purple."

Elijah's voice went hard. "Violet Purple is not a threat, and she's one of us. You won't lay a hand on her. Any information you want will come from us, not from you."

President Roy laughed, a short, humorless sound. "You're walking on thin ice here, Elijah." He used his name this time, as if to pull rank.

Elijah's reply was colder. "Keep pushing, and you'll find your office less comfortable than you think. Negligence will be an ugly charge after you step down, President Roy."

"And breaking the Accord would be even uglier." Roy told him, "I'll double the forces and hunt Vale down. But you give me full access to anything you have on Violet Purple."

His last words came out with an edge, "Let's hope the next president is as accommodating as I am."

The call disconnected.

For a long time Elijah said nothing. Then he turned to his beta, Christian. "How long until the next flight to the North pack?"

Christian rubbed his chin. "Flights aren't possible right now. The West pack is in full-blown celebration."

"By car, then?"

"The North pack's the farthest, hence seven hours if the weather holds," Christian looked up. "Aren't we staying back for Asher's coronation?"

"We move for the North pack. Now."

### Chapter 603: Beloved Alpha

When Asher woke from sleep, the smile that had lingered on his face vanished as if it had never existed. His eyes glinted dangerously as he rose from the bed and stalked toward the adjoining room, where he could already hear Roman and Jeremiah laughing over some joke.

The moment he stepped in, both men froze.

Roman was the first to sense the storm coming. He pointed dramatically and yelled, "Run for your life!"

Jeremiah, acting on instinct, took off immediately, but Asher was faster. He moved like lightning, blocking the doorway before his beta could escape.

"I expected him," Asher growled, jerking his chin toward Roman, "to lie to me. But you, my own beta, keeping vital information from me?"

Roman's eyes widened. "Wait—how did you—" then realization dawned, and his expression turned scandalized. "Don't tell me... Violet visited you!"

He jabbed a finger toward Asher, accusing him. "No wonder you were grinning like some fool! You were having sexy time with our mate, weren't you?"

There was no mistaking it—nothing else could make that stone-hearted bastard smile like that.

Maybe it was Roman's ridiculous tone or the way he pouted like a jealous child, but Asher's fury vanished away. He sighed, rubbing a hand over his face. Gods, he couldn't deal with him right now.

Jeremiah seized the moment to explain, "I didn't mean to keep it from you, Alpha. I just thought you needed rest. You were half-dead when we got back, and we didn't want to burden you."

Asher's jaw tightened, but the fight in him died. One could say that his encounter with Violet in the dream world had tamed his blood thirst for now. Not to mention they had good intentions — even though those secrets annoyed him as hell.

Still, his voice carried authority when he said, "Don't ever let that happen again. Anything that involves Violet or my cardinal brothers..." Asher emphasized on that part, making Roman's heart practically melt, "whether I'm dying or not, you tell me immediately."

"Yes, Alpha Asher!" Jeremiah replied without hesitation.

Roman had a hand pressed dramatically to his chest, swooning. "I didn't know you loved me like this," he said, still basking in Asher's earlier words.

Asher shot him a look that clearly translated to fuck off.

But Roman, being Roman, only grinned wider. "Don't look at me like that, you'll make me blush," he teased, then slung an arm around Asher's shoulder before he could escape. "Now, tell me, what exactly did you and Violet do aside from the—you know." He wiggled his eyebrows in mock conspiracy.

"Why don't you go ask her yourself," Asher retorted.

"Can't. She didn't visit my dream," Roman complained with theatrical misery. "So now, I have only you to fulfill my curiosity." He tightened his hold like a clingy octopus, ignoring Asher's attempts to shrug him off.

"Go bother someone else!" Asher snapped, trying to twist free, but Roman only clung harder, making exaggerated whining noises.

What started as playful banter devolved into a full-blown scuffle with Roman wrestling Asher to the ground, the two rolling across the floor like overgrown pups. Asher fought to pry Roman off while Roman laughed shamelessly, refusing to let go.

And that was the scene Nancy and Ezra walked into.

They froze in the doorway, blinking at the sight of the two grown Alphas grappling like children. For a brief moment, there was nothing but silence. Then, without a word, both simply moved past it, after all, this was far from the strangest thing they'd seen from those boys.

By the time Ezra entered, Roman had finally released Asher, who stood up with an exasperated sigh. Roman was not doing his fearsome reputation in this pack any good.

"Everything has been set," Ezra announced. "It's time."

Asher lifted his chin slightly, his composure snapping back into place. "Thank you," he said sincerely.

Ezra gave him a curt nod, all business.

In an instant, the playful energy that had filled the room evaporated. Asher's expression hardened, his spine straightened, and his eyes gleamed with renewed purpose. The laughter, the teasing, all of it fell away, replaced by the Alpha who commanded respect.

It was time to face his people, and there was no room for weakness.

Dominic had mistaken his youth for weakness, and he paid the price for it. Now, it was time to strengthen his hold over the others—to remind every single one of them that his late father, Henry Nightshade, had taught him how to be an heir long before he could even walk.

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It was late at night, and the West Packhouse was bursting with life. Almost every member of the West pack had come to witness the historic moment of their new Alpha's coronation. Even those who had long moved to other territories had journeyed home for this night.

Security wolves patrolled the perimeter, their sharp eyes scanning the overflowing crowd that spilled from the inside of the packhouse to the streets outside. The air smelled of roasted meat, sweat, and excitement.

Inside, the sub-alphas of the West pack and other visiting wolves occupied the front rows. Behind them were the betas, deltas, and other ranks, all lined up according to the pack's hierarchy.

The only person missing from the picture was the Alpha King himself, but that was expected. Elijah was infamous for his grand entrances. And besides, tonight wasn't about him. Tonight was about Asher Nightshade, the son of the late Alpha Henry.

For now, laughter reigned, music played, and wine flowed.

On the elevated platform in the center of the gathering, a local troupe was performing one of their over-the-top dramatizations of the "Great Fall of Alpha Henry." and the people were completely enraptured.

The scene currently unfolding showed the dying Henry in the arms of a young Asher. The actor playing Henry coughed loudly, dramatically clutching his chest. "My son," he gasped, reaching for Asher's cheek.

"Promise me... promise me you'll protect the pack. Promise me you'll guard our people, our home, our bloodline!"

The actor portraying Asher dropped to his knees, shaking his "father's" body with exaggerated sobs. "I promise, Father! I'll lead them well. I'll make you proud!"

And just like that, the crowd dissolved into tears. Some openly wept, their hearts breaking all over again for a leader they still adored.

Unknown to them all, Asher Nightshade was watching and his jaw was clenched.

"Who in the world arranged that?"

Chapter 604: No Longer The Same

Henry was not the martyr the whole pack made him out to be, and one of Asher's first visions as Alpha was to tear down that illusion.

He would expose Henry for who he truly was, and it was an abuser, a manipulator, a liar, a psychopath. The list could go on forever.

Hence one could imagine the devastation twisting inside him as he stood on the balcony overlooking the courtyard, watching that performance unfold below.

"Who in the world arranged that?" His jaw was clenched, voice tight with disbelief as he turned to Jeremiah, standing beside him.

Before Jeremiah could respond, another voice came from behind.

"I did."

Asher froze. He turned, his breath catching when he saw it was Ezra.

"H-how could you?" Asher's tone cracked, pain raw in his voice. "You know... you knew the monster he was. What he—" He stopped mid-sentence, his throat locking up.

The memories came rushing back at him, dragging him back to the memories of the bruises, and the constant fear. He shut his eyes and swallowed hard, forcing the past back.

Ezra said nothing for a moment. He simply walked forward, joining Asher at the balcony railing. The noise of the crowd rose below as the play reached its climax, featuring the scene of Asher and Dominic fighting for the position of Alpha.

When the character-Asher ripped Dominic's fake heart out moments later, the crowd roared in triumph, their loud voices reverberating through the night.

"Look down," Ezra said suddenly. "Tell me, what do you see, Alpha Asher?"

"A bunch of ignorant fools," Asher replied with a sarcastic curl of his lip which was very much like him.

Ezra didn't take offense, chuckling instead. The boy's dry humor was out of this world.

"Try again," he said patiently.

Asher scowled at the crowd, trying to guess what Ezra wanted him to notice. After a moment his eyes narrowed and something clicked.

"They're in love with Henry," he muttered, disturbed.

"They're in love with their Alpha," Ezra corrected. He turned back to him. "And now their Alpha's son, who by right, is their Alpha."

Asher looked at Ezra for a beat, then turned away. "I don't need them to love me," he said.

"The West pack is fractured," Ezra continued. "Your alphas might try to take your position, or, did you think Dominic's death ended it all?"

Asher did not say a word, his scowl deepening as his active mind raced.

"The rebel bands lost their leader, and now, they're like desperate rats. Desperate rats do anything." Ezra's voice hardened. "Right now all you have is the people's adoration."

"I'm their leader, so they'll bow whether they want to or not."

"And that's exactly why Henry's legacy serves you better than your rebellion would. Henry may have been a villain, but he wrapped himself in the face of a hero. You, Asher, are the real deal, fiercer, less forgiving, maybe wiser, but you lack his storytelling. If you tear down that image now, you won't only lose the pack, you'll be painted a traitor by your enemies."

"You're newly ascended. The West needs a symbol of unity, not a leader who shatters everything on day one. That performance you think glorifies Henry rekindles pack identity. It makes them see you as a continuation of greatness, not a threat to stability." He gestured to the crowd. "Let them see Henry in you, for now."

Asher's mouth tightened. "So you want me to walk in my father's shadow."

"Who said you should pretend?" Ezra replied evenly. "There's a difference between pretending and being smart. You're not your father, I know that. You're better. But leadership isn't charging forward with new rules, it's timing."

He let the words hang there, then added, "Henry's memory buys you time. It silences doubters, those who say you're too young or inexperienced. You can't rebuild the pack by dividing it further. Let them love you first, then change them."

Asher's lips twitched in reluctant irritation. "So what you're really saying is I should play along."

Ezra gave a half-smile. "Play along? No. Ride the wave. Once they're yours, you can steer it anywhere."

For a moment, Asher said nothing, and Ezra didn't pressure him. Even Jeremiah stood so still beside them that one might have mistaken him for air itself.

Asher exhaled deeply, the tension leaving his shoulders. Then he lifted his gaze to Ezra.

"Have you ever considered quitting your job and becoming a motivational speaker? That seems to be your calling."

Ezra burst into genuine laughter, the sound rich and unguarded. Both men held each other's gaze for a long moment — an unspoken acknowledgment, and a silent exchange of respect.

Then Ezra straightened and announced, "It's time to meet your people, Alpha."

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As soon as Asher appeared, every single pack member dropped to their knees, heads bowed to their Alpha.

It was like a domino effect as the kneeling began from the inside and rippled outward into the streets. The moment, a sight of raw power, was both breathtaking and humbling.

Escorted by his beta, Jeremiah, Ezra, Roman, and a few guards, Asher took in the crowd. His slitted gaze raked over every face in attendance, his features unreadable.

The only ones still standing were the priestess and Elder Kent, who would officiate the coronation. Alpha King Elijah would have been on his feet as well, except he was nowhere to be seen. A fact, Asher noticed.

Irene and her husband, Aeron; Leon and his mate, Alexa — all Alphas of equal status — stood. They were not required to kneel, though even they bowed their heads in acknowledgment as Asher passed.

Then Asher's eyes locked with Alpha Marlow's, and the smirk that curled across his lips was pure menace. Marlow's heart lurched; cold sweat rolled down his temple. He was guilty of more than he could count —and Asher knew it.

Finally, Asher came to stand before the priestess and Elder, his back to his people.

Behind him, his escorts stepped back and dropped to their knees — Roman included. Cardinal Alpha or not, Asher had risen beyond them. They were no longer on the same level.

Chapter 605: Finally Home

"Brothers and sisters of the West," Elder Kent began, his voice thundering across the crowd. "We gather here tonight before heaven and earth, wolves and men alike, to crown the next Alpha of the West Pack, one chosen not by chance, but by blood, by strength, and by the will of the goddess herself!"

Everyone lifted their heads, watching attentively. Not making a sound.

The elder continued.

"Alpha Asher, do you accept the mantle of leadership over the West Pack? Do you swear to protect your people from all threats, within and without? To uphold the values of the pack, to honor the goddess, to guide with strength and fairness, and to never turn your back on the call of your people?"

Asher answered with a steady voice. "I do."

It was the turn of the priestess, one of the moon mothers who served in Selene's temple. She was a tall elegant woman draped in a white flowing dress.

"Under the watchful eyes of the goddess," she said, "speak now your vow to your people."

Asher turned not to the sub-alphas, nor elders, nor even the high-ranking wolves in the front rows. No, his gaze rested on the mothers, the children, and the old—the ones who had endured the most and asked for the least.

His gaze particularly lingered on a woman near the edge of the gathering. She carried a small child on her hip, the boy's tiny fingers clinging to her shoulder as if his life depended on it. Her wide eyes met Asher's.

Hope. Fear. Faith. It was all there in that single look.

And when Asher spoke, it was as if he spoke directly to her.

"I stand before you not as my father's son, but as your Alpha," he began, his voice rough yet commanding. "From this night onward, no woman of this pack will live in fear under my rule. No child will grow hungry or cold while I draw breath. The strong will protect the weak, not prey on them. Every voice—male or female, highborn or lowborn, human or wolf—will have a place in this pack."

His words rolled through the silence, stirring the crowd like a storm wind.

"I will not lead you with cruelty, nor will I turn away from the cries of those in pain. The West Pack will no longer be known for its hunger for dominance, but for its strength in unity. We will not bow to fear, nor yield to corruption. Not while I lead."

The crowd was utterly still. Some even held their breath, spellbound by Asher's words.

Asher fixed his gaze on the woman. "You have my word," he promised her. "You and your children are safe with me."

A single voice broke the silence.

"Alpha Asher!"

It was the woman he'd looked at. Her voice cracked but rang with pride.

Then another joined her.

"Alpha Asher!"

And another.

Then ten. Then fifty. And more.

Soon, all the women of the West pack were crying out. Their voices filled the air, breaking centuries of silence and submission. It was a sound both beautiful and terrifying—like a dam bursting, centuries of buried pain finally finding release.

The men glanced around uneasily, unused to seeing their women so bold. But none dared interrupt. Asher stood tall and unyielding, pride swelling in his chest. This was exactly the change he wanted to bring.

The priestess stepped forward, carrying a small earthen calabash filled with a strange mixture. The scent of herbs wafted through his nostrils and she said to Asher, "Bow, Alpha."

Asher sank to one knee.

The priestess dipped her fingers into the calabash and smeared the mixture across his forehead in three strokes.

"Let his ears be opened to the cries of his people," she intoned.

"Let his heart be filled with compassion, his mind with wisdom."

"Let his hands never tremble when he must protect his own."

At first, it seemed like a normal ritual until it happened.

There was a sudden rush, like wind roaring through his skull, while his heartbeat thundered.

And then, he heard it. The voices of his people in his head.

The mindlink had opened.

Unlike Roman, Griffin, and Alaric, whose bond had awakened through their mate, Asher's had been unlocked by the goddess herself. The goddess had touched him.

The sheer weight of it struck him, yet Asher did not falter. So this was what leadership felt like. What seemed like a thousand voices echoed in his mind, each one a responsibility he had chosen to bear.

Elder Kent stepped forward once more, holding a thick fur. Lifting it high, he announced with a loud voice.

"Before the eyes of the goddess and the hearts of her people, I ordain thee, Asher Nightshade, son of Henry, Alpha of the West Pack. May your reign bring balance, and may your claws bring justice."

He lowered the fur around Asher's shoulders.

The crowd went utterly still. Then, one by one, they lifted their heads and howled to the night sky.

From the center of the courtyard, and spreading outward into the streets, the pack howled in unison, displaying a beautiful vision of wolves calling to the moon, to their Alpha, and to their future.

"Hell yeah!" Roman whooped over the noise, his grin stretching wide before he threw back his head and howled the loudest of all.

Jeremiah joined next. Then Ezra. Everyone — even those who had collided against Asher's reign from the start. No one dared be the odd one out, not when the pack's affection had shifted so completely toward their new Alpha.

At the corner, Nancy clapped her hands so hard her palms stung. She was so proud of Asher.

Elder Kent raised Asher's hand high.

"West Pack," he proclaimed. "I present to you Alpha Asher!"

The chant began slowly, then built into a frenzy. "Alpha Asher! Alpha Asher!"

Asher's chest swelled, pride and purpose blazing through him. He lifted his head and howled so fierce it echoed far beyond the packhouse walls.

The response was deafening.

And for the first time in his life, Asher felt truly, completely home.

Chapter 606: Marry Alpha Asher

"Congratulations, Alpha Asher," kept ringing over and over again until it became a mantra Asher just nodded to. He never thought so many people would show up for the coronation, and now, everyone wanted a moment of his time.

Music pulsed through the courtyard, blending with the smell of roasted meat and sweet wine. Laughter filled the air as the west pack celebrated as if tomorrow would never come.

Asher stood by the long banquet table, half-listening to yet another toast. At his side, Ezra watched quietly, only intervening when it was necessary.

A tall man with a polite smile and expensive cologne approached, his human scent distinct even amidst the crowd.

"Alpha Asher," he greeted warmly, extending a hand. "It's an honor. Gideon Mann, CEO of Astra Industries, one of Aster City's top trade companies."

"Astra Industries is a textile conglomerate," Asher noted. "You're the one funding that women's manufacturing hub in District Six."

"Indeed," Gideon replied proudly. "We precisely train women, giving them steady income through tailoring and distribution. It's a noble initiative, and quite profitable too."

That caught Asher's attention. "And how would that benefit the West Pack?"

Gideon leaned closer. "We could establish a branch here. The older women of your pack, lots of them with no education, could work with us. We'll provide the equipment and trade access to the human markets. You'd be strengthening the economy and reputation of the West pack."

Ezra nodded in approval. "That's actually worth considering."

Asher gave a small, thoughtful hum. He could already picture how this would empower the women of his pack, giving them purpose.

"I'll send Jeremiah to meet with your team," Asher said in a clipped voice. "If your proposal holds merit, we'll move forward."

Gideon grinned. "Excellent. I knew this partnership would be mutually beneficial." He raised his glass in cheer. "To progress, and to alliances."

But before Asher could respond, the man's tone shifted. "Also if I may ask, is it true that you're single, Alpha?"

Ezra almost choked on his drink, side-eyeing Asher.

Asher froze for half a heartbeat before schooling his face into calm. "What makes you think I'm single?"

Gideon laughed, the kind of sly, self-satisfied laugh that grated Asher's nerves. "Oh, I've heard rumors. Something about you being entangled with a human — Violet something?"

"Violet Purple," Asher corrected, his tone sharp enough to cut steel. "And watch the way you say her name."

The businessman's grin faltered. "Ah, my apologies. But er... rumor has it she's already mated to three of your fellow Cardinal Alphas." He tilted his head toward Roman, who at that very moment was being cheered on by a crowd as he drank from a keg upside down.

Asher's eyes flicked to the scene, then back to Gideon, his face expressionless. "So?"

The human chuckled nervously. "Well, I was thinking of a connection, one that would benefit us both." He stepped forward, his voice lowering conspiratorially. "I have a daughter, Clarisse. Beautiful, well-educated, and adaptable. A union between your pack and my family could strengthen both sides. We'd merge trade routes, secure resources, and perhaps, in time, build something greater."

Ezra gave Asher a side glance, the kind that screamed, don't kill him yet.

Gideon continued, oblivious. "And of course, I'm aware Alphas usually choose she-wolves for lineage purity, but I'm not unreasonable. My daughter could be your second wife. After all," he chuckled crudely, "a wolf needs a Luna to breed heirs, and a human to keep his bed warm. Am I wrong?"

The laughter that followed was deafening, to Gideon, at least because Asher was so disgusted, it practically showed on his face.

Ezra felt the tension and the sudden drop in temperature before he saw it.

"Asher," he warned him.

But Asher had already stepped closer, eyes glowing faintly, voice low and lethal.

"I thought of compelling you to shove your own hand up your ass, but that would be a waste of my ability. So I'll say it plainly."

The man's face went chalk-white, but Asher continued, his voice calm yet razor-sharp.

"My woman's name is Violet Purple. She will one day be Luna of this pack. The only Luna. So take your proposal and your rotten tongue, and crawl back to whatever hole you came from. I only pity your daughter for having an animal like you for a father."

Gasps rippled through the surrounding crowd.

The businessman's face turned crimson. "You dare speak to me like that? You're just a newly crowned Alpha! Do you even know who I am? Even your Alpha King speaks to me with—"

Asher growled deep, and guttural. It was the exact kind of sound that made lesser wolves drop to their knees. Gideon stumbled back, tripping over his own feet and landing hard on the floor as laughter erupted from nearby onlookers.

Humiliated, he scrambled upright, glaring at Asher. "You'll regret this. You'll all regret this," he spat before storming off, his pride more wounded than his body.

Asher exhaled, finally releasing the tension.

Ezra, calm as ever, handed him a glass. "Here."

Asher took it without a word and downed it in one go.

"If I'm counting correctly," Ezra said dryly, "that makes twelve marriage proposals in one night."

Asher said nothing, and simply grabbed another glass from a passing tray. He knew what Ezra was implying, after all, no Alpha stands without a Luna.

Ezra said casually. "I do hope Violet is up to marrying an Alpha as soon as possible."

"That's a work in progress. One step at a time." Asher said, a sudden glint in his eyes.

Then, out of nowhere, Asher picked up a spoon from the table and tapped it rhythmically against his wine glass.

Ping, ping, ping.

The sound cut through the noise like a bell, and gradually, the chatter died down. All eyes turned toward him.

"Can I have your attention?" Asher announced with the commanding tone of an Alpha who no longer needed to roar to be heard.

Chapter 607: Expose The Traitor

A hush fell as curiosity rippled through the pack, all eyes were fixed on Asher.

Then Asher spoke.

"Tonight marks a new dawn for the West Pack. My father, and his fathers built this empire from nothing, and now it is my duty and my greatest honor to make it greater than he ever dreamed. We will rise beyond these walls and claim our place as the strongest Wolf pack in Dorminia."

A surge of applause followed, cheers rising like thunder. Wolves howled their approval, their hearts filled with pride for their pack.

Irene watched from her corner, arms crossed, a knowing smirk on her face. The boy had guts, she'd give him that. Declaring such lofty dreams this early in his reign? Bold. Foolish, maybe, but bold. Let him dream, she thought. Her East Pack would always come out on top.

Leon Draven, meanwhile, leaned lazily against a pillar, sipping from his cup. Politics bored him. The boy can have his moment. After all, the south doesn't fight for thrones. They lived their life to the fullest.

The applause carried on until Asher raised a hand, and the noise died instantly. His tone changed.

"But," he said quietly, "it's quite sad that even among our own people there are enemies who work against the progress of the West Pack."

The crowd fell into uneasy murmurs.

"What does he mean?" someone whispered.

"Enemies?" another muttered.

Only one man's hands had begun to tremble and it was Alpha Marlow's. His pulse raced, his knuckles pale. He already had an inkling where this was headed.

Asher's gaze swept the crowd. "For years, my father's former Beta, Dominic, siphoned the pack's resources. He purchased contraband, ran underground trade, and built a loan-shark network using our people's pain. He took children as collateral, enslaved debtors, and turned our pack's strength into his personal business."

Gasps broke through the courtyard.

A young she-wolf clutched her chest. "The children?"

An elder muttered darkly, "Dominic... that snake."

Asher went on. "He would have been confronted, but he challenged me first. He knew the truth would end him, so he tried to end me instead. His death only confirmed his guilt."

Nods rippled through the crowd. They had seen Asher's strength firsthand. They believed him.

But then his tone deepened again. "What pains me more is that he didn't act alone. Some of our own Alphas stood beside him, feeding from the same filth."

Now the murmurs turned to noise.

"Impossible!" someone shouted.

"Who?"

"Which Alpha?"

The high-ranking wolves shifted uneasily. The sub-Alphas, eleven of them, stood grouped together. Then the crowd instinctively parted, leaving them exposed at the center like prey.

Alpha Rowland was the first to speak up. "This is dangerous talk," he snapped at Asher. "Wild accusations without proof will only divide the pack!"

Asher's smile was cold. "Proof?" He tilted his head. "Then let's talk proof."

He turned his gaze straight at Alpha Marlow.

Every head turned with him.

Marlow's face drained of color. "I-I'm being framed!" he stammered. "I've served this pack faithfully. My wealth, my pack's prosperity, is being used against me! You want me gone so you can control it all!"

Asher laughed, but there was no humor in it. "You dare lie to my face? To your Alpha?"

The tone silenced everything.

Jeremiah stepped forward, motioning toward the guards. "Bring her in."

A thin, pale woman was led to the front, trembling. She clutched her shawl around her shoulders and bowed low.

"Speak," Asher ordered.

"My name is Elina," she began, her voice cracking. "My husband and I borrowed money from Alpha Marlow's men to save our son. When we couldn't pay, they took him. Said a debt must be paid one way or another." Her eyes filled with tears. "My husband killed himself three nights later."

The crowd fell deathly silent.

Then another woman pushed through, her voice shaking but fierce. "He took from me too," she cried. "I was a widow. I needed money to feed my children. His men said if I couldn't pay, I'd have to please their Alpha instead. I did what I had to — and he laughed when I begged him to stop."

A third voice joined. A young man stepped out. "He doubled my interest even when my sister was ill. When I couldn't repay, they forced me to fight wolves for sport for their entertainment. I lost my sister that night."

The crowd erupted.

"Monster!"

"Scum!"

"Traitor!"

Marlow tried to back away as bottles, plates, and scraps of food flew at him. His own guards deserted him, while the other sub-alphas turned their backs.

"Enough!" Asher's voice boomed through the commotion, silencing it at once. His eyes were blazing. "Justice will be served. I will not let this corruption poison my pack any longer."

He turned to Jeremiah. "Take him. He will face trial for his crimes."

"Yes, Alpha!" Jeremiah barked, signaling the guards.

They seized Marlow by the arms, dragging him forward. The crowd hissed and threw whatever they could grab at him. Marlow tried to speak, but no one listened. His voice was swallowed by the roar of his people.

When the crowd finally quieted, Asher stood there for a long moment, his jaw tight.

Ezra came up beside him, calm as ever. "You handled that well."

Asher sighed, rubbing a hand over his neck. "That's a nice one coming from your lips?"

Ezra smirked faintly. "It's just the beginning. There are more to come your way as Alpha."

Asher looked back at the crowd, murmuring, "I'm sure each and everyone of them was involved one way or the other." He referred to the sub-alphas.

Ezra nodded. "We'd find out when Marlow starts talking. It would take time, but they cannot hide forever."

Asher sighed, tired. "I think I've done enough for one night."

Jeremiah asked him, "Should I come with you, Alpha?"

"No," Asher told him. "Enjoy yourself for one night. Come tomorrow, we have a purge on our hands."

## Chapter 608: Pack Of Wolves

"How dare you treat me like this!" Alpha Marlow bellowed as the two wolf guards hauled him through the packhouse, his wrists cinched in suppressor's cuffs. The metal was cold, and he couldn't call on his wolf's strength even if he could.

He spat and thrashed, but the guards were not moved at all. They shoved him down the corridor toward the cells, past the echo of the celebration that still droned in the courtyard.

Marlow's face was livid, veins bulging on his temples, "Once I'm free from this place, I'll make sure you \_"

One guard pushed the heavy iron door to the dungeon open while the other stepped back, even as Marlow continued to curse them.

But a sudden yelp cut him off.

The guard who had his back staggered, hand flying to his mouth. Blood slicked his fingers while a silver dagger protruded from his chest. He dropped to the ground, dead.

The second guard turned with horror on his face. They were under attack!

But before he could send any order through the pack link, a blade came flying and sank into his neck.

Then one of the assassins stepped into the limelight and ripped his heart from his chest, blood spilling to the ground.

Marlow's heart thudded in his chest. For a beat he was frozen, disbelief twisting his features. He suddenly wished the cuff were off so he could fight for his life. This was such a cowardly way to die.

The assassins were three in number, fully cloaked with their faces half hidden in the darkness.

Marlow's stomach turned cold when he saw the leader step forward, his boots soundless on the ground. The man's grin was casual, and contemptuous.

"Who are you?" Marlow barked, trying to sound terrifying. But it came out thin.

The leader removed his hood enough for Marlow to see a scar across his jaw, a smile that didn't reach his eyes. "Cane sends his regards."

The name hit Marlow like a blow. "Cane?" he repeated, disbelief giving way to fury. "Alpha Cane planned this?!" His voice was a broken thing, hope and horror warring in it.

The leader shrugged as if answering for a minor inconvenience. "He did."

The blood drained from Marlow's face. He understood, in that instant, the machinery grinding against him. "You've come to silence me so the truth can be buried," he spat, rage in his voice. "All of the alphas have turned their backs against me. They're using me as the scape goat."

The leader answered, "Not quite, Alpha Marlow. You will die, sure. But first, Asher Nightshade must die. We'll make it look like you after murdering the newly crowned Alpha. The search for you will be endless. But it's all futile because you'd already be dead by then."

"So this is Cane's plan, huh? That cunning animal! After everything I've done for him!" Marlow cursed.

Then he laughed, a high, hysterical sound. "You think you can kill Asher? He's a cardinal alpha, he slew Dominic. He's stronger than you think."

The leader's chuckle was cruel. "Cardinal alpha or not, he is not invincible. Tonight he's exposed and weak from all the battles. You should worry less about Asher and more about your own life. We don't have time for this."

He motioned to the two men flanking him. "Take him out of sight. Make sure the story looks clean, and everything goes as planned."

Marlow's pleading turned to roaring as they hauled him away. "You'll never get away with this! Tell that to Cane! He'd regret this!" he screamed.

But none of the assassins took his words to heart, already moving to the next phase of their plan.

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The packhouse was almost empty when Asher finally returned to his quarters. He was drained from all the activities. So he shut the door behind him, exhaling deeply. The silence heavy but comforting.

He headed straight for the shower, and bathed. Stepping out, Asher wore nothing but his boxers as he collapsed onto his bed.

Tomorrow there would be war within his own house. He had plans to purge every Alpha who had fed on his father's filth. It was going to be brutal.

So he closed his eyes, and for a brief second, there was peace.

Then he heard it.

Asher jerked sideways just as a blade cleanly landed where his throat had been. The mattress tore open, feathers scattering. He rolled off the bed, landing hard, already baring his fangs.

Three men stood in his room. They were not just wolves, these were mercenaries. He could tell from their scent and that brutal look in their eyes.

Asher said, cold fury tightening his jaw.

"So they couldn't wait until morning to get rid of me. I was giving them the courtesy of tomorrow."

One of them spoke, voice muffled under the black cloth mask. "Our orders are simple, Alpha Asher. Nothing personal."

Asher's claws slid out, "Which of my Alphas sent you? ?"

None of them met his eyes. They knew one look into his slitted eyes and it was all over.

"Our job isn't to talk," the leader said coldly. "It's to kill you."

They lunged.

Asher ducked, his claws meeting blade, and

sparks flew. He twisted, kicked one of them into the wall. The third came from behind, slashing low. Asher pivoted, grabbing his wrist and snapping it clean.

But the second man wasn't finished. He lunged again, and this time the blade caught him across his abdomen. The silver burned through and Asher hissed, staggering back.

The leader stepped forward slowly, admiring the scene. "Just as I thought," he said. "You are worthy of being Alpha. But we didn't come to fight fair."

From his cloak, he tossed a small canister to the floor. It hit the ground and burst, thick gray smoke filling the air.

Asher's eyes widened. He knew the scent immediately.

Wolfbane.

He coughed violently, covering his nose with one hand, but the smoke had already slipped through his lungs. His vision blurred, his knees weakening.

The mercenaries didn't wait and charged at him again with their swords.

## Chapter 609: Pack Of Wolves - 2

The West Pack was a pack of wolves—literally and figuratively.

Henry Nightshade had raised them with iron fists, believing cruelty forged loyalty, and that fear was the best kind of obedience.

Unknown to him, all he'd really done was breed monsters—ravenous, power-hungry beasts who learned to bare their teeth even to their own kind.

Now, those same wolves were turning on his son.

Asher's breath came ragged as he braced himself against the wall. Blood leaked from his abdomen, and the scent of iron filled the air, mingling with the smoke that burned his lungs. The assassins closed in, circling like vultures over prey that refused to die.

He tried reaching through the mindlink again.

Jeremiah! he called, forcing the link open with sheer willpower.

But there was nothing. The connection snapped back like a whip, making his head pound. Someone, or rather, something, was blocking him.

He gritted his teeth. No way in hell was him dying like this.

The only choice left was to escape this room. The more he stayed inhaling the smoke, the weaker he became. It was even a miracle he was still on his feet, but he guessed it was adrenaline doing his job. No way in hell was he dying this way.

The assassins sensed his intent and made sure to herd him further from the exit. When one of them swung again, Asher sidestepped and slashed upward with his claws. He teared through the man's arm, and blood sprayed.

But the second one took advantage, plunging a silver dagger into his side. The pain was blinding, but Asher used it, grabbed the assassin's head, and ripped through his abdomen in one brutal motion.

His intestines spilled out causing him to scream loudly. The other two turned at once, distracted, and Asher ran.

Asher didn't make it far before a dagger whistled through the air, grazing his back. The silver burned him, but he didn't stop. He burst into the hallway, breathing hard, only to collide with a solid chest.

Roman.

"Hey," Roman began with a grin, "I was about to—" His words cut short as his eyes caught the blood soaking Asher's torso.

His expression changed instantly. "What the hell—"

Before Asher could answer, one of the assassins stepped out from the smoky doorway, and threw a dagger.

Roman caught it mid-air, smirking—then hissed when the silver burned his hand. "Son of a—those fucking bastards!" He flung it away and grabbed Asher's arm.

"Didn't they attack a little too early?" he demanded as they ran.

Asher coughed out a bitter laugh, "Desperate rats do desperate things." Ezra's words echoed grimly in his head.

The hallway stretched ahead, eerily empty. The noise from the ongoing celebration outside covered every sound of their struggle. No one would hear them even if they screamed.

Roman slowed, glancing around. "This is bad. We need to—"

Figures appeared from the far end of the corridor, cloaked and armed.

Roman turned to the other side, and more assassins emerged, cutting them off completely.

"Oh, great," Roman muttered, annoyed, "We're surrounded."

Asher pushed away from him, forcing his posture straight despite the blood dripping from his wounds. He wouldn't give these killers the satisfaction of seeing weakness.

Roman glanced at him. "I'll take three, you take three, yeah? Think of it like sparring lessons back at Lunaris."

Asher claws slid out once more. His eyes gleamed cold. "You talk too much."

Roman winked at him. "And yet you keep listening."

But then, the six assassins pulled out their throwing daggers, each one gleaming in the light.

Roman swallowed. "Okay, maybe... think of it like lycan football," he said under his breath.

Asher didn't respond. His mind was busy calculating, tracing angles, and predicting trajectories. He'd have to move fast to survive. His muscles coiled, ready.

"Now!" Roman roared.

They charged forward at the same time. Daggers flew at them, flashing like stars. Asher ducked under one, catching another midair and flinging it back. It sank into an attacker's throat. Roman tackled another, twisting his arm till bone cracked.

Suddenly, a blinding flash ripped through the hall, momentarily halting the fight. The air warped, bending around itself as a portal formed in the middle of the hallway.

Before Asher could react, someone shot out from the portal.

"Huh?" Roman's eyes widened as he recognizes her, "You —"

But before he could say a word, she grabbed Asher's wrist, then Roman's, and yanked them toward her.

"No wait —!" Asher was still saying.

But the portal swallowed them whole.

Behind them, the remaining daggers hit the floor where they had stood.

The assassins stood frozen, their blades still raised, and faces hard with disbelief. The leader barked, "Where did they go?"

"N—no idea," one of the men stammered, eyes sweeping the doorway as if the missing pair might reappear on the other side.

The leader panicked. "Spread out! Find them now!" His voice left no room for mercy. "If they escape, you're all dead. Understood?"

"Yes, sir!" they spat, fanning through the corridors.

They hadn't gone far before the clatter of armored boots echoed from the stairwell. A line of guards poured into the hall, led by Ezra, whose face was grim with controlled fury.

"Hold position! Surround them, don't let any move!" he ordered

The assassins tried to pivot, and run away, but the exits slammed shut as more guards barred their way. The veteran guards of the West pack cut off their retreat.

Panic flickered across the leader's face. It dawned on him at once that this was a trap.

He signaled a desperate charge. They lunged at the guards but they were outnumbered and overwhelmed. Hands closed on their throats, while the other's wrists were snapped, their throwing knives wrenched free and clattered to the floor.

The leader swung wildly and was caught by a guard's forearm, slammed down onto his knees.

Ezra strode forward, breathing hard. "Capture them alive," he said, each word cold. "We will find out who sent you."

The assassins snarled, fought, cursed, but one by one they were wrestled down, bound, and forced to the ground. Just like that, the hunters had become trapped.

However, when Ezra looked around, he asked, "Where is Asher?"

Chapter 610: Submit To Him

Violet Purple woke up with a sheepish grin tugging at her lips. She had never thought she'd actually pull it off, but she had missed Asher so badly that she'd thrown caution to the wind and tried reaching him through the dream.

And it worked.

The memory hit her like a spark, heat rushing to her cheeks. Saints, she could still feel his kiss, every touch, and every way he had her. Her body tingled in such a way she could almost swear the dream had been real.

Still smiling, Violet turned, and froze.

Alaric was wide awake. His piercing blue eyes watched her with quiet amusement, head resting lazily on one arm.

"Y-you're awake," she stammered, feeling her heart trip over itself.

"Of course," Alaric replied smoothly. "Not even a dead man could sleep through your moans."

Her eyes widened to the size of saucers.

Goddess, no.

Color flooded her face as she yanked the sheets over her head.

"Don't be shy," Alaric teased her, "I mean, It was oddly sexy watching you moan and writhe in your sleep."

"Shut up!" Violet yelled from under the covers, mortified beyond words.

Alaric chuckled, "What? It was a sweet dream, huh?"

He added wickedly, "Next time you plan a secret rendezvous with Asher, give me a heads-up. While he keeps you busy in the dream realm, I'll handle the real thing, so you don't end up humping the air."

And that was it, Violet had had enough.

She turned fast, fire flashing in her eyes as she straddled Alaric, pressing him down against the bed.

Violet landed a playful but firm smack on his chest. "One more word and I swear I'll kill you," she warned.

Alaric winced dramatically, clutching his chest. "Violence against the injured. You're one cruel mate."

Violet rolled her eyes.

But before she say a word, the world spun. A gasp left her lips as Alaric flipped her beneath him in one swift, effortless motion. She landed on her back with a soft thud, and his smirk—the slow, arrogant kind—appeared over her.

"Still think you can win?" He taunted her.

Something primal sparked inside Violet. Thalia, her wolf, stirred within her at the challenge. Suddenly, the air was charged with that primal tension only wolves understood.

Violet didn't answer. Instead, she twisted her hips, using her strength to flip him back over. Alaric hit the mattress with a grunt. His eyes glowed as his wolf rose, that dangerous Alpha energy bleeding through his control.

He snarled at her, and the sound shot straight through her veins. But instead of fear, it filled her with a wild, playful, and intoxicating feeling.

Alaric's grin deepened. "You really want to play this game?"

"Oh, I'm not playing," Violet breathed, and the tension between them thickened until it was hard to tell if they were fighting or flirting.

In an instant, Alaric rolled her again, pinning her wrists above her head. They'd reached the edge of the bed now, the world narrowing to the sound of their breaths and heartbeats colliding. His gaze dared her to move.

But Violet never backed down.

A sly glint lit her eyes right before she hooked her legs around his waist and twisted. They both tumbled off the bed, hitting the ground with a thud that rattled the floorboards.

This time, she landed on top.

Alaric's breath caught as she pinned his arms to the floor, her hair tumbling down like a violet curtain between them. Her razor sharp teeth had descended now, gleaming dangerously. For a moment, her features shifted—half lupine, her wolf showing through her human skin.

She looked like power incarnate.

But Alaric wasn't one to submit. His own wolf surged forward, his blue eyes burning as he flipped her one last time. She landed beneath him again, breathless and trapped, their legs tangled, their hearts beating wildly against each other.

She struggled, but every movement only made it worse. The friction, and the closeness was unbearable.

"Submit," Alaric growled, his voice rough, vibrating through her chest.

Thalia bristled in defiance, baring her teeth through Violet's lips. She would not yield.

But then Alaric's wolf growled back, a deep, thunderous sound that made the walls tremble. It wasn't just dominance, but pure power.

Violet's breath hitched. Thalia finally lowered her head, baring her throat in instinctive submission.

She did not submit out of fear, but respect. Wolves exposed their necks only to those they trusted, and accepted as their equal. After all, one wrong move could mean death.

She trusted her mate.

Alaric froze above her, his chest heaving. The sight of his mate, trusting him with her life, sent an thrilling feeling roaring through him.

A growl rumbled low in his chest as Alaric leaned down. His lips brushed against her neck, right where Griffin's rune was carved on her skin.

The touch sent a violent shiver through her body.

Her hands clenched around his arms as he kissed her again, slower this time, the heat of his breath burning through her veins. The second kiss lingered, and her heart nearly gave out from how intense it felt. Every nerve in her body screamed for more.

Alaric lifted her chin between his fingers, forcing her to meet his eyes.

"Do you have any idea what you do to me?" he murmured darkly, his voice rough.

Before she could answer, he kissed her.

Hard. Deep. Desperate.

Violet melted instantly, her hands sliding up his neck as her lips moved against his in sync with his hunger. He kissed her like he was claiming her soul, like he'd been waiting a lifetime for this exact moment.

The air turned heated. His breath mingled with hers, their wolves howling within.

Her body responded on instinct, arching into him, craving more, and when he deepened the kiss, her head spun.

Then, just as her fingers brushed the edge of his waistband—

Knock. Knock.

The sound shattered the moment like glass.

Alaric and Violet froze, their ragged breaths filling the silence.

Violet lifted her gaze and glared at the door. She was going to kill whoever that was.