

## Defy 611

Chapter 611: Took The Letter

It was Ace behind the door.

Just like that, Violet's annoyance vanished away. She certainly could not kill the brother of her mate, although from the way she glared, it was a near thing.

Even Ace looked uncomfortable under her gaze. "Did he do something wrong to her?" he couldn't help but ponder inwardly.

"Brother."

At the sound of Alaric's voice, Ace's composure broke. He rushed forward and pulled his brother into a desperate embrace, his voice shaking. "I'm so sorry."

Alaric blinked, taken aback by the intensity in his tone. "There's no room for sorry," he said, "You didn't cause the attack, Ace. None of this is on you."

But Ace shook his head violently. "You don't understand," he choked out. "It's all my fault."

Something about the trembling in his voice made Alaric still. Slowly, he pried his brother's hands off and looked him in the eye. "What are you talking about?"

Ace looked up, his eyes already glistening. "I did it," he whispered.

Violet's expression hardened with suspicion. "What did you do, Ace?" she demanded.

Ace said with guilt written across his face. "First, you have to know I never thought it would come to this. I didn't mean for any of this to happen."

Alaric's patience snapped. "What did you do?" His voice dropped low like that dangerous calm before the storm.

Ace's lips quivered. "It was years ago, but I was the one who took the letter."

Alaric's brow furrowed. "What are you talking about? What letter?"

Ace swallowed hard. "Mother told me everything after she woke up. Finn only did what he did because Father ignored the letter he wrote."

Alaric frowned deeply. "Wait—what in the world are you talking about?"

It dawned on Violet that Alaric had no idea about Finn's betrayal, nor the attack on his mother. In the vision Alice showed her, Alaric had been summoned by his father, where the truth had been exposed, however, they ended up dying, unaware of the ongoing attack on the pack.

But Violet had woken up before that scene, altering the course of action. She had them rushing to the warehouse where they had stopped the destruction of the North pack. Except Alaric ended up getting shot, and here they are. In one word, Alaric had missed out on that revelation.

Well, not anymore.

Ace told him. "Your Beta is Patrick's spy and aided him in the attack against the pack. He attacked mom last night and we couldn't get any information because he destroyed the cameras. But mom just told me the truth. Finn's mom and our father had been a couple. However, dad left her for mom and it ended up ruining her life. Finn returned to the North pack to get some sort of closure, so he wrote a letter to our father ...." He paused this time, unable to continue.

"And?" Alaric demanded. He had an inkling where this was headed, but he needed to hear it from his brother's mouth.

"I took the letter," Ace confessed, his voice barely audible now. "I saw him sneaking out of Father's office and got suspicious. I went in, found the letter, and read it. I don't even know what I was thinking. Maybe I wanted to see what he would do next. Maybe... maybe I just wanted to play a little game."

He looked down, tears spilling freely. "Mother and Father—everyone—always loved you, Alaric. Not me. I was the one in the corners, and always ignored. So I did something twisted. I manipulated Father into choosing Finn as your beta. Finn was a strong wolf in the first place, so everything fell into place, easily. Father was proud of me for finally thinking about you, not realizing it was all selfishness. I wanted to see what would happen when the son of Father's ex-lover became your right hand."

Violet stood frozen, the weight of his confession sinking like stones in her stomach.

Ace wiped his tears with a shaking hand. "I swear, I didn't think it would go this far. I thought maybe you'd fight, argue, hate each other a little... but then move on. I never imagined it'd end in blood, betrayal, not to mention, a war. I didn't know Patrick was using Finn. I didn't know he'd... he'd—" His voice broke completely. "Please forgive me, Alaric. Please. I never meant for any of this."

Alaric froze, every muscle locked as the words sank in. For a long moment, there was no sound, just the echo of Ace's confession looping in his head.

Then Alaric let out a dry, humorless laugh.

"Well," he said bitterly, "it did end just the way you wanted."

Ace flinched as if he had been struck. "Alaric, please—" he choked, "I swear, I'll be a better brother. I'll make it right, I'll—"

"Don't." Alaric hissed the word like venom. His hand came up sharply. "Don't touch me."

Ace froze mid-reach. His tears fell harder now, but Alaric didn't move to comfort him. His gaze was not hateful, but it was cold and hollow.

"I need some space," he said finally, his voice breaking at the edges. Then he turned and walked away without looking back.

The sound of Ace's sobs followed him down the hall, but Alaric didn't stop.

Violet lingered a moment, staring at the younger boy. There was so much she wanted to say, but nothing would undo the damage.

Her eyes softened for a brief second, then hardened again. She shook her head, disappointed, and left.

When she went looking for Alaric, he was nowhere inside the packhouse. She searched quietly, following his scent through the night until it led her to the outside.

There Alaric stood, his back to her, while his gaze fixed on the empty stretch where the warehouse once stood, but was no more — all thanks to her.

Violet didn't say a word. She only stepped closer and stopped beside him. For a while, neither of them spoke. They simply stared at the emptiness ahead, sharing the quiet moment between them.

Then Alaric asked without looking at her.

"How does it feel being an orphan?"

Chapter 612: The King's Arrival

"Huh?" Violet blinked, caught completely off guard by the question. She hadn't seen it coming.

Alaric's gaze stayed fixed ahead. "You must feel relieved," he murmured, "that you didn't have to go through all these betrayals."

"Well, technically..." Violet said, her tone thoughtful. "I wasn't exactly an orphan. I had Nancy, and she was a pain in the ass. At least, back then."

Alaric pressed, "But you still lived like one. That must've been easier than mine."

"No, it wasn't," Violet said flatly.

That made him turn to her, curious despite himself.

"There wasn't a single day I didn't wonder who brought me into this world and why they left me alone," she continued, her voice tightening. "I used to stare at myself in the mirror, look at my hair, and think, maybe it's because I'm a freak."

Her fingers reached for a strand of that same purple hair now, running through it absently. "I cut it more than once. Thought if I chopped off the color, maybe I could start over. But it kept growing back, same damn purple, as if mocking me."

She let out a bitter laugh. "Those thoughts ate me alive, you know? I'd imagine what life would've been like if I'd had a real family. I had no identity, no roots, just me and Nancy, and she wasn't exactly the model guardian. But she kept me alive, and protected me from the predators in District One. That was something."

Her tone softened, almost wistful. "Still, it couldn't replace what it felt like to belong, you know, to have a name that meant something, a home that didn't feel borrowed."

Suddenly, the softness vanished, and her features hardened. "Also, this is going to sound bitchy, Alaric, but I'm going to say it anyway since you're comparing. If that's the case, then your life was easier compared to mine. And compared to Asher's." She said the last part with emphasis.

Alaric opened his mouth to argue, but Violet cut him off. "You practically lived like a prince your whole life, Alaric. You had everything anyone could wish for. You never had to starve for days, or finally find food only to wonder how you'd survive the rest of the week. Your family was complete. You didn't have an abusive monster for a father."

Alaric shot back, "My mother is a manipulative bitch, you saw it. She was willing to endanger my life just to break the two of us apart. She nearly killed me."

"Nearly being the word," Violet countered sharply. "And it was one time, after you finally decided to stand up for yourself. But I've seen things, Alaric. Been through situations your princely life wouldn't have survived. I've been inside Asher's memories, too. He walked a thin thread between life and death every time Henry laid a hand on him."

She said, "I'm not trying to invalidate your pain, or make it sound like it's nothing. But right now, I'm speaking for Ace. What he did was wrong, yes, but at least he's remorseful. And without him, we wouldn't have been able to save this pack."

"Alaric," she said firmly, "you need people on your side right now, most of all, family. Because whether you see it or not, a war is coming. Finn was already bitter long before that letter. Whether it was intercepted or not, he still would've turned against this pack. You think an apology would've fixed years of hatred?"

The crease in Alaric's brow deepened. It was clear the gears were turning in his mind.

Violet went on. "Finn envied the life you lived. He wanted to be the Alpha's son, which was something impossible. An apology wouldn't have been enough for him. He would've demanded more..." Her voice dropped lower, thoughtful. "Maybe he even wanted your father to cast your mother aside to make his own mother Luna again, just to soothe his wounded pride."

Alaric scowled at her, but Violet only shrugged. "Just saying."

Then she added, "And your brother isn't the only one at fault. You, Alaric—you ignored Finn. You never treated him like an Alpha. Just like your father, you were too wrapped up in your own world of science until you met me. You practically handed Patrick access to Finn."

Alaric's jaw tightened. Guilt plowed through him because his mate was right—he had played a part in it all.

"If it hadn't been Finn," Violet concluded, "Patrick would've found someone else. The North pack was his target, he would surely find a way."

Alaric exhaled deeply. "So you're telling me to forgive Ace?"

"Forgiveness is up to you," Violet replied calmly. "What I'm saying is don't let guilt crush Ace. Don't push him so far he breaks. He was a kid who made a stupid mistake. If anyone deserves blame, it's your parents. They caused all of this."

Alaric ran his fingers through his hair and sighed longer this time, as if the weight of the world was pressing on his shoulders.

"I'm sorry," he murmured, "for thinking living as an orphan was easier."

"Oh, don't worry," Violet said dryly, "you were right anyway."

"Huh?" Alaric frowned in confusion.

"I've got a mother whose husband wants me dead," she said, lips twisting. "And a father who plans to use me for world domination. Maybe being an orphan isn't so bad after all."

Alaric smiled faintly. "Come here." He opened his arms, and Violet walked right into them.

He held her close, swaying slowly from side to side. "Don't worry," he murmured into her hair. "Our kids will never be orphans. Not with four fathers."

Violet chuckled. "Aren't you jumping ahead a little, my lord?"

Alaric smirked. "Not ahead. Just prepared." He hugged her tighter.

"Aren't you two cozy," a voice drawled. But neither of them turned, not when they'd sensed him long before he spoke.

Griffin stepped into view, his muscly arms crossed. "Hate to ruin the moment, but we've got a problem."

Violet groaned. "Don't we always?"

Griffin's tone darkened. "It's Elijah. He's arrived in the North Pack."

Chapter 613: Strange Sky

Elijah was here for her.

"It's me he wants," Violet said out loud.

"I know that," Griffin replied. "Someone apparently recorded you rending the warehouse into nothing, and the extra drama of you floating in the air with Alaric." He added quickly, "Although, for the record, the scene of you falling to the ground is breaking the internet right now."

"Floating in the air is not dramatic," Violet pouted. "And I just don't have control over it." That was her excuse for both the floating and the falling.

Violet wished she could see the video herself, but of course, her phone was gone. Again. Not that it was her fault — they'd been neck-deep in one crisis after another lately, and her poor devices had paid the price.

She'd lost count of how many phones had met their tragic end by now. On the bright side, her mates were always there to replace them over and over again.

Griffin went on, "The point is, Elijah's here. And no doubt, his men are already searching for us."

"He won't harm her," Alaric said. "The world already knows about her now, which means he'll have to answer questions if anything happens to Violet. But that doesn't make her safe either. This is Elijah we're talking about."

Violet scratched her scalp. "And I don't know if telling him I'm his brother's daughter is a good idea, even if he already suspects it."

"Elijah definitely knows his brother's alive," Griffin was convinced. "That's a given. There are too many signs. The way he hoards his throne alone is suspicious enough."

"And to keep it," Violet said, a small smirk tugging at her lips, "he'll need my help."

Griffin looked at her. "There's nothing to keep. You're its heir now."

Violet said nothing to that.

Alaric tilted his head back toward the night sky and sighed. "I suddenly wish we could just elope somewhere and wait out this chaos, even if it's for a single day."

No sooner had those words left Alaric's mouth than a crack suddenly formed in the very fabric of space itself, followed by a burst of blinding light. Then, just as quickly, it dimmed enough for them to make out the portal swirling before them.

"What the—?" Alaric cursed, eyes widening to the size of saucers.

As a man of science, watching a portal materialize right in front of him was both shocking and exhilarating.

Violet's eyes narrowed at the uncanny sight, shadows instinctively gathering in her palms as a defense mechanism. When she saw a figure begin to emerge from the light, her first thought was that it was one of her sisters. Her muscles tensed, ready to obliterate them before they could lay a hand on her mate.

Hence one could imagine her shock when a face she knew all too well stepped out of the portal.

"Lila?" Violet whispered, her feet frozen to the floor.

The last time she'd seen Lila, she'd been bound to that carnivorous tree, and Violet had assumed she was dead.

She took a good look at Lila. Her pixie-cut hair now flowed longer, brushing past her shoulders, and her skin was milky smooth, almost glowing like a newborn's. The unhealthy pallor she'd carried in that dreaming world was completely gone. But what truly caught Violet's attention were her pointed ears, that was unmistakably Fae. Lila was no longer afraid to show who she really was.

"Lila!" Violet shouted and ran straight into her, hugging her. She pulled back just enough to ask, her voice filled with relief, "How are you here? Did my mother rescue you?"

But Lila said urgently. "This isn't the time or place for questions, Princess. You're needed back home."

"What?" Violet was confused.

Before she could ask another word, Lila pushed her hard, and she fell straight into the portal. Violet screamed as the light swallowed her whole.

"Violet?!" Griffin and Alaric yelled in unison. It happened so fast, neither could react in time.

"Come get your mate," Lila told them, and without hesitation, jumped into the portal after her.

Griffin and Alaric didn't even think twice, and followed after her, diving in at the same moment. Almost immediately, the portal sealed shut behind them.

Unknown to them, Ace had seen everything.

He'd been on his way to beg his brother one last time—even if it meant dropping to his knees— only to stumble into the portal. And in a blink, everyone was gone.

Ace stood there in stunned silence, his heart hammering. "What the fuck just happened?" he whispered to the empty space.

Meanwhile...

A fissure ripped open in the air, and Violet came screaming through it like a banshee,

before landing flat on a bed of flowers.

The impact was surprisingly soft, the petals cradling her like silk, and for a wild second, she thought she had fallen into a bed made of cotton. If that even made sense.

Violet groaned and coughed; the flowers released a thick, honey-sweet scent that clung to her lungs until she nearly choked.

Rolling onto her back, she blinked hard because above her stretched a sky she'd never seen before.

There was two crescent moons in the sky.

"What the hell...?" she whispered.

At the same time, the portal pulsed and promptly spat Lila out.

Unlike Violet, she landed gracefully on her feet, barely disturbing a single petal. Of course she did. Lila looked like someone who'd done this a thousand times.

Moments later, Griffin and Alaric came crashing through the portal with identical screams, tumbling like rag dolls. Griffin hit the ground first, and Alaric landed squarely on top of him with a solid thud.

"Great," Griffin groaned, his voice muffled in the dirt. "I'm a damn mattress again."

Alaric's face was buried against Griffin's stomach. Without lifting his head, he muttered, "Nice body, though."

The portal sealed behind them with a snap, and silence fell upon them for a second before they both jerked to their feet.

"Violet!" Griffin and Alaric shouted in unison.

But Alaric's gaze locked on Lila first, and before anyone could stop him, he hurled a bolt of lightning straight at her.

#### Chapter 614: Meet The Fae Queen

Lila was quick on her feet, the lightning strike missing her by mere inches. Still, the hairs on her arms stood on end, reminding her how close that had been.

"Where did you take Violet?!" Alaric roared,

electricity sparking across his arms.

"Violet!" Griffin cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted her name at the top of his voice.

They had landed in another part of the vast garden, and that bolt of lightning had been the perfect giveaway to their location. So when Griffin shouted her name, Violet echoed back. "I'm here!"

Immediately, both men ran toward the sound.

They met halfway, with Griffin scooping her right off her feet as though she weighed nothing. He inspected her frantically. "Are you hurt?" he demanded, hands running over her arms and sides.

"I'm fine, just—atchoo!" Violet sneezed violently. "God, the flowers in this place are awful!" she groaned, rubbing her nose.

Before she could say more, a rustle came from behind them. Alaric's senses sharpened immediately. He turned, and there was Lila stepping through the foliage. At once, Alaric moved in front of Violet,

lightning crawling down his arms like glowing veins, the air humming with static. One wrong move and she'd be ash.

"There's no need for violence," Lila said calmly, her expression unreadable. "I lured you here on purpose. I knew Violet would never come alone without her mates."

Only then did Alaric and Griffin really take in their surroundings. Until now, all they'd cared about was finding Violet. But as they looked around, realization struck hard.

The garden stretched endlessly, filled with strange, luminous flowers while two crescent moons hung beautifully in the sky.

"Where are we?" Alaric asked, though he already sensed the answer.

Lila straightened proudly. "Welcome to the Fae Realm."

Even Violet who had already suspected it was caught off guard by the announcement.

The moment she'd landed here, something deep inside her had stirred, as if her soul had recognized the place before her mind could. The air was lighter, alive with magic, and it seemed to seep into her pores. She could feel the realm, breathing with it, and pulsing through her veins. If she'd ever felt powerful before in the human realm, she felt invisible here.

Still, Violet frowned. "You could've at least warned us—atchoo!—before dragging us through a damn portal!" She sneezed again, then cursed through gritted teeth, "Oh, for fuck's sake—atchuh!—get me out of here already!"

Lila narrowed her eyes, unimpressed. "Hopefully you're not allergic to flowers, Princess, or the entire realm might go into shock."

The Fae live in alignment with nature. The trees were their lifelines. Every home, every court, even the palace grew from the living roots of this realm. Their world did not exist beside nature—it was nature itself.

Violet frowned. She hadn't even met the Fae yet, and already she could feel the weight pressing down on her shoulders. What if they didn't accept her? What if she was too wolfish to be Fae? What if her own mother looked at her and saw nothing but a mistake?

She suddenly didn't seem too thrilled.

Alaric sensed her withdrawal through the bond and, without hesitation, reached for her hand. His palm was warm, giving hers a firm squeeze.

"We're here with you," he said simply.

It was just a few words, but somehow, they anchored her. Strength seeped back into her chest, and Violet took a deep breath. Well then, if the Fae didn't like her, that was their problem. She could always leave this glowing, flower-choked realm and go back to Earth, where she belonged with her lovely mates.

"Come," Lila commanded, "I'm sure the others are frantic already."

At the mention of the others, Violet's eyes widened, hope flaring through her like a spark. Surely, Lila wasn't talking about Asher and Roman—was she?

Suddenly, the world felt brighter. "They're here?" she asked, her voice trembling with excitement.

Lila answered. "See for yourself." She summoned another portal, light rippling outward.

Violet didn't wait for permission. She practically jumped into the portal, her heart pounding so fast it drowned out everything else.

When the light dissolved, her feet barely grazed the ground before a familiar voice called out her name.

"Violet!"

She turned just in time to see a blur of motion.

"Asher!"

She stumbled forward, and the next thing she knew, she was lifted clean off her feet as he twirled her around. It looked like a scene straight out of a romance movie, sheer, overwhelming relief radiating from both of them.

Asher didn't wait another second. His lips crashed into hers.

Violet gasped, then melted against him, her fingers sliding into his hair as if she'd been starving for the feel of him. He pulled her closer, pressing her tight against his body until there was no space left between them. There was only heat and the sound of their heartbeat.

Asher deepened the kiss. All the hunger, all the ache he had carried since the last time together poured into it. His tongue found hers, tasting, claiming, and remembering every part of her he had missed.

Violet moaned softly, her body reacting before her mind could catch up. She held on like she would never let go, the world around them fading. They kissed again and again desperately, like two people trying to make up for lost time.

When they finally pulled apart, breathless, their lips were red and swollen. Asher rested his forehead against hers as he tried to catch his breath, staring into her eyes. Even a blind man could see the amount of affection he had for her.

Violet couldn't help the blush that crept up her neck. Everything about Asher was always so intense, from his touch to the way he looked at her.

Then someone cleared his throat, loud and intentional. They both turned.

Violet's heart skipped when she saw who it was.

Roman.

He rubbed his nose, pretending to look casual. "Tell me," he said, "how in the world am I supposed to compete with that?"

Violet giggled softly. "Roman."

But Roman wasn't joking. It was as if he made up his mind right then to truly compete. Before Violet could speak, he closed the space between them. His lips caught hers, hot and sure.

Violet gasped, hands gripping his shoulders, and the next thing she knew, her feet were off the ground. Roman lifted her easily, her legs wrapping around his waist. His hands slid down to her bottom, squeezing hard, his groan deep and raw.

God, it had been a while.

Unlike Asher's kiss that burned like fire, Roman's was pure sin—slow, rough, and dirty. He kissed her like he wanted to taste every breath she took, grinding against her in a rhythm that made her dizzy.

Their moans mixed, filling the air, their bodies moving like they were caught in slow music only they could hear. Heat coiled through Violet, every nerve alive. She wanted him, badly. Her hands fumbled against his chest, ready to tear through the layers between them—

Then her eyes flew open.

People were still watching,

"Fuck my life," Violet whispered under her breath, face burning hot.

Roman just grinned, whispering against her lips, "Worth it."

Violet smiled at his antics. Roman would be the death of her.

Then she turned and froze.

A group of Fae stood before her, dressed in intimidating armor. Their bright eyes were fixed on her. Six of them in total were tall, elegant, and had this otherworldly aura to them. They didn't speak, but their stares said everything. They were studying her, weighing her, as if trying to see if she was truly one of them.

What was she supposed to do? Violet had no idea. Her heart thumped in her chest, and though she tried not to look nervous, she could feel their scrutiny crawling all over her skin.

She wasn't like them. Not entirely. Their pointed ears, their perfect skin — everything about them screamed power and grace.

And she was just Violet.

Then, almost unconsciously, she dropped the glamour that had been hiding her true form and her reflection changed. Her ears weren't as sharply pointed as theirs, but they were subtly and undeniably Fae.

Oddly enough, Violet felt lighter. It was as if she could finally breathe again.

Lila stepped forward with a proud smile. "They've come to welcome the princess to the palace."

At once, all six Fae dropped to one knee, their heads bowed.

"Your Highness," they said in one reverent voice.

Violet blinked, unsure how to respond.

From the side, Roman whistled. "Well, would you look at that. Our little mate's got worshippers now."

Violet's cheeks warmed.

Then Lila said, "It's time to go. Your mother awaits you, Violet."

Her mother.

Violet's stomach turned. Her fingers trembled slightly, but before she could overthink it, the Fae soldiers rose and parted, forming a path.

Lila led the way, while Asher reached for Violet's hand, his grip firm.

She managed a small smile and nodded.

"Fine then," she whispered. "Let's do this."

What's the worst that can happen anyway.

Chapter 615: Step Into The Gate

"I dropped us off at the closest location the magic can allow since we can't teleport directly into the palace," Lila told her as they walked on.

"Why is that?" Violet asked, intrigued.

"It's for the safety of the royal family. If anyone could just teleport at will into the palace, enemies could easily launch attacks anytime."

"Oh." Violet nodded in understanding.

"Although," Lila added, "your mother, Queen Seraphira, has the unique ability to teleport among her other powers. It would be nice to know what you can do now, princess."

Violet smiled shyly, nerves and anticipation eating her up. All this was new to her, and she was about to meet her biological mother. How was she supposed to act? This was going to be awkward.

It occurred to Violet at that moment. "How did you get out of Baron's imprisonment? I said I was going back for you, but I didn't know how, and Asher warned me not to attempt dream walking by myself."

"That was wise of Asher." Lila turned back to look at him, but he didn't react, his expression unreadable.

She continued, "Baron used me to lure you out, but thankfully nothing went according to his plan. The Queen figured out Zyrella's betrayal and realized something was wrong. She rescued me."

"Zyrella?" Violet repeated, confused.

"You have so many things to learn. Don't worry, you'll be settled soon enough and learn the Fae way." She suddenly announced, "And we're here."

"Whoa," Violet breathed as she looked up, momentarily halting in her steps. Not just her, even the cardinal alphas stopped, the breath knocked out of them.

The palace itself rose from the heart of a vast forest. Tall, ancient trees loomed on both sides of the narrow path leading to the entrance — if it could even be called that.

The circular gate stood open, made entirely of aged stone and twisted vines. There were no guards, not a single soul watching over it, yet something about that stillness made Violet's skin prickle.

The gate looked ordinary enough, but Violet knew no one crossed that gate uninvited and lived to tell the tale.

"Do you feel that?" Violet whispered to Alaric, referring to the gate.

Alaric's brows furrowed. "It reeks of energy." He lifted his hand, crackling with a faint charge of electricity, reacting to the pull from the gate. "It's magnetic," he said with awe.

Lila turned and said, "The gate opens only when it senses Fae blood. Otherwise, you're roasted on the spot."

Roman muttered dryly, "That's faestatic."

Asher spoke up, "So what are you trying to say? That we won't be able to enter without her?" He took Violet's hand. "That's not going to happen. Wherever Violet goes, we go with her."

Lila sensed his threat and rolled her eyes. "We've taken that into account. That's why we tuned the wards sustaining the gate. Your kind can pass."

"You mean 'her' mates, right?" Griffin corrected.

"Excuse me?" Lila frowned.

"We are her fated mates, not just guests to this realm," he said pointedly.

"Fated mates or not, you're still guests in the Fae realm until the Queen says otherwise," Lila replied.

Roman and Alaric exchanged a look but said nothing, though the worry in their eyes was clear. They'd known this day would come — the day the Fae would judge them — and now it was here.

Seeing their unease, Violet stepped forward. "My mates will receive the same welcome I do. Otherwise, I command that you take me back to the human realm. Am I clear?"

"They're already welcomed," Lila said calmly. "Otherwise they wouldn't be standing here. Now, it's time to go in, princess."

"I'll go first," Asher said, stepping ahead. "Let's see if the Fae are really as welcoming as they claim."

What were the chances that the gate was as secured as Lila claimed it was. Moreover, what if Violet went in and couldn't come in afterwards while they're stuck outside?

Asher didn't trust Lila. She always claimed to mean well for Violet, but her ways were too mysterious. If he went first and something went wrong, at least Violet would be safe to destroy this place herself.

"Asher?" Violet said, concerned.

"She said the gate is safe, didn't she?" Asher smirked. "See you on the other side, my purple queen."

Without hesitation, he walked in and disappeared completely. There was no reflection from the other side, only their anxious faces staring back.

"I guess I'll go next," Griffin said, but Roman beat him to it, leaping in with a shout of excitement.

"That bastard," Griffin grumbled, then sighed and stepped through as well.

Now it was just Violet and Alaric.

"I'll go ahead first," Lila said and vanished into the gate.

Alaric smiled and reached for Violet's hand. "Our turn."

Violet smiled softly and intertwined her fingers with his. Together, they walked in.

Warm tingles spread across Violet's body as the magic washed over her — probing, and testing. Then it softened, recognizing her, welcoming her like an old friend.

When they emerged on the other side, she was fine, but Alaric was sweating, pale.

"What happened?" she asked quickly.

"Let's just say it's going to take some getting used to," he said.

Violet sighed, guilt building in her chest. The one place that finally welcomed her was not friendly to her mates.

Thankfully, ahead of them, Asher, Griffin, and Roman looked fine. Behind them, the Fae guards followed.

Violet turned, her breath catching as she took in the size of the courtyard. Glowing flowers bloomed along the cobblestone path, responding to their footsteps as if greeting them personally.

"Let's go in," Lila commanded.

They obeyed.

Meanwhile...

Hannah stood hesitantly before the gate. She'd barely made it through the portal before it sealed. Everything was happening too fast, and she had no choice but to go along for now.

She remembered what Lila had said about what happened to those without Fae blood — but the cardinal alphas had gone through, and that had to count for something.

Taking a deep, shaky breath, she stepped forward and vanished into the gate.

## Chapter 616: Her Rightful Place

The palace was as eerie as it was breathtaking. The foyer wasn't guarded by soldiers but by colossal statues of stags. It was carved entirely from white stone and—call it strange—but the creature looked alive when she stared into its eyes.

Violet swallowed nervously. This place practically hummed with power. Yet she was struck by the grandeur of divine beauty that seemed to echo through every wall.

The hall stretched endlessly, its high vaulted ceiling inlaid with starlit glass that mimicked the real night sky. The floor was made of smooth moonstone tiles that reflected the stars above, giving the illusion that one walked on air. Floating lights drifted lazily through the air like fireflies.

A fountain stood at the center, its water glowing with magic, rising and falling in gravity-defying shapes—wings, crowns, and celestial patterns. The air smelled faintly of sweet jasmine, while hauntingly beautiful melodies echoed through the corridor, though no singer could be seen.

"Wow," Roman breathed, his eyes gleaming like a child taken to a one-of-a-kind amusement park. Violet could only wonder about the chaos he could cause in a place like this.

She silently prayed her mother had a sense of humor. If not, they were doomed.

"Come this way," Lila said, leading them toward a throne room at the far end, framed by an arched entryway.

The throne hall was vast, illuminated by natural light streaming through a dome of glass and leaves. The throne itself was imposing, but Violet's attention was on the woman standing on the dais, her back turned to them.

They kept walking until Lila suddenly halted and turned.

"This is where you stop," she said to the cardinal alphas.

None of them protested. They knew this moment was private, belonging to Violet alone.

Violet felt their gazes on her back as she followed Lila forward. Her heartbeat quickened with every step until the dais loomed ahead, draped in soft light from the open dome above.

Then Lila dropped to her knees and bowed her head low.

"Your Majesty," her voice carried through the vast chamber, "the princess has returned."

Violet froze.

She stood awkwardly, unsure what to do. Was she supposed to bow? Or curtsy? Or say something royal?

Before she could even decide, the Fae standing on the dais turned, and the breath left Violet's lungs.

The sight of her mother hit her like lightning.

Queen Seraphira was simply divine.

Violet finally understood where her strange purple coloring came from. Her mother's hair was a cascade of Violet, silky and long. It was braided in parts and threaded with beads, while the rest flowed freely down her back in true Fae fashion.

Her eyes were deep amethyst, the kind that caught and held light. Even her lashes shimmered faintly, tipped with gold dust. Her skin was soft and flawless, not marked by time or age.

She was so young and ethereal that anyone looking at them could have mistaken them for sisters instead of mother and daughter. Violet almost felt jealous.

The Queen stepped forward, her every movement graceful, and deliberate as though the very air parted for her. She took her time, descending each step until she stood directly before Violet.

For a long heartbeat, they simply looked at each other, mother and daughter, strangers bound by blood.

"I—uh—Hi? I mean, greetings... your majesty? Or should I say mother—Queen—uh..." Violet stammered hopelessly.

Queen Seraphira's lips curved, and she laughed softly.

It was the sweetest sound Violet had ever heard, like bells ringing in a dream.

The awkwardness in her chest doubled, but she couldn't help smiling shyly.

Then, with quiet certainty, the Queen reached out and took Violet's hand. She lifted it and pressed their palms together, fitting them perfectly.

At first, Violet only felt warmth, then suddenly, a surge of energy burst through her veins. It was nothing like the thrill of Alaric's lightning. It flooded her, wrapped around her, and filled her until her heart pounded against her ribs.

She gasped softly, her magic instinctively rising to meet it. For a fleeting moment, mother and daughter's auras intertwined, Violet light and shadows dancing together, glowing between their joined hands.

The Queen's eyes softened.

"Blood of my blood," she whispered, voice trembling with emotion.

"What?" Violet whispered back, barely able to speak through the lump in her throat.

"Your father would whisper those words to you when you were in my womb," Queen Seraphira said, her gaze growing distant, filled with memories. "I never truly understood those words until now."

Her voice broke slightly, and then she smiled, radiant and proud.

"My daughter."

Violet's heart twisted painfully at the words. She had imagined this moment a hundred times, but nothing compared to the real thing. The warmth, the recognition, the strange ache that came with finally belonging somewhere.

Queen Seraphira pulled her into a hug. Violet hesitated for a breath, then melted into it, her arms wrapping around her mother tightly.

Queen Seraphira cupped Violet's face, her amethyst eyes soft and glistening. "I know," she began, "that no excuse could make up for the time we lost. But you must know this, my daughter that not a single day went by that I didn't ache for you. I missed you so terribly, I thought I would lose my mind."

Her voice cracked as she went on, "When your father took you, I nearly went mad with grief. If it hadn't been for the priestess assuring me that you were alive, I would have died of heartbreak."

Her words broke into sobs. "I'm so sorry, Violet... for everything you had to face alone."

Violet felt her mother's arms tighten around her again desperately as if the Queen feared she would vanish if she let go. Tears slid down her mother's cheeks, warm against her neck.

Violet's throat ached, but she gently patted her back. "It's okay," she whispered softly. "I'm fine now. I don't hold any of it against you."

For a long while, they simply stayed like that.

Finally, Queen Seraphira drew back, brushing at her tears and smiling faintly through them. "Nothing will come between us again," she said firmly. "You're home now, in your rightful place, Princess of the Fae Realm."

Violet forced a smile.

She wasn't so sure about that yet. Because no matter how beautiful this realm was, there were people waiting for her back in the human realm.

#### Chapter 617: Three Mates — And One

It was inevitable that Queen Seraphira's attention drifted to the cardinal alphas standing behind her daughter.

"I see you didn't come alone," the queen said slowly, a knowing look in her eyes.

Violet's pulse skipped. "Your Majesty," she began nervously, her hands twisting together, "these are—um—my mates."

Why was it so hard introducing her boyfriends to her mother? Oh, Violet knew why. Acceptance. What if her mother didn't like them? Nothing would change her mind about her mates, but it would still mean the world if the woman accepted them. All of them.

The queen's brows rose. "Your Majesty?" she repeated, eyes widening as if she'd just been insulted. "Oh no, no, no, my child. You're my daughter now. Don't call me 'Your Majesty'—call me Mother."

The words hit Violet so hard her throat went tight. She'd faced countless battles, but this genuine warmth completely disarmed her.

She nodded shyly, whispering, "Yes, Mother."

Seraphira's smile deepened before her gaze shifted to the men.

"Quite a harem you've built here, daughter," the queen teased lightly as she glided toward them with the grace of a goddess. "When Lilarin told me about them, I almost didn't believe it. But of course, I should have known. You were made with the Goddess's blessing, after all."

Her eyes sparkled as she looked the men over, curiously. "Come now, don't just stand there. Introduce yourselves to your mother-in-law."

At the mention of the word, "mother-in-law", it was as if the queen had given a certain green haired Alpha the permission to be himself aka set loose.

Roman was the first to step forward.

"Roman Draven," he said, bowing with exaggerated grace, his smile wicked and his tone dripping charm. "Your Radiance, had your royal servant Lilarin..."

He deliberately stressed the word servant, earning a murderous glare from Lila behind him.

"...not snatched me away in the middle of battle and given me a heads-up that I was about to meet the legendary Fae Queen, I would have brought flowers. But alas, it is an honor to meet the woman responsible for raising a princess powerful enough to steal four hearts — mine included."

The queen's lips parted, her hand flying to her chest in mock fluster. "Oh, stars! You're a charmer! If I weren't already immortal, you'd have killed me with that line!"

Violet groaned. "Mother, please. Don't encourage him."

On the bright side, both of them were getting along. That had to count for something, right?

"Encourage him?" Seraphira laughed. "Darling, I'd adopt him if you hadn't already claimed him!"

Roman winked. "There's still room in the family for a favorite son-in-law, right?"

Behind him, Griffin muttered under his breath, "Someone's already ranking up... most annoying son-in-law."

Queen Seraphira must have caught his grumbling because her attention shifted instantly to him, and Griffin straightened so fast it was almost military.

Then he gave a polite bow, composed and courteous.

"Griffin Hale, Your Majesty. It's a privilege to meet you. You have a beautiful kingdom."

Seraphira looked visibly impressed. "Oh, polite, respectful, and well-built. You're the responsible one, aren't you?"

"You flatter me, Your Majesty."

"I think I'll sleep comfortably knowing my daughter has you for support."

"Thank you, Your Majesty." Griffin couldn't hide the small smile tugging at his lips. He was delighted to know he'd made an impression on her.

When Queen Seraphira moved on, Roman threw an arm around Griffin's shoulder, giving him a congratulatory pat that practically said, "Good work, brother."

With a calm smile, Griffin grabbed that hand and squeezed hard. A small crack echoed in the air, sharp enough to make Roman's eyes water.

Roman winced in silence, shooting Griffin a wounded look that clearly said, "Why you gotta do me like that, man?" But Griffin's expression stayed perfectly straight, as if nothing had happened.

Violet watched the exchange unfold, a crease forming between her brows. The Fae realm definitely wasn't ready for her men.

Alaric stepped forward next, his white hair glinting faintly as if it drank in the moonlight.

His voice was steady when he spoke. "Alaric Storm, at your service, Your Majesty. I've read about the Fae and their magic, but none of it compares to seeing it in person."

He paused, glancing around the luminous hall. "Words aren't enough to describe the mysteries my eyes have seen tonight, or is it still day?"

The question carried a boyish curiosity. Even though it was clearly night, this realm pulsed with such magic that it felt as though the Fae could bend time itself.

"It is indeed night," the queen confirmed, smiling. "I love aesthetics, so I made the palace mirror the loveliness of the night sky."

Her gaze swept over him appraisingly. "Flattery delivered with humility," she said approvingly. "You're the scholar. How refreshing."

"Thank you, Your Majesty." Alaric bowed slightly, the corners of his mouth twitching in shy pride.

And then there was Asher.

Unlike the other Alphas, Queen Seraphira's smile vanished the moment her eyes met his.

Violet straightened at once, unease prickling down her spine. Asher Nightshade was different from the others, and she was certain her mother sensed it too. She only hoped her mother saw what she saw in him.

Asher hadn't moved an inch since they entered. His slitted eyes followed the queen with calculation. Then, he inclined his head slightly. "Asher Nightshade, your majesty," he said simply.

Zephira studied him in silence, her gaze sharp and penetrating. "You're not mated to my daughter," she observed.

"Not yet," Asher replied with cool confidence. "But I'm next in line."

The room seemed to hold its breath. Even the other Cardinal Alphas went still, knowing this was an important moment, and first impressions mattered.

To everyone's surprise, Queen Seraphira stepped closer and cupped his cheek. Asher stiffened instinctively, startled by the touch, but didn't move away. He could sense no malice in her, still, his guard stayed up. One never fully trusted a Fae.

"I see cracks in you," Queen Seraphira murmured, her tone soft but piercing. "Why do you carry such heaviness in your soul?" Her gaze deepened, as if she could see straight into the fractures of his spirit.

Asher's jaw tightened. Then he stepped back, breaking whatever connection had formed between them.

#### Chapter 618: Union With A Fae

"I'm sorry," Asher said bluntly, "but I'm not a fan of anyone getting into my head without my permission, especially with magic I don't understand."

"You're right to be wary," Queen Seraphira nodded her head. "Caution has kept many alive. However, I am a healer, and I don't just see wounds of the body, I sense the ones buried deeper too. And I worry that the darkness you carry might one day harm my daughter."

She admitted, "I once believed I could mend broken men, and it cost me dearly. I won't let my daughter make the same mistake."

Asher's jaw clenched, and Violet's heart skipped a beat. She knew that look in his eyes — the one that said no one, not even the gods, would stop him from getting what he wanted.

Violet expected Asher to start raining threats, but to everyone's surprise, he bowed his head, not out of submission, but sincerity.

"I love your daughter with everything I am," Asher said, his voice raw. "I would never hurt her. If anything, I'd lay my life down for her. And if you want me to prove it, I'll do it without hesitation."

There was no mistaking the conviction in his tone. It rippled through the throne room, and everyone present felt the truth of his words deep in their bones.

For a heartbeat, no one moved. All eyes were on Queen Seraphira, every breath held in anticipation. The final decision rested with her.

Then the queen lifted her head proudly. "Then that makes you my son. May the Goddess favor your bond as well, if she wills it."

Violet exhaled a breath she hadn't realized she was holding. Thank the heavens. It would have been a nightmare having to reject her mother just because she couldn't accept Asher.

Roman made a dramatic snuffle. "Okay, that's it. I'm crying. Someone hold me."

Griffin groaned. "I swear, if you start fake-sobbing—"

"Too late," Roman sniffed loudly, turning and burying his face in Griffin's chest. "That was so beautiful."

Griffin sighed, letting him do whatever he wanted.

Asher looked stunned. He hadn't expected the queen to yield that easily. In his mind, she would have given him impossible tests to prove his worth. Most people needed evidence before they trusted him, and Queen Seraphira had simply... believed?

"I'm sure your transition to the Fae realm has been a difficult one," Queen Seraphira said. "You all need rest. We'll have plenty of time to get to know each other better." Her gaze lingered on Violet as she said it.

"That would be nice, Your Majesty— I mean, Mother." Violet mentally face-palmed the second the word slipped out.

"Help them settle, Lilarin," the queen said, turning away and climbing the dais once more. Her tone carried the finality of dismissal.

"Come," Lilarin said, gesturing for them to follow.

They moved as one, but Violet hesitated, turning back for one last glance. Her mother stood tall under the filtered glow of the hall, regal yet somehow gentle. When Queen Seraphira noticed, she smiled and lifted a hand in farewell.

Violet smiled back and followed the others out.

As soon as they were gone, the smile vanished from Seraphira's gaze and was replaced by exhaustion instead. She slumped on her throne, rubbing her temple.

The remaining Fae who had escorted them dispersed, all except one. Rhara, the second in command after Lilarin, stood before the queen.

"What do you think?" Queen Seraphira asked without looking up.

"Mated to three Beastmen, with one other bond waiting to happen?" Rhara sighed. "The people are going to throw a fit. It's not enough that she's half Fae, now she's entirely partial to their kind. Baron will use it to fuel his campaign."

Beastkind — that was what the Fae called any supernatural capable of shape-shifting. Some among the Fae possessed the gift as well, though they never leaned fully into the beast side the way most werewolves did. And those who did were not limited to taking only the form of wolves.

It was rumored that werewolves were descendants of certain Fae who had left the Fae realm to settle in the human world. Whatever differences existed between the "Fae beasts" and "werewolves" were likely the result of evolution.

Of course, those were just theories.

And such theories, among the Fae, were considered taboo and insulting. The proud high Fae saw it as an attempt by lesser creatures to claim divine lineage. Hence only a few radical ones believed that the first werewolves were born of Fae blood tainted by human mortality.

Still, it was not a topic one spoke of openly. To imply that a werewolf carried even a fraction of Fae heritage was to invite outrage.

"Unfortunately, it is already what it is. We cannot go against a matebond." Seraphira told her.

However, an idea struck Rhara.

"Perhaps..." she began thoughtfully, "she can keep her mates. But we could add one more to her harem. A union within our kind would show her loyalty to the Free Fae."

Seraphira's eyes snapped open. "Excuse me?"

Rhara didn't flinch. "She doesn't necessarily need to love him," she continued. "The princess can keep him by her side for appearances. And if the gods will it, a child coming out of such a union would be an extra bonus for the realm."

Seraphira's expression darkened. "Has my toxic union with Baron not taught this realm a lesson?" she asked coldly.

Rhara bowed her head. "Forgive me, Your Majesty. I was only offering suggestions."

"I just barely got my daughter back," the queen snapped. "She still has to prove herself worthy of the throne. I will not subject her to the same disastrous pairing my own mother forced upon me."

"I'm not saying you should force it on her," Rhara persisted. "You heard the fourth Beastman. He believes he's next in line to be mated to her. If that is true, wouldn't it be better if the next mate were a Fae? It would grant Princess Violet a stronger foothold in court. Right now, she stands alone."

Seraphira's patience snapped. "Shifters love differently. Their bonds are primal and their fate is decided by the goddess. You don't meddle with the matebond. If Asher Nightshade believes he's meant to be mated to my daughter, then so be it. I will not entertain any other thoughts. This conversation is over!" she thundered, her power humming through the room.

Rhara recoiled slightly at the queen's fury. "Of course, Your Majesty," she said, bowing deeper. "It was out of line. It won't happen again."

"Just leave me," Seraphira commanded, waving her off.

"Yes, Your Majesty." Rhara turned to go, but her eyes glinted with determination.

She would prove the queen wrong.

#### Chapter 619: Their Private Quater

As Lila led them through to their quarters, they moved like children lost in a dream, their gazes wandering over the impossible structure that surrounded them. From the outside, the palace hadn't looked half this large. Yet here they were, walking through endless halls that shouldn't exist. Guess that was Fae magic for you.

"The Queen wanted the princess to have her own quarters," Lila said as they walked. "But I advised against it, knowing how mates prefer to stay close at all times. She saw reason and gave in."

"One thing you did right for once," Asher responded bluntly.

Lila's head snapped toward him, her glare sharp enough to bore a hole through his skull.

But Asher met her gaze with that cold, unreadable look of his, daring her to say something more.

"Can we not?" Violet cut in, her voice tired. She'd dealt with too much in the past twenty-four hours; the last thing she needed was another petty argument.

"If you say so, Princess," Lila replied, her tone neutral but her pride clearly bruised.

Asher said nothing, though a flicker of guilt crossed his face before vanishing just as quickly.

Lila suddenly stopped. "We're here."

The tall, regal door was carved from aged mahogany, its surface etched with curling vine-like patterns that shone faintly under the light. It stood framed between two white pillars veined with ivy leaves.

Lila didn't even need to knock because as soon as she came close enough, the enchantments woven into the wood reacted to her presence, and the door opened on its own.

Seeing that, Roman frowned. He hoped those doors were friendly; there were no gaps he could squeeze through conveniently when he shifted into his friendly neighborhood serpentine form. It would take him all night to dig out an escape route.

"Impressive," Alaric said, stepping forward and running his fingers along the wood. "It's almost like the technology in our world. Does it respond only to approaching footsteps, or is it customized to certain people?"

"It opens upon predicting footsteps."

"Then what about privacy since anyone can just come in?" Asher asked with a scowl.

Although it was a harmless question, perhaps because of the tension between her and Asher, Lila answered with a touch of arrogance.

"The house is sentient. It means it's aware of everything that happens. If the occupant desires privacy, it knows not to open. You can speak to it — it listens."

"Such a convenient way of spying." No sooner had Asher spoken than a vine cracked out of nowhere and whacked him across the face.

Lila smirked knowingly. "Better treat the house well. Accidents do happen," she said with a veiled threat as she stepped into the room.

The others went in, leaving Asher behind. Violet was the one who turned and took his hand, sighing. "One step at a time."

"This place seems too good to be true," he muttered, suspicion thick in his voice.

"We don't know that yet, not without getting to know the realm first."

"Are you two coming in or what? Afraid of change, Asher Nightshade?" Lila teased.

Asher rolled his neck as if working out a kink, then made up his mind. "Let's go in, then." He took Violet's hand, and she smiled as they walked in together.

As expected of the quarters, it was massive — an enchanting mix of human luxury and Fae wilderness. The first thing that caught their eyes was the soft blue light filtering through the stained glass windows, the same kind from the hallway — except here, the vines had grown into the room, creeping along the stone columns and trailing across the ceiling.

Lila hadn't been kidding; the Fae truly lived side by side with nature.

The scent of wildflowers filled the air with a clean, fresh sweetness that reminded Violet of spring mornings. She was relieved to know she wasn't allergic to flowers after all, just that particular one.

To the left was the living space: a wide sitting area with low couches of pale moss-green velvet, arranged around a glass table shaped like a blooming petal. Bookshelves spiraled from floor to ceiling, carved around living trees that seemed to have grown straight through the room itself. The shelves were lined with books, scrolls, Fae trinkets, and strange artifacts.

Floating globes of light hovered above, illuminating the space with a soft, warm glow.

"This place is wicked!" Roman shouted in delight before flinging himself onto the canopy bed at the center of the room.

The bed was enormous, large enough to comfortably fit all five of them. The frame was made from intertwined roots polished to a dark sheen, their knots forming natural spirals. A soft cream curtain draped loosely around it, giving the whole setup a cozy yet ethereal presence.

Pillows in muted forest tones were scattered generously, while ivy and wisteria trailed from the ceiling beams, perfuming the air faintly.

"Goddess, this is so soft, I feel like I'm lying on a bed of clouds," Roman said, flailing his arms like someone swimming in water.

As expected of Alaric, curiosity got the better of him. He joined Roman on the bed, letting out a sigh. Roman hadn't been exaggerating, the mattress was deep and soft, the sheets warmer than fur.

Soon the both of them were turning and tossing across the bed, testing it.

"Come join us, Violet," Roman said, a glint of mischief in his eyes.

"Mhmm," Violet replied dryly, seeing through him. She wasn't falling for that trap.

"I'm going to check the bath," she said instead.

"I'll come with you," Griffin offered.

Together, they passed through the vine-draped archway and entered the bathing chamber.

The large freestanding tub, oval and smooth, was carved from polished stone, filled by golden fixtures that poured crystal-clear water. Pots of herbs and flowers surrounded it, releasing a calming fragrance that filled the room.

The floor tiles were etched with sigils that warmed subtly underfoot, while light spilled through frosted glass panels draped with emerald curtains.

A vanity stood near the door, its mirror rippling faintly like water whenever someone approached, showing not just one's reflection but also the shimmer of their aura.

Right now, Griffin's aura was as bright as the sun. And perhaps most dangerously of all, they were alone.

#### Chapter 620: Together Forever

It took less than a minute for the moment to turn awkward, more like it thickened with sexual tension. Violet and Griffin were alone in the bathroom, the air heavy with warmth and the scent of jasmine. The idea of a bath with him was tempting, maybe too tempting.

Griffin looked just as uneasy. He scratched the back of his neck, and Violet noticed something.

"Your hair's growing," she blurted out before she could stop herself.

Griffin ran a hand through his hair and gave a crooked grin. It was longer now, not buzzed like before but not long enough to brush back yet.

"Oh?" he teased, flashing that half-smile that always made her heart skip. "Maybe now that we're in the Fae realm, you can order a few potions to help it grow faster. Then you can finally satisfy that little hair kink of yours."

"I do not have a hair kink," Violet shot back, pretending to sound offended. "I just like your hair."

"There," Griffin said with mock satisfaction. "A hair kink."

That did it! The both of them burst into laughter. But the laughter, just as quickly as it came, faded into silence. Their eyes locked and the bond between them hummed. Violet felt the hot and magnetic pull, and before she knew it, her feet were already moving.

She needed his lips on hers.

Violet was inches away when the door opened, and she spun around so fast she nearly lost her balance, pretending to check herself in the mirror.

Roman stood in the doorway, his eyes darting suspiciously between them. Then he caught sight of something in the mirror and froze.

"Well, would you look at that," he said, stepping closer.

Violet asked. "What?"

Roman grinned. "Your aura."

Sure enough, dark mist glowed around Violet's reflection, swirling softly like smoke. Roman stood beside her, and his own reflection flared bright green.

"Splendid," he said proudly, flexing his arm. "Yo, Alaric! Get in here!"

Alaric walked in a moment later, clearly annoyed. "What is it now?"

"Check this out." Roman gestured to the mirror.

Alaric glanced at his reflection, and froze. An icy blue glow shimmered around him, like frost spreading across glass. "Whoa."

"I know, right?" Roman smirked. "Just one person left."

Just like that, Roman disappeared for a second and returned dragging a scowling Asher by the arm.

"What is so important—" Asher stopped mid-sentence. His reflection pulsed with a dark, shadowy aura that was deep as night, and as fierce as his gaze.

The room fell silent. Even he didn't know whether to be proud or disturbed.

But Violet stepped closer, standing beside him. Her own dark aura merged with his in the reflection until it became one. It didn't discourage her, instead, she took Asher's hand and intertwined with hers, then slowly, the color shifted. Darkness turned to purple, glowing deep and alive.

Gasps filled the room.

Violet's breath caught. For a moment, she simply stared, then whispered in awe, "You're the yin to my yang... the light to my darkness, even as I am to you."

Asher stared at their reflection in the mirror, eyes wide with disbelief. The purple glow still shone around them, wrapping their joined figures like a heartbeat of light. Slowly, his gaze shifted to Violet.

The way he looked at her made her breath catch. There was only pure, burning affection in his eyes that seemed to reach into her soul. It was so intense that Violet's cheeks flushed, and she found herself lowering her gaze, unable to handle the weight of it.

But Asher wouldn't have it. With one hand, he lifted her chin gently until her eyes met his again. Then, without a word, his lips crashed into hers.

Violet gasped against his mouth, her heart racing. Asher's kiss was fierce and consuming, like he was drawing life straight from her. Her knees almost gave out, and she clung to him for balance, not realizing there was another warm body behind her until she felt the press of someone's chest. Hence, she was sandwiched between them.

Asher deepened the kiss, his tongue tasting the roof of her mouth, his hand sliding to the back of her neck as if he could pull her even closer. He kissed her again and again until her lips tingled and her hands trembled against his chest.

When he finally pulled away, his breath was heavy. Asher cupped her face in his palms, eyes blazing with emotion. "You're mine," he said with every conviction in him. "In this world and the next. Even in a thousand to come. I'll love and adore you till my last breath, Violet Purple."

Violet's throat tightened, and tears gathered in her eyes. "Then I'll be by your side for all those thousand years," she whispered. "I'll fight for you, live for you, and not even death will keep us apart."

This time, it was Violet who kissed him soft and slowly, pouring everything she felt into it. When they parted, she leaned her forehead against his, breathing him in.

When she finally turned, her other mates were watching, not with jealousy, but proudly. Like they, too, had felt the power of that promise.

Griffin was the first to step forward. "In this life and the next," he said, "I'll be your pillar of strength. Our harem will stand unshaken, no matter what comes."

Then Roman grinned, sliding in beside him. "And in this life and next," he declared, "no one's ever going to get tired of this harem. There'll be nothing but fun, and a little bit of trouble, courtesy of me."

That earned a snort from Alaric, who crossed his arms. "In this life and the next," he added dryly, "I'll make sure our kids don't end up as knuckleheads like Roman by contributing my brilliant genes."

They all burst into laughter.

"Seriously?" Roman groaned, rolling his eyes.

Alaric shrugged with a straight face. "I was just stating my usefulness."

Roman huffed, though the corner of his lips curved into a reluctant smile.

Violet, glowing with affection, thrust out her hand. "Together, forever?" she asked.

Roman was the first to place his hand over hers. "Together, forever."

Then Griffin, Alaric, and Asher joined in, their voices ringing through the space, "Together, forever!"

They broke apart laughing, relishing the moment.

Well, until Roman said, "So....? Are we finally having this bath, or not?"