

Defy 641

Chapter 641: Come Back Soon, Roman

Violet had no idea what to expect when she walked into the pixies' home. She thought there would be some kind of structure or something, anything to show she'd crossed into their world. But the moment they stepped through the barrier, nothing seemed to change.

It was still the same forest. If anything, it seemed like the pixies hadn't built a kingdom at all. They had simply claimed a piece of the forest as theirs.

And right in the middle of it all, was still Roman lounging on a couch made entirely of blossoms, looking far too comfortable, as if he'd just been crowned their king.

Violet wanted to walk over and drag him out of that flowery throne herself, but it seemed far too easy. And if the Fae had taught her anything already, it was that nothing in this realm ever was easy. There was probably a ward around him, or some sort of charm waiting for her to rush in. She was no idiot.

If she wanted Roman intact, she had to play this smart. If it didn't go well, well then, rest assured she would erase them out of existence. Violet kept that thought in her mind.

Thankfully, she didn't have to wait long.

The pixies darted around them in blurs of color and laughter, trails of golden dust shimmering in the air where they passed.

On any other day, Violet might've thought them adorable with their tiny faces glowing with mischief, and bright eyes filled with innocent curiosity. But today, all she saw were little predators with glitter for claws.

Lila was the one to speak first, "Show your respect to the Princess."

A chorus of gasps and squeals filled the air, the pixies' voices overlapping in a dizzying harmony that made Violet's head spin.

"Ohhh," one of them exclaimed, clasping her tiny hands together. "Look at her! The princess of two worlds finally graces us!"

Another came in close, circling Violet's head with wings. "Her hair! It's black—no, purple at the ends! I heard she plucked it straight from the night sky!"

"That's ridiculous," a third argued, her voice tinkling like a bell. "I heard she's half beast! Does she snarl when she's angry? Go on, princess, show us your fangs!"

The others giggled, spinning and swooping in a blur, their laughter both charming and maddening at once.

"She doesn't look like a beast," said another with coral-colored hair. "More like a doll. A soft one."

"But fragile things break so easily," a blue-winged pixie whispered with mock innocence, brushing past Violet's cheek.

Their high, rapid, voices overlapped until Violet could barely tell who was speaking anymore. The pixies didn't take turns to talk, instead they sang over each other, their curiosity so intense it bordered on insult.

Violet realized they weren't scared of her. They thought she was fragile? She? Fragile?

At once, when a group of them flew too close, Violet bared her teeth, flashing the very fangs they'd been so curious about.

The effect was instant.

The pixies shrieked dramatically, their high-pitched squeals echoing through the air as they scattered in a flurry. Tiny wings beat furiously as they clung to one another, their faces twisted in comical horror before going to hide behind Ruman as if he could save them from their wrath.

One of the pixies peeked out from behind his leg, whispering, "She does have fangs!"

A low growl rumbled from behind Violet.

It was Asher.

Even without turning, she could feel the coiled tension in him. The way he shifted his weight said he was getting tired of their games. She had to do something before the puppet master took matters into his hand - it never ended well.

She stood tall and announced, "I am Violet Purple, your princess, and I'm here to take back my mate you stole."

"Stole?" a tiny gold-haired pixie said, flying close enough for her glow to touch Violet's face.

"He came to us willingly. We only kept him because... well, he's delightful company." The pixie's smile widened, all sugar and teeth. "But if you want him back, Princess, you'll have to pay a price." She giggled, like this was a treat.

Violet's glare cut through the laughter. Left to her own devices, she would have snatched the little thing and dizzy her until she learned some respect. But this was Fae territory, and Fae customs mattered. So she kept her hands to herself, cooling the heat behind her eyes into a slow, dangerous calm.

"Of course, I know that," Violet said confidently, "And that which is why I demand a trade."

At once, the gold-haired pixie perked up, her wings flaring with giddy excitement. "A trade? I love a trade!"

"As do we!" chimed the others, their high, musical voices overlapping. "We love a trade!"

Violet exhaled in relief. At least this was going according to plan.

Then Lila stepped forward, opening the golden box with deliberate care. The moment the lid lifted, the air seemed to hum.

Gasps rippled through the pixies.

The golden-haired one clasped her hands over her mouth, eyes glimmering with awe, while the others who dared to hover closer nearly swooned midair.

"It's beautiful," one breathed.

"No, divine!" cried another.

They circled the box like bees around honey, their wings shedding flecks of dust. The pearls reflected in their wide, glittering eyes like twin moons caught in pools of starlight. Some even reached out tiny hands as if to touch, trembling with longing.

Violet watched the hunger bloom on their faces, their mouths parting in reverence.

"Yes," she thought wryly, eyes narrowing just slightly. "Take it already."

Violet was tired of this already. Her patience, stretched thin, was about to snap.

Just as the gold-haired pixie reached for the necklace, she snapped the box shut.

Violet blinked. "What was that for?" she asked, exasperated.

The pixie's lips curved into a smug smile. "You trade with the queen's gift, not yours. It's not costing you a thing."

"What?!" Violet's voice rose, echoing with disbelief.

"Perhaps," the pixie added with morbid satisfaction, "to make it easy, you can have your mate by day... and we'll have the serpent at night. We love the cute serpent after all."

That did it.

Violet's nose flared, fury igniting beneath her skin. Her magic stirred within her, ready to strike. Behind her, Asher, Alaric, and Griffin's reactions mirrored hers, the air charged with growls and the boom of thunder across the sky. Why play words when they could crush these tiny pests with ease.

But then, something clicked in Violet's mind. Her expression shifted as a slow, dangerous smile curled her lips.

"You're right," she said.

The gold-haired pixie blinked, startled. "I'm right?"

"Yes," Violet replied smoothly, "We'll make that trade."

At once, her mates erupted.

"Violet—"

"Absolutely not—"

Asher grabbed her arm, his eyes blazing. "Don't even think about it."

Violet turned to him, calm yet firm. "Do you trust me?"

Asher's jaw tightened. He didn't like this one bit. But when he caught that spark in her eyes, that fierce glint of confidence, he exhaled slowly and released her arm.

"Fine," he muttered darkly. "But if this goes south, I'm burning this whole damn forest down."

Violet's smile deepened. "Fair enough."

Lucen whispered behind her, "Don't offer your blood. They love powerful things."

"I have this handled." Violet said to him.

"So what is it, Princess?" the gold-haired pixie asked eagerly, "What do you trade?"

Violet smiled sweetly. "You can keep a piece of him forever."

The pixie gasped, her entire body glowing brighter, wings fluttering madly. "A piece?"

"A piece! A piece!" the chorus of pixies echoed in shrill excitement, spinning mid-air like children at a festival.

"Yes," Violet said smoothly, her tone honeyed, and confident.

"Deal!" the golden one squealed, her grin wide.

"Deal," Violet repeated, her smile curling into something far more cunning.

"What part of him do we keep?" the pixie pressed, anticipation making her glow even brighter.

"This..." Violet walked over to where Roman sat lazily draped across the couch of blossoms, blissfully enchanted. Without hesitation, she leaned down and plucked a strand of his green hair.

"Ow!" Roman yelped, blinking dazedly.

"There," Violet said, holding the strand between her fingers. "You keep what you love." Her voice hardened. "And I take what's mine."

For a heartbeat, the entire grove fell silent. Then the pixies burst into loud, wailing sobs that sounded both tragic and ridiculous. Their golden dust scattered everywhere as they cried, clutching at each other like heartbroken toddlers.

Behind her, Asher, Alaric, and Griffin exhaled in relief, tension melting from their shoulders.

"She's Fae, all right," Griffin murmured with a smirk.

Finally, the golden pixie sniffled, wiping her face with tiny fingers. "You speak well for a half-breed," she admitted grudgingly. "Clever tongue. You may take your serpent."

Roman stumbled to his feet, woozy but free of enchantment. "You traded a piece of me?" he croaked.

"Relax, drama queen," Violet replied dryly. "You've got plenty of hair left."

Before he could argue, Griffin slung him over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes. "Let's go, your highness. Before they decide to keep your scales too."

As they made their exit, the pixies swarmed behind them, tossing glittering dust like confetti. One of them even shouted, "Come back soon, shiny snake!"

Roman groaned. "Over my dead, sparkly body."

Chapter 642: A Spell For Protection

"Blah!" Roman gagged, throwing up for the third time. He heaved and groaned, clutching the toilet like it was his last lifeline, riding out whatever cursed thing the pixies had fed him.

"I think I'm dying," he moaned pitifully, forehead pressed against the cool porcelain.

"You're not dying," Griffin said, patting him on the shoulder. "Just... don't go to strange parties at night."

From the corner, Alaric—who was supposed to be providing moral support—snorted.

"Yeah, laugh all you want," Roman muttered, rolling his eyes.

"You should be grateful it's not diarrhea," Alaric said dryly.

Roman opened his mouth to fire back, but another violent wave hit him. He lurched over the toilet and started hurling again, loud enough to make Griffin wince.

On the bright side, the serpent wouldn't be creeping out its hiding place anytime soon.

Unbeknownst to them, Violet had seen everything unfold. She returned to the living room, where Asher stood before Lila and Rhara. His posture was rigid, his slitted eyes cold and razor-sharp.

"What's happening to him?" Violet demanded.

"Now that the enchantment's worn off, his body's fighting it," Lila explained.

"Fighting what?"

"Nectar," Rhara added.

"Nectar?" Violet's frown deepened.

Lila sighed. "Sugar. Lots of it. Fae tend to have a serious sweet tooth."

"And don't forget the pollen," Rhara chimed in, "and whatever magic dust they probably sneezed into it. He might be supernatural, but his body isn't built for food from this realm."

"Food," Asher called out, "You probably intend to feed us soon."

"There's a spell that'll let you handle our food, and stop you from falling for Fae charms so easily."

"Really?" Asher scoffed. "And does that spell happen to leave any residue you can use to manipulate or control me?"

Rhara shot Lila a look that clearly said, Where did you find this one?

"It's just protection so you don't end up like Roman did last night." Lila responded.

Asher's eyes narrowed further. "You expect me to believe that?"

Lila let out an exasperated sigh. "You think I dragged you all the way to the Fae realm to do what, control your mind? I could've left you behind, especially since you're not even mated to Violet."

That last part hit a nerve. Asher's jaw clenched, his teeth flashing in a snarl. But Lila bared her own in return, her sharp Fae teeth glinting as the air between them thickened. In an instant, the sweet-faced Fae was gone, replaced by a dangerous creature.

"Alright, that's enough!" Violet stepped between them before it could turn into a fight.

Violet reached out, her fingers brushing Asher's before she firmly took his hand. His muscles tensed, but she didn't let go. Without saying a word, she led him away from the others, toward a quieter corner of the room.

"Asher," she began, turning to face him. "I get it. I understand why you're pissed. You're not in your element, this is not the world you're familiar with, and you don't trust any of them one bit."

His eyes snapped toward Lila, still visibly bristling. "You're right, I don't trust them. Any of them. Not even your mother," he said flatly, meeting Violet's gaze without flinching. "Even the devil can pretend to be an angel."

Violet was speechless, her mouth parting slightly, but Asher wasn't finished.

"That spell could have something attached to it, and we'd never know. Roman's situation should be proof enough."

Instead of getting offended, Violet simply said, "Exactly. Look what happened to Roman."

Asher's jaw tightened. "Roman happened because he can't sit his ass in one place. He walks straight into trouble and brings it home like a damn souvenir."

"And what if next time it's you? Or Griffin? Or Alaric?" Violet countered, her voice gaining strength. "You won't be stuck here forever. You know it already, Fae are masters of glamours and charms. We're already at a disadvantage just by being here."

Asher folded his arms, but his silence told her she had his attention.

"What if it's not the pixies next time?" she continued. "What if one of you falls into the hands of something worse? A Fae who knows exactly what he's doing. Remember Baron?"

Asher's worked his jaw at the mention of that name.

"We don't even know what he's capable of yet, Asher. You can't tell me that doesn't worry you. Even if my mother is the devil, at least she wants me alive."

Asher's mouth fell open, the defiance in his eyes gone. He swallowed, and tried to explain, "I didn't mean it that way..."

"No, it's alright." Violet said gently, "I'm not saying you have to trust her, But maybe—just this once—you should listen. I'm only but one and can't keep you all from danger. You guys need protection in this realm."

Asher sighed, running a hand through his hair. "Fine," he muttered at last.

"Thank you." Relief warmed her tone.

"However," Asher said, "If that spell makes me crave flowers or start singing in my sleep, I'm murdering all of them."

Violet snorted. "Really? That would be a cute sight."

"Violet." He growled, mock-threatening.

She laughed anyway. "Fine, that won't happen. Also, no murdering anyone, you blood thirsty beast." Violet teased, leaning in to kiss him on the lips.

What was supposed to be a simple kiss quickly evolved into a passionate one.

Violet moaned softly, leaning into Asher until there was literally no space left between them. Her fingers tangled in his hair, pulling him closer, deepening the kiss.

A low, possessive rumble escaped Asher's chest in response, vibrating against her lips. His hands roamed her body, tracing the curve of her spine, skimming down to the small of her back, before finally resting on her hip, holding her there.

Lila cleared her throat deliberately, pulling them both back to reality.

Violet pulled away, breathless, her cheeks flushed. Asher didn't even bother hiding his annoyance, his gray eyes flashing toward the Fae female.

"So?" Lila demanded.

"We'll do it," Asher said, "But I need to speak to the queen. I have questions of my own."

Lila told him. "You'll meet the queen over breakfast. Discussions in the Fae realm are often made over meals."

Asher met her gaze. "Fine. Then do it."

Chapter 643: Gentle Killers

Asher's fierce loyalty was a thing to study. The moment Lila explained the spell, he stepped forward without blinking.

"Do it on me first," he said. "If I'm fine after breakfast with the queen, the others can take it."

Violet opened her mouth to argue, but he cut her a look that said this wasn't up for debate. She closed it again, squeezing his hand instead. He squeezed back with assurance.

To be honest, Asher expected they would invite some priest and that it involved some ritual, you know, witch style.

Instead, Lila only moved closer, "Hold still," she said.

Then she breathed a string of soft, old words against his skin. A small prickle ran under Asher's flesh, as if a veil brushed him from crown to heel. The hairs on his arms stood on edge, then settled. Just like that, the tingling faded like the after-spark of a touch.

"That's it?" he asked, stunned. He had been looking forward to a little pain.

"That's it," Lila said. "It should blunt glamour, shield you from charms, and let your body accept our food. If anything feels wrong, tell me immediately."

"It won't," Violet hoped to the gods. Still, her eyes stayed on Asher, searching his face for any sign of discomfort.

He rolled his shoulders once. "I'm good."

"Good. Let's go."

Griffin and Alaric stayed behind to babysit Roman—and really, to babysit each other—while Roman paid a very noisy price for pixie nectar.

Asher and Violet took the central corridor with Lila and Rhara leading the way, vines stirring along the walls as if gossiping about their passing.

They were brought into the breakfast hall, and it felt like walking into morning itself.

The room was long and bright, set beneath a domed ceiling laced with trailing ivy and thin panes of colored glass. Sunlight broke through the glass in soft strips, painting the floor in blues and greens.

The floor was smooth stone, but warm underfoot, and tables curved along either side in elegant arcs instead of harsh lines—Fae didn't like straight things, apparently—and each table was draped in cloth that looked like it was woven from mist.

At the head, on a dais of pale wood, stood a narrow, graceful table. Queen Seraphira rose from it the instant she saw them.

"Daughter," she called out.

Violet's breath caught.

The queen looked effortless, as always, wearing a gown the color of riverlight, and a golden circlet on her head that marked her place.

Her long, braided hair fell like a banner down her back. She crossed the space between them with a pace that seemed slow and yet arrived all at once, taking Violet's hands in both of hers, her eyes shining with delight.

"Mother," Violet said the name with less effort than yesterday.

Queen Seraphira lifted her gaze to Asher. "Alpha Asher," she greeted with a soft smile that didn't pretend.

Asher was taken aback by the respect in her tone. Since arriving here, all he'd been called was beast, as if he were some lesser creature. Maybe the queen was different.

No. He caught himself. She wouldn't win him over that easily.

So he dipped his chin respectfully, but not submissive. "Your Majesty."

"Come," the queen said, gesturing to the head table. "Let's eat and talk."

Violet kept Asher's fingers tangled in hers as they climbed the short steps. When they reached the dais, they all sat together with Violet between them.

"I heard about the incident last night," the queen began. "I'm sorry your first hours here were troubled."

Asher didn't sugarcoat. "For a princess of a realm, the pixies do not show much respect to your daughter."

"Free Fae aren't open to outsiders. They aren't open to most things," Queen Seraphira said, honest as a cut. "In time, they'll warm to her. To you all."

Violet exhaled, some thread in her chest loosening. "I'll hold you to that."

The hall soon was filled with activity. Servants entered with platters of food, each one stranger and more beautiful than the last.

Bowls of thick cream swirled with honey. Trays of sliced fruits Violet knew—peaches, figs, berries—and fruits she didn't, with skins like glass and soft, sweet steam when cut.

There were herbs with dew still clinging to them, roots roasted until their sugars sang, and round loaves whose crusts cracked to reveal tender, fragrant crumb. A carafe poured milk that sparkled like late dew; another poured something pale green that smelled of mint and pear.

And then there were thin, seared slices of meat with a dark glaze, set beside bowls of jewel-bright compotes.

Asher's brows lifted. "I didn't think Fae eat meat."

"Some do," Seraphira said, breaking a loaf and setting a torn piece onto Violet's plate. "Some are vegetarian. Some are of the stricter path. We are many, not one. We argue about it at tables like this, too."

Asher picked up a slice of the seared meat between his thumb and forefinger. "Seems odd. The people who live as one with nature, killing others for their plates."

Yes, he wasn't trying to be polite; he was trying to see what lived behind her eyes.

Queen Seraphira met that challenge without flinching. "Order must be kept," she said. "We don't hunt for sport. We don't waste. And we don't murder. When it is needed, the animals are offered, and they are sent with calm and prayers. Death is not a stranger here. We treat it like truth, not entertainment."

"So," Asher said, tasting the edge in his own voice, "You all are gentle killers."

Across the table, Violet coughed into her cup, the sound thin and awkward. She shot Asher a warning look. Please don't start a fight over breakfast.

Seraphira didn't bristle. She laughed lightly, not a stitch of poison in it.

"If that is the name you choose," she said, amusement in her tone. "You have doubts about me, Asher Nightshade. That's wise. But do not doubt this: all I do now, I do for the safety of my daughter."

Of course, Asher didn't buy that. Henry had also claimed to do what was best for him — while breaking him in the process.

Chapter 644: Finally Meet, Daughter

"You mean the same daughter you left powerless in the human realm?" Asher said, his unflinching gaze locked on hers.

The queen's composure faltered. The polite warmth in her eyes vanished, replaced by a chill that made the entire hall feel smaller.

Violet did not know it, but her aura shifted too as her dark magic stirred, ready to defend Asher if the need arose. Seraphira might be her mother, but she was still a queen, and Asher was overstepping. This was supposed to be her conversation.

Just as expected, there was darkness in the Queen's gaze. Like Violet, her aura pulsed, a dangerous glint flashing in her amethyst eyes.

Seraphira's voice trembled with leashed anger. "You think I was happy to leave my daughter in the human realm?" There was no softness in her voice now, only fury and pain tightly coiled together.

But Asher wasn't intimidated, even as the air they breathed thickened with power, sharp as pins and needles.

"I don't fault the circumstances," Asher replied evenly. "But from what I've gathered, Lila found Violet months ago, if not earlier." He hinted that Lila might not have told the full truth.

"That was enough time to train her, to prepare her for what lay ahead, especially knowing the kind of husband you had. Maybe then Baron wouldn't have nearly killed her during her dreamwalk."

Asher's words struck like lightning.

For a heartbeat, Seraphira's mouth parted in disbelief, guilt flashing in her blazing eyes. Just like that, the pressure of her magic in the air eased.

Even Violet, who sat ramrod straight, gripping her spoon so tightly her knuckles had gone white, exhaled shakily. The suffocating tension began to dissolve, replaced by guilt and shame.

The queen's eyes softened, the fire in them dimming into sorrow. For the first time, Violet saw not the immortal ruler of the Fae, but a mother who had made impossible choices and was now forced to face them.

Not just her, Asher saw it too. But unlike Violet, he wouldn't let emotions dull his instinct to protect her.

"I made a stupid decision," Seraphira admitted, staring at them yet seeing nothing, lost in whatever memory had been stirred.

"I was scared of leaving Violet with powers that Angus might exploit, and at the same time, I was terrified of unlocking powers that would draw Angus to her like a moth to flame."

Her eyes gained focus now, pinned on Asher. "But do you dare judge me when you have not walked in the shoes I have walked in?"

She paused, then went on, "Every night I have cursed the bonds that kept me chained to both wretched men while my daughter grew up without me. Do you know what it means, wolf? To watch your child from afar and be unable to reach her because every step closer risks her life?"

This time she studied Asher with such intensity it was unsettling, almost as if she could see straight through him.

"You pursue perfection. You seek control. Yet you forget, Asher Nightshade, life is anything but perfect."

Asher shifted uncomfortably in his seat. He hated being under scrutiny, and right now the Queen held him under her gaze like a specimen beneath glass.

"Tell me then," she said softly, "have you not committed mistakes? Not even one?"

Asher didn't need to answer, because Violet knew.

Lucille.

With his constant need to control and manipulate every outcome like a puppet master, he had played games with the girl, and the circumstances had nearly led to her death. He'd ruined her life.

Violet hadn't forgotten that. Neither had Asher.

One could tell he remembered from the way he flinched, as though struck by an invisible hand.

For a second, no one spoke. Then Queen Seraphira picked up the goblet before her, paused, and said, "However, protect her as fiercely as you challenge me, wolf. The day may come when she will need someone unafraid to stand against even a queen." Then she sipped her pale green drink.

Asher couldn't find words, so Violet took over, intentionally stirring the conversation from that sensitive topic. "How long am I to stay here?"

Queen Seraphira was just about to respond when her nose flared. Her eyes sharpened a second later, and she looked ahead.

Violet turned at the same time Asher did, and the growl that rumbled from his chest perfectly mirrored the chill that ran through her.

There were some eyes one could never forget.

Though she had seen him before—through Lila's eyes in the dream realm—this was different. Now she saw his true eyes for herself, a striking forest green that could lure anyone in without even trying. But Violet knew better. Those eyes hid nothing but poison. Baron might be handsome on the outside, but he was rotten to the core within.

He strode up the dais wearing that same arrogant smile, the kind that made it seem like the world already belonged to him.

Asher's glare cut to the queen, venom in his voice. "What is he doing here?"

That seemed to snap Seraphira from her trance. Before Baron could reach the table, vines crept out from the walls, twisting into thick, thorned branches that formed a living barrier before him.

Baron only laughed. "Is this how you welcome me, my queen? In front of our daughter?"

"Violet is not your daughter!" Seraphira hissed, her voice like steel.

"Not biologically," Baron conceded, his tone dripping mockery, "but by the laws of our people, she is. You are my wife, and that makes her my daughter."

The queen didn't move. But her silence made him smirk.

"Well then," Baron said, tilting his head, "if you won't let me greet my daughter properly, I suppose I'll visit her privately later."

Seraphira's eyes widened at his audacity. Instinctively, she released the vines, and they slithered back into the walls.

Baron stepped forward smugly, taking his time as he joined them at the table. He pulled out a chair, sat, and smiled as if nothing was wrong even though three pairs of furious eyes bore down on him.

Then, turning to Violet, his smile stretched wider.

"We finally meet, daughter."

Chapter 645: Don't Want To Rule

Most villains never claimed to be one, but none were as dangerous as the ones who knew exactly what they were and relished being it.

And one of them happened to be her mother's husband.

Or more accurately, her stepfather.

Violet mentally winced at the title. The idea of a father had always appealed to her once, but now? Her family tree was just so... messed up.

"We finally meet, daughter," Baron said in the most charming voice.

Oh, hell no. Violet recoiled mentally. She already had one psycho father, having two was taking it way too far.

But damn, her mother really did have a knack for choosing bad men.

Nonetheless, if he wanted to play this game, they'd play.

"No pleasure there at all, Baron," Violet replied coolly.

Instead of being offended by her sarcasm, Baron burst into laughter, as if this were all just entertainment to him.

Meanwhile, Asher, who had been silently watching from the side, studied the Fae Queen's consort with cold calculation.

Finally, he said, "You're the all-powerful Fae Queen, and yet you can't get rid of him."

Before the Queen could answer, Baron's attention had already shifted to Asher. Their gazes locked.

In an instant, Asher compelled him. "Leave us."

Normally, victims of his compulsion went glassy-eyed within seconds, their will bending under his command. But Baron didn't look dazed, if anything, he was puzzled, as if trying to decide whether to humor the command.

Then, realization dawned on him, and his lips curved into a knowing grin, his irises glinting with delight.

"You," he recognized Asher. "You're the wolf with the mind ability." Baron laughed out loud, "Your little parlor trick might have worked on lesser creatures in the human realm but you should know here, most High Fae are immune to such compulsion."

Violet watched the blood drain from Asher's face, the shock tightening his jaw. His compulsion had always been his one unshakable weapon and now Baron had ripped it aside like it was nothing.

Baron continued, "And that brings me to ask, how's our daughter preparing for her trial?"

Violet stiffened. So did Asher.

They asked in unison.

"What trial?"

If her eyes were bullet, Baron would be nothing but pulp with the way Seraphira glowered at him. She rubbed her forehead, "I was planning to tell you after Breakfast but apparently someone just likes causing unnecessary drama." She said through gritted teeth.

"That doesn't sound like unnecessary drama," Asher snapped, his defenses snapping back into place. He should have known better than to trust her.

"Exactly," Baron agreed, sounding far too pleased. "We all want our daughter to succeed in the trials, after all."

"Could you just shut up, already!" Violet exploded. Flames crackled from her hands and shot straight toward Baron.

He didn't even flinch. Baron moved his hand, and extinguished it as if he were taking the air from around the blaze.

Violet didn't know which was more terrifying—the fact he could manipulate air, or the effortless precision with which he did it. He was skilled. Very skilled.

"You have raw power, but it's untrained," Baron judged. "You're easily flustered and hot-tempered. At this rate, you're hopeless in the Trial of Ascension. But who knows, hope isn't lost. If I train you, I could make something of you."

"Yeah, over my dead body," Violet spat, furious and distrustful, unsure which game he was playing.

"I'll kill you if you even get an inch near her," Asher swore, his eyes gleaming with dark promise. The Fae was stronger obviously, but he would get the job done. It was only one Fae against four cardinal alphas after all.

Baron snorted. "It would be fun to watch you try." He clearly delighted in the fact that his life was linked with the Queen's. If Asher killed him, the Fae Queen would die too.

Then he stood up, and said to the Queen, his wife, "I'll speak to the Court of the High Fae and persuade them to move up the date. We can't wait for our princess to be approved, she'll command more respect then."

Seraphira's hands curled into fists, her knuckles white.

Baron smiled the wider for it. "Better hurry with her training. Chop-chop, no time."

Having achieved his purpose—and that was ruining everyone's mood—Baron pushed his chair back, stood, and said cheerfully, "Enjoy the rest of your meal. We will meet again." Then he sauntered out of the hall, whistling a tune.

They all watched him go with intense gazes until the doors closed behind him.

As soon as he was gone, Asher turned to the Queen, fury flashing in his eyes. "I should've known Violet wouldn't be suddenly dragged into the Fae realm unless something was up. A fucking trial? Are you kidding me? She practically knows nothing about the Fae or how to use her powers! You just saw what happened right now." He gestured to Violet, referring to the way Baron had effortlessly extinguished her flame.

"He's strong," Violet pointed out, still shaken. "Very strong."

Asher fired back, "And what does he mean by moving up the date? Violet's unprepared! And why can't you put your husband in order? You're the fucking queen!"

Seraphira groaned, rubbing her temple. "Ever since news of Violet spread, the realm feels betrayed. I told you, the Free Fae don't mingle with outsiders. And I, the queen, broke that rule."

"I'm not asking for excuses," Asher hissed. "I'm telling you to fix this."

"There's no fixing it," Seraphira said, her tone hardening. "Violet is my heir, and to claim her place, she must prove herself before the Court of the High Fae. The Trial of Ascension is tradition and the only way she can be recognized as my true daughter."

For a moment, Asher and the Fae Queen locked eyes, the tension snapping back into the hall.

"And what if Violet doesn't want to be your heir?" Asher asked.

"What?" The queen's tone carried genuine disbelief, as if the idea itself was absurd.

The next thing Violet knew, two pairs of eyes were fixed on her.

Oh, hell no.

But just as she feared, Queen Seraphira turned to her, eyes narrowing ever so slightly.

"You don't want to rule, Violet?"

Chapter 646: Panic Attack

Two pairs of eyes pinned Violet on the spot, and her mouth opened and closed like a fish out of water.

"Violet..." her mother pressed, "Don't you want to be my heir?"

Violet tried to speak, but her voice failed her. The words tangled in her throat and refused to come out. A bead of sweat rolled down her temple, her pulse hammering in her ears. Suddenly, her chair felt like a hot seat, the air too thin to breathe.

"Violet?" Asher called her name, concerned. His brows furrowed, his hand twitching as though he wanted to reach for her. He could sense something was wrong.

Violet Purple never believed in panic attacks. She had always been strong—panic, in her mind, was for the weak. But in that moment, when she met Asher's slitted gaze and her mother's piercing amethyst eyes, both heavy with expectation, and responsibility, a crushing wave of pressure settled on her chest.

Violet abruptly stood up, her chair scraping back loudly. The walls felt like they were closing in, and she stumbled a few steps away, her breath hitching. She needed air—she needed to breathe. Something was choking her.

Asher was on his feet in an instant. "Violet?"

Queen Seraphira rose too, her voice tight. "Violet, are you alright?"

But Violet didn't respond. Her eyes darted around wildly, and unfocused, panic clouding everything. The blood roared in her ears, drowning out every voice as if she'd been dropped underwater. She clutched at her chest, but her heart only beat faster.

"I think she's having a panic attack!" Asher was alarmed.

Except it wasn't just a panic attack.

Dark shadows began to coil around her, protectively like a dome. The air thickened, humming with unstable magic. Veins darkened beneath her skin, pulsing with power that was too much for her fragile control. When Violet staggered against a pillar for balance, it exploded into dust the moment her hand touched it.

Asher moved to run to her, but Queen Seraphira grabbed his arm and pulled him back.

"Don't!" she warned, her eyes wide. "She's having a flux."

Asher's voice was rough with panic and anger. "What the hell is a flux?!"

"Magical instability," Seraphira said quickly, her tone clipped but urgent. "The human realm holds limited energy, but here, magic flows freely. Her body isn't used to this abundance, and with her emotions feeding it, the power's building uncontrollably. She needs balance—a release—before it consumes her."

From the way Violet's magic surged higher, they both knew the effects would be destructive. To Asher, the scene was almost like that day at the pine lodge when her powers came out for the first time. Only this time, it was stronger.

Almost immediately, the doors flung open, and soldiers poured into the room.

Asher's head snapped up, every muscle tensing. He didn't like this at all.

But the Queen was already in command. "Build a barrier around us!" she ordered.

All five soldiers responded at once. "Yes, Your Majesty!"

Then they spread out in a perfect circle, their lips moving as they murmured in an unfamiliar tongue.

"What are you doing to her?" Asher demanded, stepping forward. He was ready to fight and rescue Violet if it came down to that.

Before he could take another step, Lila appeared and planted a hand firmly on his chest, forcing him to halt. "You'll have to trust Queen Seraphira on this," she said urgently.

"Trust her?" Asher glared at her. "She's the reason Violet's unstable in the first place!"

"Even so. Complaining and blaming her won't change anything!" Lila snapped back.

At that same moment, the doors burst open again.

Alaric, Griffin, and even Roman—still pale and weak—stormed in, drawn by the violent surge of emotion through their bond. They froze at the sight: Violet surrounded by pulsing magic, Queen Seraphira standing before her, and the soldiers doing some strange chant.

What the hell was going on here?

Then, in a blinding shimmer, a transparent dome sealed around the Queen and Violet, shutting everyone else out.

Inside, the Queen turned to her daughter.

"Violet," Seraphira said calmly, "Breathe."

Violet shook her head, her voice hoarse. "I—can't. It's choking me."

"Then all the more reason to breathe," the Queen said firmly, "You own this power, Violet. It does not own you. Follow my lead."

Seraphira inhaled deeply, slowly, her chest rising and falling in rhythm.

Violet tried to follow, but every breath felt like dragging knives into her lungs. Still, she forced herself to release one shaky inhale, then one trembling exhale.

"Good," Seraphira whispered. "Again."

Her voice was steady, guiding her like a lifeline in the dark.

Outside the barrier, the cardinal alphas waited with anticipation. If anything happened to their mate, they would rent the Fae realm in two.

Back inside, the Queen continued her patient rhythm. "You have too much magic inside you, and it's overflowing. We'll purge the excess, and keep the rest you need."

Violet managed a weak whisper. "How?"

"Magic runs through every part of you," Seraphira explained. "In your blood, your bones, your breath. The same way your body expels sweat through your pores, you can expel magic the same way. You must open yourself to release it. Feel it leaving you."

Violet squeezed her eyes shut, her whole body shaking. She imagined the thick, heavy, suffocating, power inside her.

"Let it go," the Queen urged. "One trickle at a time."

But Violet cried out instead when she felt a sharp pain cut through her. She had rushed the whole process.

"Follow me, Violet," Seraphira whispered again. "Slow. And steady."

Just like that, dark shadows poured from her skin like ink dissolving in water, replaced by a soft glow that mirrored her mother's.

The Queen's voice carried like a lullaby. "That's it. Keep going, daughter. Let it all go."

Violet did.

With every exhale, more power escaped her until her knees buckled and her breathing slowed, returning to a normal pace.

When Violet finally opened her eyes, the shadows were gone. And she felt lighter. Lighter than she had ever felt since her magic emerged.

"How?" Violet whispered, her voice barely audible.

Seraphira smiled, brushing a strand of hair from her daughter's damp forehead. "Every Fae learns to regulate their magic from the moment they're born. I'm sorry, Violet, you were denied that."

The Queen's voice was full of guilt.

The soldiers took down the barrier, and they stepped out. And immediately, Asher and the others rushed forward.

Violet tried to meet them halfway, but her legs wobbled.

"Whoa, whoa—easy."

Alaric reached her first, catching her just before she hit the ground. His arms were around her, his expression tight with concern.

"She needs bed rest," Seraphira said firmly.

"I don't..." Violet began to protest weakly.

But Alaric wasn't listening. With effortless strength, he adjusted her in his arms, holding her as if she weighed nothing.

"We're leaving." Alaric left without the queen's permission.

Roman and Griffin fell in beside him immediately, both their faces etched with worry.

Asher lingered for a second longer, his gaze locked on the Queen.

"This conversation isn't over," he said, his voice low but firm.

Seraphira muttered after him. "I wouldn't expect it to be."

Only then did Asher turn away, following his mates out of the hall, his chest tight with so many emotions he kept buckled inside.

Alaric carried Violet all the way to their room even as she protested.

"I'm fine," Violet mumbled stubbornly. "You don't have to treat me like a patient."

"You heard what your mother said," Griffin replied from behind, "The queen insists on bed rest, and honestly, I'm not in the mood to argue with royalty."

Alaric tucked the blanket around her shoulders while Griffin adjusted the pillows. Roman stood by the door, arms crossed, watching silently.

Just then, the door opened again, and Asher stepped in. The room shifted instantly. His eyes locked onto Violet's, and the tension melted from his expression.

"I'm so sorry," Violet whispered, guilt heavy in her voice.

"There's nothing to apologize for," Asher said. "None of this was your fault. It's the queen's."

Roman groaned. "Can someone tell me what the hell happened out there?"

Asher's jaw clenched, anger flashing in his eyes. "Panic attack worsened by her powers. She's overflowing with magic and no one bothered to teach her control." He kicked the edge of a table, sending a chair crashing into the wall. "All because of them."

"Asher." Griffin's voice was calm, but his eyes were sharp. "Enough. She needs peace, not more chaos."

"We can't stay here," Asher snapped, his voice rising. "It's not safe."

Alaric met his glare evenly. "And we can't leave either. She needs training."

To everyone's surprise, Roman stepped said. "How about we talk about this later? Violet needs rest."

That quieted the room. All eyes flicked toward her. Violet wanted to disappear under the sheets. She hated feeling this helpless, as if she was a fragile thing they had to protect.

After a long pause, Asher exhaled. "He's right. Sleep, Violet."

He leaned forward, brushing a strand of hair from her face before turning toward the door. One by one, they followed him out.

But before the door closed, Violet caught the look they exchanged. They were definitely planning something.

Chapter 647: About Lila...

Lunaris Academy...

Standing in front of Principal Jameson's office, Daisy Fairchild sucked in a deep breath.

"There's nothing to be scared about. You did nothing wrong. We'll just answer Mrs. Jameson and we're good to go." She gave herself a pep talk before finally mustering the courage to knock on the door.

"Come on in," Jameson's voice came from inside, and Daisy braced herself as she stepped in.

Of course, there was Principal Jameson looking primed and proper as always, not a single piece out of place. One would think that after the horrible scandal that had plagued Lunaris Academy, the woman would have been sent packing.

Unfortunately, the hard-to-kill cockroach had managed to wriggle her way back into position by riding on Violet's purple glory, the human girl with three mates. She had the PR team push that story, feeding the garbage to the public until they practically forgot all the recent incidents.

In a way, it worked. Lunar Academy was once again the top supernatural academy every human girl dreamed of being chosen for. Everyone wanted to be Violet Purple.

Even now, it had been revealed that Violet Purple wasn't even human. But no one seemed to care. If anything, the academy's popularity had exploded beyond control.

How did Violet Purple become a werewolf—or whatever people thought she was? Already, rumors were circulating that there was a secret lab in Lunar Academy where humans were experimented on and turned into werewolves.

And yet, instead of deterring them, it only made everyone want to be part of Lunar even more.

It was crazy out there.

When Daisy came in, she never expected Principal Jameson to have a visitor and certainly not a familiar, blue-eyed Luna.

"Luna Zara," Daisy bowed her head respectfully. "An honor to meet you."

"The pleasure is mine, Daisy Fairchild."

Daisy lifted a brow. How did the Luna of the North Pack know her name? And why was she summoned here? Of course, Daisy wasn't stupid; she could sense something was off.

"Do have a seat, Daisy." Jameson gestured to the chair in front of her.

Daisy sat carefully, hyper-aware of the Luna's presence beside her. Suddenly, it felt less like a meeting and more like she'd just stepped into an interrogation room.

"I'm sure you're surprised by my presence," Zara said with a small, knowing smile.

"Yes, I am. By chance, Luna Zara, did anything happen to Violet?" Daisy asked, curiosity lacing her tone. The last she heard, her friend Violet was in the North with her son, Alaric, where their bond had finally snapped into place.

It was safe to conclude that communication with Violet had been downhill. With so many things happening in such a short time, keeping in touch was nearly impossible. Not to mention, Violet's line hadn't connected in days, and the only information she ever got came through the Alphas or their betas—whenever they were even reachable.

Luna Zara opened her mouth as if to lie her way out of it, but suddenly paused. Then she sighed, heavily. "To be honest, that's why I'm here."

Daisy shifted uncomfortably in her seat, a prickle of unease crawling down her spine.

"Why? What happened?" she demanded, her voice tight with apprehension.

"Violet Purple suddenly vanished with my son."

"What?!" Daisy shouted, stunned. She shook her head in disbelief. "What do you mean vanished with your son?"

Zara Storm studied the young girl before her, satisfied to see she already had Daisy wrapped around her finger.

Leaning forward, she spoke with emotion.

"To be honest, I was a bit hard on Violet. I'm sure you've heard the rumors about us, but the North Pack isn't used to inter-pack marriages. Still, the goddess mated them, and I realized my mistake. I should never have gone against them. And now... I think Violet is punishing me by taking my son away from me."

"No!" Daisy blurted out, louder than intended.

Zara blinked, feigning confusion. "No?"

"No. Violet would never do that. Sure, she's hot-tempered and unpredictable, but she wouldn't go that far unless..." Daisy's voice trailed off mid-sentence.

"Unless what?" Zara pressed, her keen gaze pinning the girl.

Daisy swallowed. Unless it was necessary. But she didn't say that out loud.

Instead, she forced a small smile and said, "All I'm trying to say is that Violet isn't petty enough for that. Maybe they just went on a vacation or something, and didn't want to be disturbed. I've heard some mates do that. You know, like a honeymoon."

"Is that so?" Zara's tone was calm, but her eyes sharpened as she studied Daisy. The young girl's breathing had shifted ever so slightly. The Luna could sense it. Daisy Fairchild was beginning to catch on, growing guarded. And more than that, she was hiding something.

Hence, Zara dropped the act a little, her polite mask slipping as she became more direct. "So you're trying to tell me that Violet Purple did not contact you?"

"No," Daisy answered, straightening her shoulders. "We haven't spoken in a while."

"Not in a while," Zara repeated, nodding slowly as she glanced at her phone. "Well, you're telling the truth there. Your phone records prove that."

Daisy froze. "Excuse me?" Her voice rose, sharp with disbelief. "You went through my phone records?!"

She shot to her feet, anger flashing through her.

Mrs. Jameson quickly tried to diffuse the tension, hands raised slightly. "I'm sorry, Daisy, but this is a very serious situation—"

"It's still not your right to go through my phone records!" Daisy cut in furiously. "That's an invasion of privacy!"

As Daisy continued to rant, Luna Zara spoke a single name.

"Lila Meadows."

The name sliced through Daisy's anger like a blade. She froze mid-sentence, every trace of heat vanishing from her voice.

Zara slowly lifted her gaze, her icy blue eyes locking onto Daisy's scowl. The room went silent except for the soft ticking of the office clock.

"Did you know her identity is completely false?" Zara asked suddenly.

"What?" Daisy's eyes widened, genuine shock on her face.

"The real Lila Meadows is dead," Zara said calmly. "She doesn't exist. Not for years."

Daisy stammered, "T-that's impossible... she-she was right there with us! I had no idea... "

Zara watched her closely, every flicker of emotion. "I'm sure you didn't."

Mrs. Jameson stepped in, shaking her head, trying to make sense of it all. "I have no idea how that girl managed to manipulate her way into the academy's system. Our vetting process is strict. But this matter will be looked into immediately."

Zara told her arrogantly. "She probably achieved that with magic. It's the only explanation that makes sense."

Then she turned to Daisy again, her tone rising an octave. "And that's where all this becomes suspicious. Of all the rooms in Lunar Academy, why Violet Purple's? Why choose that specific room?"

Daisy swallowed hard. "We were all friends, Lila and Violet got along. Maybe it was coincidence.... " She asked innocently, "... Or You think Lila approached Violet on purpose?"

Of course, Daisy knew Lila approached Violet on purpose because she was her guardian. But Daisy would not say any of that, not after she swore an oath. Even if Zara put a knife to her throat, not a word would leave her lips.

Zara looked at Daisy suspiciously. "Since your stay with the fake Lila, did you notice anything off about her?"

Daisy acted confused. "Like what?"

Zara sighed, the sound heavy with irritation, as if the entire process was exhausting. "I believe this Lila might have something to do with Violet and my son's disappearance. Who knows? They might be in danger."

Daisy frowned. "But you told me Violet disappeared with your son."

Zara tilted her head slightly, her expression unreadable. "And you just told me Violet would never do such a thing, didn't you?"

Daisy hesitated. "Yes, so why then would you suddenly think Lila might have a hand in the disappearance?"

Zara smiled, though there was no warmth in it. "It's just the circumstances," she said smoothly. "Moreover, it's reported that Lila took a supposed leave and no one's seen her since. There's enough circumstantial evidence to suggest she might be involved in whatever is going on."

The tension in the room thickened. Daisy could feel Zara's gaze pressing down on her, like the woman was searching her soul for answers.

Then Zara leaned forward, lowering her voice to something almost gentle. "You're a smart girl, Daisy, all I'm saying is, if you know anything about this girl, even the smallest details, it could help in the search for Violet..." She paused, her expression suddenly full of worry. "...and my son."

Silence fell for a moment.

Daisy's voice was steady when she finally said, "No, ma. I don't know a thing."

Zara straightened, the warmth vanishing from her face, "Thank you for your time, Daisy," she said crisply.

Daisy nodded quickly, her pulse racing. "Thank you, ma."

Without waiting for permission to leave, Daisy turned and practically bolted out of the office. Her heart hammered against her ribs as she pushed the door shut behind her, not daring to look back.

What the hell was going on?

Chapter 648: Find The Truth

With Daisy gone, it was just Luna Zara and Principal Jameson left alone in the office.

"Is it really true? Are Violet Purple and Alaric missing, or is there something going on that I don't know?" the woman asked, her eyes sparkling with curiosity.

Of course, none of them knew not just one of them, but all the cardinal alphas were missing. The news was kept tightly under lock to prevent chaos from breaking out, especially among the humans. There was already a lot they didn't know about. What would happen once they learned that the powerhouse of the wolves — the cardinal alphas — were missing?

Not only would it bring a lot of prying their way, but it would also give some people ideas. People like Patrick, who might attack now that the freaks with magical powers could not stop him.

Zara, of course, with cold arrogance, ignored her and stood up to her feet instead. Then she lifted her gaze haughtily and told her, "If you know what's good for you this time, you'll keep your snoopy nose out of this matter. In the meantime, report to me if you get any information on that girl named Lila Meadows, or even Violet. I hope your day's more pleasant than mine."

Then she walked away.

Unknown to Zara, Jameson rolled her eyes and made a face behind her. The arrogance of that woman.

Zara barely made it outside Jameson's office when her phone rang. She looked down at the screen, and her expression instantly soured.

You have got to be kidding me. Couldn't this man give her some breathing space?

"Your Majesty," Zara answered, unable to hide the irritation in her voice as she took Elijah's call.

"Any information?" Elijah went straight to the point.

Zara flexed her jaw. "Nothing. The kids are completely ignorant of Violet's whereabouts." She didn't mention her suspicion about Lila Meadows, the student who supposedly never existed.

While Zara was running the errand for Elijah, she was also doing it for herself. Her son was missing, and she had to find him. Hence, she would never share her discoveries—assuming Elijah didn't already know them. It wasn't beyond her to believe that Elijah had a morbid fascination with punishing them, all because of the so-called betrayal years ago.

Of course, the reason the boys were missing had to be tied to Violet. No werewolf possessed the kind of power she did, not even the cardinal alphas. That meant she was something else. And most girls had a tendency to spill secrets to their friends, especially the ones they lived with.

There was no way the girls lived with Violet and didn't notice the smallest thing about her, or about the mysterious Lila Meadows. The only question now was how to extract whatever they knew.

Zara had already interviewed Ivy Sinclair separately before moving on to Daisy. She had taken them by surprise, questioning them so fast that the girls had no time to regroup or come up with lies. They probably wouldn't even realize what just happened until they met soon.

"Fine, you can let the matter go."

"What?!" Zara halted in her steps.

Elijah replied, "Violet's in a place you cannot reach."

"What do you mean by that?" Zara's confusion only deepened.

"Enjoy your second chance I bought for you with your husband, Zara Storm."

"What? Hello? H-hello?! Your Majesty—" The line went dead.

"Damn it!" she cursed, clutching the phone tightly.

What did Elijah mean by a place she could not reach? She knew it! That asshole knew something she didn't!

How did he expect her to let this go when her son was missing? To think she had almost trusted Violet, only for the girl to pull this move on her. She had to find Alaric by all means necessary.

At the moment, her only source of information was the girls. Unfortunately, too many eyes were on her, and she couldn't extract the truth directly. Unless, of course, she had someone else do it for her.

Zara pulled out her phone, and within seconds, the line connected.

"Elsie..." she said in a sugary tone, "I'm in the school premises, and I was wondering if we could catch up. It's been a while, hasn't it?"

And that was how, nearly an hour later, Zara Storm was seated across from Elsie Lancaster. Of course, the North Pack Luna was not foolish enough to meet with Elsie on school grounds, so they had settled for a quiet restaurant in the city.

Elsie Lancaster had proven to be stupid before, and if she failed again, Zara didn't want anything to do with her.

Elsie, however, was giddy with excitement. Ever since the scandal that ruined her reputation, Luna Zara had turned her back on her completely. The woman had been as cold as ice, and Elsie had felt it. So, for Zara to call her now meant this was her chance at redemption.

Zara looked her over and began, "I had high hopes for you, Elsie..."

At once, shame washed over Elsie. She lowered her head, unable to meet Zara's eyes.

"...However, I'm willing to look past your faults if you can do what I have in mind."

"I can!" Elsie blurted out eagerly. "I'll do anything for you, Luna. Just name it!"

Zara looked pleased. She leaned back. "What do you know about Lila Meadows?"

"Lila?" Elsie wrinkled her nose. "That weirdo?"

Zara raised a brow. "Weirdo?"

Elsie explained, "The girl's a little crazy in the head. There's just something off about her." Then she perked up. "Why are you asking? Did something happen?"

Zara said calmly, "Alaric is missing."

"What?!" Elsie gasped, covering her mouth.

"All of the cardinal alphas are, and I believe it's connected to Violet. Something tells me Violet and Lila share a secret. Her roommates, Ivy Sinclair and Daisy Fairchild, know something and won't talk." Zara's voice dipped dangerously. "I want you to find out what they're hiding. Do you understand?"

A glint sparked in Elsie's eyes. "Of course, Luna Zara. I promise I won't fail you this time."

Chapter 649: Pray To The Goddess

Unlike the last time Micah had been in the West Pack, security had never been this tight. Now, guards were stationed to every corner, the rooftop, and even the main gate looked like a fortress. It almost felt like President Roy himself was dwelling here.

Even though Alpha Irene had requested his presence, the guards still scanned them and searched the car's trunk before granting access to the pack house.

As soon as Micah stepped out, Irene was already there to welcome him.

"You're here," she said briskly. "Sorry for the inconvenience, but security is tight right now and for good reasons."

"What's going on?" Micah asked, falling into step beside her.

Irene's expression hardened. "A lot."

They walked into the house, and just like the gate, the atmosphere was tense. There were so many guards around that not even a cockroach could sneak past unnoticed.

As they climbed the twisting staircase, Micah asked, "There's something I don't understand. How did you know I'm the Oracle?"

Irene glanced back at him, her expression unreadable. "Griffin told me."

"What?" Micah cursed under his breath. He should've known better than to trust those little rascals with his secret.

"My son and I are quite close," Irene said, continuing her climb effortlessly. "He once told me that if anything ever happened to them, I should contact you that you have lots of information." She paused briefly, looking over her shoulder. "He said you're trustworthy, which is hard to believe for a demon."

"Half-demon," Micah corrected sharply.

"Correction taken," she said smoothly. "Although, trust is a luxury none of us can afford right now. You'll see why soon."

At the end of the hallway, Irene stopped before a large door and pushed it open.

As soon as Micah saw what was inside, his feet froze.

The room was filled with familiar faces. Alpha Aeron, Irene's husband, sat at the center, his expression grim. To his right were Alpha Ezra and his mate, Nancy. On the left, Alpha Leon and his wife, Alexa. Jeremiah, Asher's beta, stood near the window, his piercing gaze locked on Micah.

Every pair of eyes in that room turned to him the moment he entered.

Micah's stomach dropped. This was more serious than he thought.

"He's here," Irene announced from the doorway.

Aeron's deep voice cut through the room. "Close the door behind you."

Micah complied, pushing the door shut before walking toward them with the confidence of someone used to scrutiny. He stopped in front of the long table where the Alphas and their mates sat.

"I'm Micah Raymond, son of the former Alpha—"

"We all know your identity, son," Aeron interrupted him, "Irene tells me you have access to a lot of information. We believe you might be able to tell us the whereabouts of our children."

Micah exhaled slowly, eyeing the serious faces before him. "Yes, they call me the Oracle because I deal in information. But my playing ground is Lunar Academy. I only dabble outside once in a while. And to make things clear, I'm not a seer. If you want one, you should contact Alice. She's the best, and that's your territory, isn't it?"

Irene told him. "Seers see what they're meant to see and only at the right time. The fact that we haven't heard anything from her means we're on our own."

Nancy spoke up, her voice trembling slightly. "Violet is missing, alongside the Cardinal Alphas. If you know anything about that, then I beg you to tell us."

Micah's gaze swept over the room, taking in every hopeful face turned toward him. Never had he imagined there would come a day when his little "skill" would be demanded like this. He had always felt safe because his identity as the Oracle was hidden, but now that it was out in the open, the protection was gone. This could come back to bite him later, but he'd deal with that when the time came.

He exhaled and said, "As you already know, I'm half-demon. I get my information by visiting hell and gathering news from the souls of the dearly departed. Aside from that, I have other means of getting intel." His eyes flicked briefly toward Aeron, then Irene. "Unfortunately, I've been occupied lately. But I

did my research, and it turns out there's unrest in the West Pack. A rebellion. Alpha Cane tried to take out Alpha Asher."

Murmurs rippled through the room. They did try their best to keep that information under lock.

Micah continued, "I don't know much beyond that. The rest of the information is locked down, which, now that I see this place, I totally understand." He met Irene's eyes and added wryly, "I'll need more details in case I need to make a trip down below."

Jeremiah was the one who spoke. "You won't need to make any trip. According to the investigation report, a portal suddenly opened up, and then some girl dragged Asher and Roman into it. Upon reviewing the camera footage, I found out it was Lila Meadows."

"Lila?" Micah muttered, his brows knitting together.

"Then we got another report from the North Pack that Alaric, Griffin, and Violet are missing," Jeremiah continued. "Although there's no confirmation that the same kind of portal appeared there, the coincidences are too good to ignore. We believe she's responsible for all of this."

"So what do you want from me?" Micah asked flatly.

"You're the Oracle," Jeremiah said. "That means you have information on Lila Meadows. How do we find her? How do we find them?"

Leon joined in. "Are the kids even safe? Is she an enemy or a friend? What does she want with them?"

In an instant, questions bombarded Micah from all directions.

When the noise finally died down, every gaze fixed on him, waiting for an answer.

Micah drew in a long breath. "If a portal really opened up, and you've been unable to find them since," he said slowly, "then I can assure you, they're no longer in this realm."

"What?!" murmurs of disbelief rippled through the room.

Micah went on, undeterred. "Whether they're safe or not..." he shrugged, "that, I can't tell. You might have to start praying to the goddess for that."

Chapter 650: Face Of The Rebellion

"How do you know all this?" Alexa asked Micah out of nowhere.

"Excuse me?"

Alexa narrowed her gaze. "You're here spilling a bunch of things nobody knows about, and we're all just accepting it in good faith?" She turned to the others.

"What's the probability he's not working with this Lila? What are the chances we're not sitting here with the enemy?"

And this, people, was exactly why he never revealed his identity. For a moment, Micah didn't answer her, he just gave her a blank look that screamed, Bitch, really?

Except when he turned, he caught the look of suspicion on the others' faces. Alexa must have noticed it too, because it gave her boldness to continue.

"The children of powerful Alphas are missing, and the only person who suddenly 'knows things' is a half-demon Oracle who admits to getting information from the underworld and some other sources. Surely, I don't sound crazy right now." She chuckled awkwardly, though the sound carried an edge.

"I really shouldn't have come here," Micah muttered under his breath. It was natural that someone would suspect him, and that was exactly why he regretted coming.

Nancy lifted her head and looked him straight in the eyes, "This sudden disappearance, it's related to Violet, isn't it?"

Micah looked at her and answered simply, "I hundred percent believe it is."

Nancy studied him, thinking. "There's something you're not telling us, isn't there? Is it about Violet? Or is it something you can't trust us with?"

Micah replied coolly, "Violet's secret is hers to tell."

At that, Nancy straightened up, addressing the others. "I trust him."

Murmurs rippled through the room. Some agreed, others clearly didn't.

Undeterred, Nancy went on, "I know my daughter, Violet, and that girl can hide a secret deeper than the ocean trench. The fact that Micah knows something about her means she should be the one saying so, not him. And I won't let him say anything that could put my daughter in danger in a room full of people I don't quite trust yet." Her eyes locked on Alexa when she said it.

Of course, everyone understood what she was saying. Violet exhibited powers no one should have — powers that suggested she was something beyond what they could comprehend. It shouldn't even be surprising that the Alphas disappeared alongside her; they were her mates, after all. With the exception of Asher — but everyone with a brain could tell he would likely join the train. They had chemistry, and Violet, at this point, was creating the impossible.

Leon spoke up, "I understand you, Nancy, but that still doesn't change the fact that we have no idea where our children are. Heck, how are we even supposed to get them back? Or when they'll return from whatever 'rendezvous' they've got going on in whatever realm they ended up in?" He gestured with air quotes, frustration in his tone.

"That one's up to us now," Aeron said firmly. "Micah has given us the information we need. We just have to figure out a way to bring our kids back—"

"If possible," Irene cut in. "What if the kids were taken for a reason, and we can't get them back until the time is right?"

"Then the seer better confirm that," Aeron replied, his tone hardening.

Ezra leaned forward. "While I hold my ground here, I'd like to believe I have all of your support," he said, glancing at each Alpha in the room.

Right now, the West Pack was in turmoil. Alpha Cane had dared to attempt to assassinate Alpha Asher Nightshade and take his place as Alpha. Except his plan folded when the brilliant Asher saw it coming. But now Asher was missing — and that was a problem.

Members of the pack already believed Asher was dead and that the leadership was hiding it from them. What were they supposed to say anyway? That Asher had been taken into a portal and vanished? No one would believe that.

It didn't help that Alpha Cane had gathered the other Alphas to his side and already crowned himself as the new Alpha. His forces had begun seizing territories within the West Pack, and it wouldn't be long before Cane's army marched straight on them.

Yes, the West Pack was now in the middle of an internal war of its own.

Leon told him, "My warriors might not be as skilled as the West Pack's, but they'll fight to the death if it comes to that. Henry was my good friend, and I won't let some parasite ruin the legacy he built so far...." He rephrased immediately, "We built so far. The Nightshade will remain in power, that's the way it was designed, and that's the way it'll stay."

Ezra saw the determination on his face and nodded, genuine appreciation flashed in his eyes. "Thank you," he said.

Then he turned to Alpha Irene.

"The women fight just as well as the men in my pack," Irene said, her tone filled with pride. "I only hope you don't underestimate them when they arrive tomorrow."

The South Pack was practically neighbors with the West, which was why they had come readily to their rescue.

Jeremiah, standing near the wall, asked carefully, "What about the Alpha King? Wouldn't all this end if he said a word?"

At that question, the room fell silent. Every pair of eyes turned to him, pinning him in place. Oh boy.

"Little beta," Aeron rumbled, his deep voice carrying authority, "if we waited for Elijah to solve all our problems, we'd be wiped off the face of this earth before he even lifted a finger."

Jeremiah suddenly felt small, and foolish, for asking.

Ezra's gaze shifted to Micah. For the first time, there was respect in his eyes. "Thank you for your time today. You can leave immediately, we'll make sure your transit to Aster City is safe. But if you're weary, you can stay the night. You'll be treated well."

"Thank you for the hospitality," Micah said, his voice dry. "But I think I'll leave immediately." He didn't want to spend another second here, not before someone decided to accuse him of something else he had nothing to do with.

Nancy told him, "And thank you for looking out for my daughter, Violet. Goddess guide you."

Micah only gave her a small smile before turning to leave.

Except, almost immediately, Violet's face flashed in his mind — that stubborn, purple-tipped-haired girl who also happened to be his sister. And knowing her, she wouldn't take kindly to hearing he'd walked away while her mate's pack was collapsing.

"No, no, no, Micah, don't turn around. Let them figure this out on their own," the demon on his left shoulder muttered darkly in his head.

Yes, he told himself, they were capable enough. They had the alphas, warriors, strategy, they didn't need him meddling.

But just as Micah took a step, the figurative little angel appeared on his other shoulder, whispering in a small but annoyingly clear voice, "Don't you think your sister would be disappointed if she found out you abandoned her mate's pack in their time of need?"

Micah groaned inwardly. "No, no, no," he argued with the voice in his mind, "They have Alpha Irene and Alpha Leon. They can handle this."

The angel persisted. "Without bloodshed? Can they do what you do? What if they die? Do you really want Violet to cry?"

"Oh, for crying out loud," Micah hissed under his breath, releasing a strangled sound of frustration.

When he turned, he found every pair of eyes in the room already on him.

"Is something the matter, Your Highness Micah?" Irene asked politely, her tone curious but composed.

Micah froze. Don't say it. Don't do it.

Yet his mouth betrayed him. "I can win you this fight," he said, "without any loss on your side."

The room went dead silent. Every person stopped moving. Even the air felt still.

Jeremiah gave him a look of disbelief. "You're kidding, right?"

He knew Micah, and with all due respect, the man knew practically nothing about war.

How could he? Elijah had practically banished him to Lunar Academy where he'd wasted his time "entertaining" students.

Micah was not surprised when most of them gave him that disbelieving look. It was the image he'd built over the years. Better that people think him the useless heir to the not-so-late king who could never amount to anything. It kept suspicion off him when it mattered. After all, who would believe he was a stone-cold assassin?

Unfortunately, for his sister, Micah would be tearing down those defenses and making himself vulnerable.

Ezra's gaze went hard. "How so?" he asked.

Micah didn't hesitate. "People think Asher Nightshade is dead and because of that, Cane is the face of the rebellion. However, cut off the head and the rest will scatter — they have no loyalty beyond the opportunity in front of them. Then they're easy to pick off."