

Defy 721

Chapter 721: Run With Her Mates

It was surprising, but even after all the exertion of the night before, Violet woke up feeling strong and full of vitality. If anything, she was the first one awake and had to rouse the others.

"Come on, it's morning already," she said, tugging on Roman's arm.

All he did was pull her back into bed instead.

"Just a minute more," Roman murmured sleepily, dragging her into the warmth of his chest until there was absolutely no space left for her to move.

"Roman, I have training," Violet reminded him, her words muffled against his bare muscles. Gods, he smelled too good and she was dangerously tempted to compromise for just one more minute.

The bed suddenly tipped.

Before she could react, Violet was lifted clean out of Roman's arms. She blinked in surprise and found herself staring up at Griffin.

Asher was already on his feet, stretching his shoulders. Roman, of course, was still clinging to sleep, and unsurprisingly, so was Alaric. Alaric loved his rest, and Roman was simply a lazy ass.

Griffin shot a sharp look at both of them. "It's Violet's first day of training. We're not delaying her."

That did it.

The South and North Alphas groaned in unison and reluctantly sat up. Alaric, in particular, looked exhausted, his hair a mess and tiredness etched on his expression. After summoning a storm the night before, it was hardly surprising.

It was still early enough that the sun hadn't fully decided whether it wanted to rise or not. If this were human time, Violet guessed it was around six in the morning, though fae time was flexible at best. They were walking toward the open gardens where her training was scheduled to take place when she noticed something was off.

The palace was bustling and crowded with unfamiliar faces. There were Fae of different kind and color, and each one they encountered stared at them strangely.

At first, Violet assumed it had something to do with the celebration planned for later—the formal introduction of their princess, aka her, to the realm. But the looks they gave her were strange and definitely not reverent. They were pointed, some amused, some openly annoyed, and others downright murderous.

Did she do anything wrong or were they not happy to receive their princess later tonight?

Violet slowed. "Is it just me, or are they staring a little too hard? And this is more than curiosity. I honestly can't tell whether they want to hug me or murder me."

Right on cue, two lithe fae females walked past them. The moment they spotted Violet, they broke into polite laughter, hands covering their mouths far too late to hide it.

"She must have really enjoyed last night," one whispered. "No wonder the thunder storm nearly flattened our homes."

Violet nearly tripped. "Huh?"

Her heart dropped straight to her stomach. Oh shit. Did the entire palace know she had... ?

Except she wasn't the only one who heard it. All four Cardinal Alphas caught the comment loud and clear.

Asher and Griffin lifted a brow while Roman slowly turned his head toward Alaric, his eyes bright with unholy delight. Alaric, meanwhile, stared straight ahead, his jaw tight, and expression carefully blank.

Right now, he was a man pretending very hard that he was not being publicly accused of causing a natural disaster.

"See?" Roman said, nudging Alaric with his elbow. "Told you that was a top-tier performance."

Alaric chanted mentally, "Don't encourage him. Do not encourage him."

But Roman didn't stop, and that was the problem

He said, "Teamwork clearly yields dramatic results and next time we could get creative. I propose we try alternative strategies."

Violet should not listen to Roman's nonsense but curiosity was a wicked thing.

And once Roman noticed he had her hooked, he continued, his eyes gleaming with wicked idea, "What I'm saying is, you know, first hole, second hole — collaboration effort. Very inclusive and very team-building."

"Dear lord." Griffin groaned, face palming. Not that he ever expected anything useful from Roman but one could always wish.

As for Violet, she simply flipped him off. She knew Roman had wicked ideas and it was confirmed. That was not her thing — although she was curious.

Roman let out a burst of laughter. "There it is, still guarding the untouched vault, Little mate." He clicked his tongue. "Such potential, wasted."

"Say one more word," Violet warned sweetly, "and I'll show you exactly how destructive I can be."

"Oh, I'm counting on it," Roman said cheerfully.

Then, as if struck by a sudden, nostalgic thought, he added, "You always were into the hard stuff like Griffin choking you just enough to make you forget your own name. Gods, remember how you two started? First day of school and barely through the gates and already halfway into foreplay." He shook his head, amused. "Some things never change."

Griffin growled, "You're an asshole, you know that?"

Roman didn't even try to defend himself and burst out laughing again, completely satisfied.

They reached the open field just as the sun began to spread over the spires of the palace. The gardens stretched wide and untamed here, a vast clearing ringed by trees whose leaves breathed magic. After Roman's incident with the Fae, they knew what boundary belonged to those little demons called the pixies and dared not to cross it.

Dew clung to the grass, the air cool against their skin, while the air smelled fresh with the scent of flowers.

And yet, the garden was empty. There was no queen or instructors around to start the training with her.

Roman broke the silence first. "Wow," he said, hands on his hips. "Either this is a test in patience, or the queen of the free Fae collectively decided to sleep in."

Asher's gaze swept the field, sharp and assessing. "No one misses royal training, especially not the princess's first."

Griffin frowned. "maybe something happened?"

Violet said nothing, but unease stirred in her chest. For all her mother's promises, for all the talk of preparation and duty, a small, treacherous thought crept in.

Did she ever intend to train her today, or was it always going to be postponed?

Minutes passed before footsteps approached from the garden path.

Rhara emerged, her expression carefully neutral.

Griffin turned immediately. "Where's the queen?"

Rhara exhaled. "The princess training is postponed for now."

Alaric stopped. "Postponed?" His brows drew together. "This is a life-or-death competition for Violet. You don't move training 'for now.' she doesn't have the luxury of time."

Rhara's gaze flicked to him, pointed. "The queen would be here if the realm hadn't spent the last several hours repairing structures shattered by a storm."

Just like that, silence fell.

Alaric went still. "...Storm?"

"Yes," Rhara said. "The one that uprooted three groves, split an elder bridge, and rattled half the courts out of their beds."

Roman winced. "Oof."

Alaric stared at the ground. "...I didn't think it was that bad."

Rhara studied him for a beat, then said. "No one was injured, but the damage was extensive."

Guilt settled visibly over Alaric's features. "I didn't mean—"

"I know," Rhara cut in. "But consequences remain."

She turned to Violet then, expression gentler. "You're free until further notice. I'll send word when the queen is ready."

And just like that, she was gone.

They stood there for a moment, the quiet rushing back in.

Asher broke it. "We're not wasting today."

Griffin nodded. "Agreed."

Roman's eyes lit up with unmistakable excitement. "I have an idea."

Everyone looked at him.

"Let's have a run," Roman suggested. "A real one. Violet hasn't had a chance to let her wolf loose yet, not properly."

Violet pointed at her chest. "Only me?"

Roman smirked. "Of course not. You've got your mates here." He tilted his head, eyes gleaming. "Let's make it a competition. See if you're as fast as you are powerful, princess."

Competition stirred inside of Violet.

"Oh, you're on," she said.

Griffin chuckled low. "That worked fast."

"All in," Asher surprisingly agreed to it.

Alaric rolled his shoulders. "No holding back."

The air thickened as power pressed outward.

Roman shifted first, his bones cracking, and magic flaring as green fur rippled over his form, tail wagging as he landed on all fours, tongue lolling in excitement.

Asher followed, his sleek black wolf emerging, his slitted eyes glowing. Griffin's shift came next—massive, red-furred, strength rolling off him in waves. Alaric was last, his white wolf edged with lightning, the ground faintly humming beneath his paws.

Violet's heart thundered.

Then she shifted.

A sharp pain lanced through her but it was nothing like the first time and was bearable. Her bones reshaped, wings unfurling as rich purple fur swept across her body.

Violet fell on all fours, feeling stronger than ever.

The world snapped into vivid clarity through her wolf's eyes. Every scent, every sound sharpened. And above it all—

Run, Thalia's voice urged, thrilled. It was loud in her head. She was

Roman dropped into a crouch and he growled once. But it was clear it was a countdown.

One.

Asher's tail flicked.

He growled again.

Two.

Violet's wings flexed.

Three!

They all took off.

Chapter 722: A Run For Power

"Fucking hell," Violet muttered as the Cardinal Alphas whizzed past her in the blink of an eye.

Even though she had braced herself—mentally hyping herself up to bolt the moment the signal was given—it still caught her off guard how fast they took off. She had pushed herself, really pushed, and it still wasn't enough.

No wonder they dominated lycan fangball.

But Violet refused to accept that outcome.

"Come on, girl," she urged her wolf. "Show them what you've got."

She pushed Thalia harder because if she lost, Roman would never let her hear the end of it.

In answer, Thalia howled excitedly inside her mind, and then she ran like her life depended on it.

Her powerful paws slammed into the earth with furious force, muscles burning as power surged through her. The world blurred at the edges as her instinct took over, and she chased after her mates with everything she had.

Griffin was the last amongst the cardinal alphas, with Alaric leading the pack—though Roman stayed almost neck and neck with him, one of them moving ahead for a moment only for the other to steal the lead the next. It was a constant shift of power and speed, the both trading places in a blur of fur.

Violet wished that she could mindlink with them. Maybe she could distract them, play some clever trick, and turn the race in her favor. But that wasn't possible. Not yet.

All mates could mindlink. When Violet had asked Thalia why she couldn't, the answer had been simple and frustrating: there was a breakage. The bond wasn't complete.

Violet knew exactly what that meant.

Asher hadn't bonded with her.

Strangely, she was grateful for it. If she couldn't mindlink with all of them, then at least Asher wasn't the only one left out. She couldn't imagine how lonely that would feel

being the single voice locked outside the circle. For once, the Moon Goddess had done something right.

Her focus snapped back to the race.

She was now running neck and neck with Griffin. Even in wolf form, he was enormous, easily the biggest among them. His red fur gleamed under the morning sun, powerful and breathtaking. For a fleeting second, Violet found herself admiring him, the sheer majesty of his stride.

But size came with drawbacks.

Griffin covered more ground with every step, while Thalia had to push harder—nearly three strides for every one of his—to keep pace. Her paws burned as she forced more speed, her muscles adapting to the space.

And then, she surged.

Violet ran passed him, and Griffin released a sound that could only be described as a resigned laugh. Thalia chuffed in satisfaction, a wolfish chuckle rumbling through Violet's chest.

Next up was Asher Nightshade.

The moment Asher sensed her presence beside him, he accelerated. His black fur blurred as he poured on speed, determination radiating from him in waves.

That was not surprising. The guy never liked to lose and he was not starting now.

"Ugh!" Violet groaned aloud, refusing to give in. "Come on, girl. We've got this," she urged Thalia the more.

As if answering the call, Thalia's pace increased again, now finding her balance. Violet matched Asher stride for stride, their rhythm syncing so perfectly it almost felt intentional.

Well, it was.

Asher's wolf frowned at their pace.

Violet had never seen a wolf frown before, but there it was—his expression was tight with disbelief as Violet kept adding speed no matter how fast he ran. Thalia cast him a smug look, her tail flicking as if in challenge.

Then she shot forward in a sudden burst, leaving Asher behind in a rush of wind.

If wolves could curse, Violet was certain Asher was doing exactly that.

She laughed, breathless and exhilarated, pride swelling in her chest. For the first time, truly and completely, Violet was so proud of her wolf.

If overrunning Griffin and Asher had felt like a victory, then chasing Roman and Alaric was a humbling reminder of exactly who she was dealing with.

Those two were monsters. They were not just fast, but devastatingly, cruelly fast.

Roman's green wolf moved with reckless confidence, his stride loose and powerful, while Alaric's stunning white wolf was something else entirely. He did not merely run but consumed distance.

Violet could feel the burn almost immediately. She never imagined running this much, not to mention pushing herself to this extent unlike the cardinal alphas who had years of practice on them.

Yet she refused to slow down or give up.

Roman and Alaric gave the others so much space that it was almost insulting. Violet had a feeling that was intentional. Alaric and Roman tend to be childish at times. Not that she could blame them, this was a competition and everyone was trying their best.

Roman shot Alaric a sideways glance, his tongue lolling briefly as if laughing mid-run. Unlike Roman, Alaric was so focused he did not even look back to check his competitors.

They were approaching the end of the line, and Violet knew, instinctively, that if nothing changed, she would lose.

Finally, Alaric turned his head, and sensed her.

The moment his gaze flicked back, something changed. As if he had been holding back all along, Alaric unleashed hell.

Electricity exploded across his white fur, bright veins of crackling light snapping and dancing along his shoulders and spine.

He raced faster.

Violet's jaw nearly dropped as she watched him pull away, the distance between them stretching impossibly fast. Even Roman faltered for half a second, startled, before snarling and pushing harder.

Violet's chest heaved as she chased Roman now, her focus narrowing.

"We are not going to catch them," Violet thought desperately.

Thalia's voice answered, calm and proud.

I am not just a wolf, Violet. I am one of a kind.

Violet barely had time to process the words before her body felt different.

Her shoulders tightened and a pressure built along her back, unfamiliar and terrifying. Her balance shifted. Her stride changed.

Realization hit her like a punch.

"No. No, no, no," Violet panicked. "Thalia, do not do that."

But it was too late.

Thalia took over and her wings tore free.

It was not gentle nor cautious at all. Her wings burst outward in a glorious, violent unfurling of purple, catching the air with a thunderous snap. Violet screamed, but it came out as a wild, exhilarated howl that ripped through the clearing.

And then they were airborne.

The ground dropped away.

The garden stretched beneath them, a patchwork of stunning colors and stone. The wind rushed past her fur, heart pounding against her ribs as Thalia flapped, powerful and sure, lifting them just high enough that the world looked suddenly smaller.

Violet's panic lasted all of three seconds before the awe took over.

They were flying. Fuck, they were indeed flying.

It was not soaring into the clouds, but they skimmed the air enough, their massive shadow racing alongside the wolves below. Griffin and Asher faltered mid-stride, skidding slightly as they looked up, startled, their jaws dropping.

Roman nearly tripped, but Alaric did not slow.

He ran harder.

Pride burned through the bond, sharp and electric. Violet felt it even without words. This was no longer a game. This was a challenge.

Thalia answered it with a triumphant roar.

She pumped her wings harder, muscles flexing, air screaming around them as they surged forward. The end of the clearing rushed closer.

Too fast.

Violet's excitement twisted into fear.

"Thalia," she cried. "We are too fast."

The wolf did not answer.

She dove.

The world tilted violently while the air roared in her ears. Violet screamed again, this time in pure terror, her voice shredding as Thalia folded her wings and plunged.

"No. Thalia, stop!"

Violet fought for control, panic flooding her senses as the ground rushed up towards her at a terrifying speed.

She can't do this! Thalia would be the death of her.

Unfortunately, thanks to the power struggle, Thalia lost focus and they hit the ground hard.

With a body that massive crashing from speed and height, the impact was catastrophic. The ground cracked, dirt and stone exploded outward in a violent wave.

Violet felt everything at once. The bone-jarring shock, the air driven from her lungs and the world spinning violently.

Then there was silence as dust filled the air.

Asher was the first to shift, his human form snapping into place as he ran, terror raw in his voice.
"Violet!"

Roman skidded to a stop moments later, shifting mid-motion, eyes wide with shock. Griffin followed close behind, already reaching for her.

But Alaric arrived first.

He shifted so quickly it was impressive as hell, dropping to his knees beside her as the dust settled, his hands shaking as he reached for her. "Violet?! Violet, are you okay?"

She groaned, rolling slightly, coughing as she sucked in a painful breath. The furs on her body began to recede, her bones reshaping until she lay there in human form once more, except her purple wings were still there.

"I'm good," Violet said quickly, wincing as she pushed herself up. "I'm good. Just..." She stretched experimentally, hissing. "Ugh. That hurts."

Chapter 723: Not In My Harem

It wasn't until the last minute that Violet realized why her back hurt so much.

"Fuck," Roman cursed "What have you done, love?"

Violet glanced back, her heart dropping when she saw one of her wings twisted beneath her at an impossible angle. The rich purple membrane was bent and the spot stained dark where blood seeped through.

"Oh," she whispered, a sudden chill creeping through her. "That's not right."

Violet hadn't felt the pain earlier because the adrenaline had dulled it, completely drowning it out. But now that the rush was fading, the agony hitting her full force.

Almost instantly, all four of her mates crowded around her.

Griffin swore under his breath, panic spreading across his face.

Asher unleashed a stream of colorful curses.

"What the fuck were you thinking?!" he snapped, his hand hovering helplessly near her wings, afraid to touch them and hurt her further.

Roman looked straight at Alaric, eyes wide. "This is supposed to heal, right?"

"It will heal..." a new voice cut in from behind them.

They all turned to see Lucien standing there.

"But," he added grimly, "you should be worried about how well it heals."

The moment Lucien stepped closer, the air turned hostile.

Low, feral growls rolled from Griffin's chest first, and it was deep enough to vibrate the ground beneath them. Roman followed immediately, his hackles raised, lips pulled back to reveal sharp teeth. Even Alaric snarled, electricity crackling along his skin, while Asher Nightshade was no less dangerous, his stare cold and pointed enough to kill.

Griffin moved instinctively, placing himself squarely between Lucien and the others, or more precisely, Violet, his massive frame blocking the Fae's path.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, his voice rough with warning.

Lucien stopped a few steps away, unbothered by the aggression aimed at him. He merely tilted his head, taking in the scene before his gaze returned to Griffin.

"Rhara asked me to take the princess for her first proper flight lesson, and it seems she had reason to worry."

Alaric took a step forward, lightning sparking at his fingertips. He growled, "You can leave, we've got this under control."

But Lucien's lips curved, slow and unimpressed. "Do you?" he asked. "Because the last time I checked, I'm the one with wings."

And to prove his point, his black wings snapped open. Wide, broad, and powerful feathers rippled as they spread, casting a dark shadow over them.

Of course, the display was deliberate, and the growls from Violet's mate deepened instantly. All of their shoulders tensed, muscles bunching as they were seconds away from tearing Lucien apart. None of them liked the guy, not when he already made his interest in Violet obvious.

Seeing the tension, Violet tried to speak, but the pain ripped the words right from her mouth and the sound that escaped her was a strained hiss instead.

That changed everything because all four of her mates turned to her at once.

"Violet."

They were all worried.

"Don't fight please, I'm good." Violet finally said, trying to put on a brave face, but they knew she was only pretending.

"I understand the protective instinct that comes with being mated, but she's in pain. Are you really going to let her suffer because you're threatened by another Fae?" Lucien added slyly, "Or worse, be added to the harem."

Asher bared his teeth, and for a split second, it looked like he would attack him. Only suddenly, his body language changed. The tension drained from his face, and he looked so calm it was unsettling.

"I like your confidence," Asher said. "It'll make it more satisfying when you fall."

Lucien's smile widened, unshaken.

Asher turned to the others. "Make space for him. Violet's health comes first."

But even with his words, none of them moved.

"Move," Asher said again, this time speaking gently. After all, he wasn't their leader here, and they were the mated ones. The decision belongs to them, not his.

Reluctantly, Griffin, Alaric and Roman parted just enough to create a narrow path, and Lucien stepped forward.

But every inch the Winged Fae advanced was met with snarls, low growls, and naked hostility. Griffin loomed at his shoulder, Roman flanking him from the side, subtly boxing him in, with Alaric taking over from the other sides. They were ready to strike if Lucien so much as breathed wrong.

Nonetheless, Lucien ignored it all.

Violet tried to stand the moment Lucien came closer but pain shot through her back like fire and she groaned.

"Don't," Lucien warned her, and for once there was no mockery in his voice. "If you move like that, you'll only make it worse."

Violet stopped and yes, she was naked. She had shifted quickly to her human form and in her current state, putting on clothing was close to impossible.

Lucien, surprisingly turned his head slightly, his eyes fixed on the ground as he crouched beside her, intentionally keeping his gaze off her body. It was a small gesture, and it calmed her mates who definitely were looking for an excuse to deal with him.

Lucien reached out slowly, giving Violet time to brace herself. His fingers skimmed the edge of her left wing first, carefully, and noticed the way the membrane twitched under his touch.

It was sensitive and raw. Violet sucked in a breath.

"I saw the moment you landed, you should have trusted your wolf." Lucien chided her.

Violet wanted to say something but thought better. She had no excuse after all.

Lucien traced farther, following the structure of the wing until his fingers reached the point where the pain exploded anew.

Violet gasped, sweat breaking out across her skin.

"There," he said. "That's the damage."

Griffin leaned forward. "Is it broken?"

Lucien shook his head. "There's no fractures, no torn bones, just soft tissue trauma and strained ligaments. You're quite lucky."

Except lucky didn't feel like the right word.

Violet's teeth clenched as another wave of pain rolled through her. Her body wanted to heal—she could feel it, that familiar pull, that warmth gathering beneath her skin—but she held it back hard.

Lucien noticed immediately.

"You're resisting it," he said.

"I don't want it to heal wrong," Violet forced out through clenched teeth. "If it heals twisted—"

"It won't," Lucien cut in. "Not if you let go now."

She shook her head, breathing fast. "What if—"

"Violet," Lucien finally met her eyes. "Your body knows what it's doing. But if you keep fighting it, you'll lock the damage in place."

At this point, her mates watched her with naked fear now. They stared at the scene with clenched fists, their eyes never leaving her.

"Let it happen, I'll guide it." Lucien instructed her.

Violet swallowed, then nodded.

She let go.

The sensation was immediate as heat flooded her back, intense and overwhelming. Her wings shuddered as power surged through them, her tissue knitting, the strain unwinding. Violet cried out, her breath breaking as the pain peaked, then slowly receded.

Violet slumped forward, panting while

Lucien monitored her progress, making sure the healing flowed correctly. By the time it was done, Violet was drenched in sweat, her chest heaving.

Lucien pulled his hands away. "Alright. Test them."

"What?" Violet rasped.

"Move them."

Lucien rose to his feet and, without warning, he snapped his own wings open. The motion was powerful, and he gave a single controlled flap, then another, demonstrating perfect balance and restraint.

Violet hesitated, then mimicked him.

Her wings responded

They stretched, unfurling fully this time without pain. The air shifted around her as she gave a tentative flap.

They worked.

Relief hit her so hard she nearly laughed.

"Good," Lucien said. "Now retract them."

Violet tried but that was the hard part because nothing happened.

Her brow furrowed as she focused harder.

"I can't," she admitted, frustration creeping in.

Lucien stepped closer. "Because you don't know how yet."

He positioned himself behind her—not touching, but close enough that his presence guided her. "Think of them as an extension, not an attachment. You don't force them away, but fold them in."

He demonstrated again, slowly this time.

Violet followed his lead, and the wings folded, and retracted.

Just like that, it was gone and her shoulders slumped in exhausted relief.

Lucien straightened. "We start lessons tomorrow."

Roman scoffed. "We can teach her to fly."

Lucien smiled thinly. "You think flying is all wings are for?"

In one motion, he snapped his wings outward and feathers shot free like blades.

They buried themselves into the ground inches from Roman's feet.

Silence fell.

Lucien turned his head slightly, eyes locking with Asher's. "They're weapons. And she'll need every advantage she can get in the Trial."

The stare held before Griffin stepped forward, towering over Lucien.

"Fine," he said coldly. "You teach her, but try anything stupid, and you're dead."

Lucien smiled.

"I wouldn't dare."

Then he turned to leave but Lucen had barely taken three steps when Violet called him.

"Lucen."

He stopped and turned back, one brow lifting as his dark wings moved behind him. "Yes, Your Highness?"

Violet met his gaze. "Thank you," she said "For helping me and fixing my wings."

Lucen said smugly, "You're welcome."

Then Violet added, calm and unmistakably firm, "But don't misunderstand this. You will never be part of my harem."

Chapter 724: The Ancestors

Violet did not walk back to the palace naked. Her men provided her with clothes she changed into, otherwise, there would have been a trail of murdered Fae — all because they looked the wrong way.

After the intense encounter with Lucen, they headed to their quarters, an awkward silence falling upon them.

"I'm so sor—" She opened her mouth to say the moment the door closed behind them, but Alaric simply enveloped her in a hug, her words trailing off.

"Shh, it's alright." He hugged her more, nearly stealing the breath out of her lungs.

The lightning prince kissed her on the forehead, saying, "There's no need to apologize, except maybe next time, give us a heads-up when you want to improvise. That way, we can do so within safety limits."

Violet lifted her head to give him a look, saying, "I still won though, didn't I?"

Alaric stared at her with a tender look in his eyes even as he argued, "We said running, not flying."

But Violet grinned. "Not my fault I have an extra limb." She subtly referred to her wings.

Alaric chuckled, then leaned down and pressed a brief kiss to her lips. When they pulled back, both of them were grinning like idiots.

Alaric told her, "You need to go wash up, princess. There's dirt all over you..." He emphasized this by running his hand through her hair, and just as expected, his fingers came up with dirt.

Violet pulled back and then glanced at her other men, who stood in the corner watching them, amused.

At once, a naughty idea hit her and she purred, "Any chance any of you gentlemen can help me out in the bathroom?"

At that question, Asher, Roman, Griffin, and Alaric looked at each other and then, as if it was rehearsed, all of them broke apart and went their own different ways, busying themselves with one thing or another.

"Are you kidding me?" Violet couldn't help but burst into laughter. So she was now a brand of temptation everyone wanted to avoid.

Truth is, she had intentionally teased them, and their reaction was to die for.

"Go have your bath, baby girl. There's no time to waste. Your training has only begun," Asher said to her.

And yes, the day was not over. On their way back, a Fae was sent to bring Violet to the library. Unfortunately, Violet could not go looking like something a cat dragged in — that was not princess-like.

So Violet took a quick bath and dressed in pants and one of Roman's fine long-sleeved shirts she stole. When she stepped out, Roman lifted a brow at her appearance, yet said nothing.

Violet grinned knowingly, then skidded in between Griffin and Asher, taking both of their arms in hers. "Let's go." She steered them away.

As usual, all eyes were on them as they walked through the hallway, not that Violet cared. She walked with her head high, and her men surrounded her protectively, the five of them easily drawing attention without even trying.

Asher had his arm around her waist, while Griffin's hand barely skimmed hers, but he was close enough that she could feel the heat of his body pressed against hers.

The crowd from the morning had reduced drastically, and Violet guessed whatever meeting her mother had with the provoked Fae was going alright.

They made it to the library, and there, Lila was already waiting for them.

"Princess..." Lila bowed her head, greeting her.

Being referred to like this, especially when they were good friends, was honestly strange, but it was time Violet started getting used to her status now.

So she gave her a subtle bow and then looked around. There was an unfamiliar Fae standing beside Lila and no sign of her mother, again.

Violet frowned. "Where's my mother, the Queen?"

Lila smacked her lips and said to Violet, "I'm sorry, but your mother has some important matters at hand, which is why your special training with her has been moved to tomorrow, and the other ones moved up to now."

Before Violet could have the chance to ask what special matter her mother had at hand that was more important than their training together, Lila was already introducing the Fae at her side.

"This is Nirmal, your current history teacher and the one who will help you make the right decision in the Ascension of Death trial."

The Fae named Nirmal was tall and willowy, like most Fae Violet had encountered so far. Her skin had an opalescent sheen that was neither pale nor dark, but nonetheless stunning and beautiful. The female's long pale hair fell down her back and was bound with gold ornaments. She wore simple robes of deep forest green that were cinched at the waist with a thin cord.

"I've been informed that this is an emergency," Nirmal said, facing Violet and studying her without pretense.

"Our priority," she continued, "at the moment is not to gain the most approval, but to keep you alive during the Trial of Death."

Those words alone caused a thick tension in the air, reminding everyone just how dangerous this trial was.

Nirmal gestured toward a long table near the center of the room. "We will begin immediately, Princess. Sit."

Violet did as she was told, her mates giving her distance. They didn't want to distract her, but at the same time, they wouldn't leave her alone either.

The royal archive was vast and circular. Floor-to-ceiling shelves curved along the walls, stacked with ancient tomes bound in leather, bark, bone, and materials Violet couldn't name. Floating sigils hovered between shelves, marking sections written in different languages.

And they were alone. There were no guards or anyone else around to bother them.

Nirmal moved around the table with grace, pulling a thick volume free from the shelves without looking. When she placed it down, the impact echoed far louder than it should have.

"The Ascension of Death is a test of recognition. Before you face the ancestors, you must understand who they are, and which of them might want you to fail. Because trust me, our kind has never been welcoming to outsiders."

She opened the book.

"Let us begin."

The records Nirmal opened did not list kings at all. No, it was only queens. The Wild Fae had always been matriarchal.

Nirmal began, "Queen Aelthryra the First shaped the Wild Fae realm, but she did not do it blindly. She ruled in close counsel with the Fifth Primordial god, the Untamed One herself—the sister who refused the Seasonal Courts. Together, they ensured the Free Fae would never kneel to the rigid structures of the other realms. It was Aelthryra who helped stabilize the magical barrier the Fifth god created and enforced the laws.

"Within that barrier, the Free Fae were protected, isolated, and taught to distrust what lay beyond. Outsiders were a threat to balance, and Aelthryra made sure that belief became doctrine.

"And of course, the Queens who followed after her were raised in that same way."

Nirmal flipped to the next page. "Queen Thryssia, the second, ruled with paranoia sharpened into cruelty. She believed contact with outsiders weakened the bloodline, and her laws criminalized fraternization beyond the barrier."

She turned to the next page. "Queen Myrrh continued the same isolation. So did Queen Vaeloria, who codified separation into unbreakable law. Under her reign, even curiosity was treason. The barrier was sacred, and the outside was corruption."

Nirmal sighed. "Pretty much all the Queens were the same except one. Queen Iskava. She was different, and though open-minded is too generous a word, she was curious. Iskava never crossed the barrier. Never spoke openly with outsiders. But she listened. She collected information and allowed stories to be recorded instead of burned. She believed knowledge was good, but even she dared not challenge the doctrine publicly."

Violet said, "So Queen Iskava is my only chance of coming out of this thing alive?"

"Possibly, yes," Nirmal replied, though even she did not sound sure.

Asher and the others, who were watching from their table, murmured under their breath, yet none of them interrupted.

"What about my grandmother?" Violet asked. "Since she's dead, doesn't that make her an ancestor?"

At the mention of that name, even Lila's expression changed.

"What? What is it?" Violet sensed something was not right.

Nirmal said, flipping to a page, "Queen Elowen, your grandmother, was admittedly the strictest of them all. Even when the veil shattered and the world beyond became unavoidable, she forbade your mother from any association with outsiders."

"Wow," Violet muttered under her breath. "Perhaps I should be glad I didn't meet her while she was alive. What happened to her anyway? Don't Fae live long lives?"

The room went still at that question.

"That information is confidential," Nirmal replied.

Violet's gaze flicked to Lila, confusion etched across her face.

Lila hesitated, then said reluctantly. "She didn't die from illness. Your grandmother was heartbroken."

Violet's brow furrowed. "Heartbroken, how?"

"She could not accept that Queen Seraphira loved a shifter and even carried his child. Queen Elowen believed your mother ruined her bloodline."

"And in her grief," Nirmal said this time, "Queen Elowen petitioned the gods to take her."

Violet stared at them both, stunned.

"So," she said slowly, disbelief threading her voice, "she committed suicide?"

Chapter 725: Why Purple?

"This realm never stops surprising me," Asher said sarcastically, making sure his words carried through the library.

Violet could not fault him either, this was simply ridiculous. The Free Fae were incredibly short-sighted. How could her grandmother commit suicide just because her mother birthed her? Though she didn't know the woman, it stung a little.

"It's not suicide," Lila tried to come to Queen Elowen's defense. "The gods simply took her upon her request."

But Roman snorted. "Whatever helps you sleep well at night."

Lila bristled at his words, saying defensively, "Queen Elowen was raised that way, so you couldn't exactly blame her."

Except Asher turned slowly, his expression as dark as a brewing storm.

"Don't," he said with an edge to his fault.

Lila frowned. "What?"

"Don't use her upbringing as an excuse," Asher snapped. "Don't dare use that as an excuse for her cruelty."

Everyone froze, stunned by Asher's outburst.

He continued, his voice rising with each word, "My father raised me to believe women were things you disciplined, not people you listened to. By your logic, should I get a pass for that?"

Lila didn't answer, the silence suffocating.

Asher continued, his eyes burning, "Should I be excused if I raised my hand to Violet? Should the gods nod and say, oh, it's fine, that's just his mentality?"

Lila's mouth opened, then closed.

"No," Asher said harshly. "Because upbringing only explains behavior, it does not justify it. Nearly everyone is raised with poison of some kind, and what matters is whether you drink it or spit it out."

"Damn," Roman muttered under his breath, impressed as shit. Then he raised a hand to support Asher, saying, "preach, brother."

Asher wasn't finished.

"Queen Elowen wasn't a child, but a ruler. A Queen. She had the power, knowledge, and centuries to question her beliefs, instead, she chose to cling to them. She chose the dogma over her daughter, and in the end, even chose death over growth and responsibility. I'm sorry, but that's not a tragic tradition, it's cowardice."

Lila's lips trembled. "You just don't understand—"

"I understand perfectly," Asher cut her off. "Because I was given a similar kind of excuse growing up by my father, and I had to fight every day not to become the monster he expected me to be."

On cue, he looked toward Violet, his expression tender. "Being raised wrong doesn't absolve you, it just means you were given a harder choice."

Then Asher shifted his attention back to Lila. "I know you want to preserve the memory of your precious queen, but refrain from feeding my purple queen such pathetic excuses. She has already received enough bullshit from the adults who were supposed to protect her. Don't add to it."

And for once, Lila had nothing to say.

Nirmal stepped in. "There is no time for arguments. It's important that the princess recognizes the faces of the ancestors who might help her."

"You mean the face of the ancestor who might help her," Alaric said sarcastically, "because so far, Queen Iskava seems to be the only one remotely welcoming. And even then, I worry her opinion would be drowned out by the others. If she wasn't brave enough to speak up while she was alive, I wonder if she will now that she's dead."

Nirmal said, her tone edged with irritation, "We're looking at possibilities here, and she's a good one. It's up to Violet to convince her."

But the cardinal alphas had never been known to make things easy on anyone. Roman yawned and said, "I still don't get the concept of my Violet having to convince these ancient figures that she's worthy to

rule when she's their progeny. Don't your ancestors have any sense of ancestral obligation to their own blood?"

Nirmal closed her eyes and took a deep breath. "It's the Trial of Ascension. They want to make the right choice."

Roman replied nonchalantly, "Then there shouldn't have been a stupid trial in the first place. Violet is your heir, simple as that. It's left to your people to get that into their heads."

At that, the large volume on the table before Violet snapped shut with a bang loud enough to startle everyone. A sudden gust of wind swept through the library, and power hummed in the air as Nirmal's eyes began to glow.

"The Trial of Ascension is tradition," she said, her voice sharp and threatening. "You would do well to respect it, beast. Or you can leave the Fae realm, simple as that."

Nirmal stood ramrod straight, a dangerous aura radiating from her.

But Roman remained seated, utterly unmoved. And though he appeared relaxed, an equally lethal presence answered hers. His eyes narrowed into slits—nearly matching Asher's, except his were green, stunning, and unmistakably dangerous.

"Make me," he rumbled.

His tongue flicked out, serpentine, as he licked his lips.

Violet noticed the way the other cardinal alphas subtly shifted closer to Roman's side, and it didn't escape her notice that they were preparing to fight for him if the need arose. She already knew how their minds worked.

"That is enough," Violet said before things could escalate. "I'm already participating in the Trial, so let's not step on each other's toes. Show me what I need to know."

Nirmal huffed before stepping away, moving to a far section of the library. With the Fae gone, Violet's gaze connected with her mates. But instead of Roman looking apologetic or even the slightest bit remorseful, he winked at her. Violet could only shake her head.

Nirmal returned moments later, slamming a book down on the desk. "This is it," the Fae said.

Violet looked down at the book. The text on its cover was written in the Fae tongue, a language she had yet to learn.

"The book is spelled so outsiders can't read it, even if they try," Nirmal said, her gaze flicking briefly toward the cardinal alphas.

Not that her men cared. The realm was biased against them. Old news. Move on.

Violet watched as Nirmal muttered a few words under her breath. The title on the book began to glow, and moments later, it flipped open on its own. Like a holographic display, the first page projected an image of Queen Aelthryra the First.

It was almost like watching a living memory, as a brief summary of the Queen's reign played out before her.

Although the average Fae were beautiful, Queen Aelthryra was stunning and ethereal. Her skin was translucent, as though magic lived within her, illuminating her from the inside. And her hair, unmistakably, was purple. Violet noted that detail and said nothing.

Nirmal spoke as the projection continued. "Though blood calls to blood, and you will likely feel your ancestors as part of you, it is important that you are able to recognize them."

Violet nodded, committing every detail to memory. Unlike her mother, Queen Seraphira, whose presence was warm and welcoming, Queen Aelthryra radiated a fierce, no-nonsense authority that left no room for softness.

As the first Fae Queen to rule with the Untamed One, common sense told Violet that this queen was the least she'd want to get her approval. Her mind was rigid and sealed in time, and only the fifth goddess could perhaps convince her.

As soon as Queen Aelthryra's projection came to an end, it was followed swiftly by her daughter's, Queen Thryssia. Thryssia was the spitting image of her mother, not only in appearance, but in presence because they both shared the same crushing aura of dominance.

There was no doubt that Aelthryra had raised her daughter with an iron hand, molding her into extensions of her own will. And Thryssia, in turn, carried that legacy forward without hesitation, preserving the rigid doctrines of their people with ruthless devotion.

And yes, Thryssia had purple hair too.

"Is the purple hair important? What does it signify?" Violet finally asked.

"Yes," Nirmal said simply. "Each Fae court bears a signature color. It's how the gods marked us. For example, the Winter Fae are often marked in blue and known to be cold, still, and unyielding. The Spring carries green, signifying their growth, renewal, and endless cycles. Summer burns gold, sometimes red. They are heat, vitality, and excess."

"And Autumn..." Nirmal breathed. "Their signature color is orange. They are decay and harvest intertwined. Endings that feed beginnings."

"Is that so?" Violet absorbed that before asking, "And the Free Fae? Why the color, purple?"

"For no grand reason," Nirmal admitted. "Or perhaps for every reason at once." She folded her hands. "Purple is the color that does not belong to any season. It is born of extremes, warm and cold, fire and shadow. Much like the Free Fae themselves. We have it all."

She then added, almost thoughtfully, "Some of us believe the colors is the way gods show that they too have a sense of humor. Others think it was simply their way of making sure we would always be recognized."

She added finally, "Or it could be all nonsense. The gods were simply bored."