

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 726: True Names[1,515 words]

Chapter 726: True Names

"Nonetheless," Nirmal said, "it's a known fact that the more coloring one has, the closer they are to royalty. As you can see with the previous queens, their hair and eyes were mostly—"

"Purple," Violet finished.

"Purple is the Fifth God's color," Nirmal continued. "Most fae give thanks to the goddess when they birth a child with purple hair, eyes, or even skin." She paused, scrutinizing Violet, her gaze lingering on the purple roots of her hair before following the black lengths down.

"...Although you," Nirmal clicked her tongue, pity outweighing admiration, "I suppose that's enough for a half-breed."

Violet's spine straightened.

In a quick motion, her purple wings unfurled, snapping open and claiming most of the room as the air stirred violently.

"I think this is enough purple," Violet said coolly. "Any more than this and I might actually throw up."

Nirmal only nodded. "You make a fair point."

Violet tucked her wings back in just as swiftly, the movement clean and controlled. She had to admit Lucien's lesson had helped, and she was curious what else he could teach her.

They went back to studying the holograms as the rest of the Queens appeared. Each of them were magnificent in her own way, carrying a different shade of authority. However, all Violet felt for them was admiration and no pull of any kind.

Well, that was until Queen Iskava appeared.

The Fae was breathtaking.

Unlike the others with their familiar purple hair and overwhelming beauty, Queen Iskava had long white hair that spilled down to her waist while her eyes were an enchanting luminous purple. But it was her smile that made Violet's breath hitch.

So warm and kind. It was certainly not the smile of a ruler towering over her people, but of someone who welcomed them in. For a moment, Violet forgot she was looking at a projection because she felt her shoulders relax without realizing it, a strange peace settling over her.

"I'll go for her," Violet said suddenly.

Nirmal studied Violet's face. "You're certain?"

Violet nodded, her gaze never leaving Iskava's image. "I can feel it. She'd help me. I don't know how, but she would."

Nirmal smiled in approval. "Not a wrong choice. Queen Iskava was the kindest of all the queens."

"Obviously," Violet murmured.

Griffin cleared his throat. "Not to interrupt," he said carefully, "but did none of the queens marry? Or am I missing something?"

Nirmal glanced at him. "What do you mean?"

Griffin gestured vaguely toward the hovering figures. "The ancestors are all queens with no mention of kings, or is it consorts? The rules say Violet needs approval from an ancestor, but I refuse to believe the men back then were so shortsighted they didn't matter."

Alaric added immediately. "I was actually thinking the same thing."

Asher remained silent, but he was clearly listening.

"So," Griffin pressed, "where are the men?"

As if this wasn't Violet's lesson, the cardinal alphas began talking over one another, throwing theories and countering them. Their voices became louder as the debate grew louder.

"What about the queens' men?" Violet asked Nirmal. "Were there none? Or are they simply not counted among the ancestors I'm meant to convince?"

Nirmal did not answer immediately. Instead, she turned her head toward Lila, their eyes communicating subtly.

"Well," Lila said slowly, "the truth is no one seeks out the consorts."

Violet lifted a brow. "Why not? They were still royalty and ruled beside the queens. Why then are they ignored?"

Lila shrugged. "Because the queens were the ultimate rulers. Every Fae who has ever entered the Trial of Death believed that a queen's approval carried the greatest weight. So that's where the focus has always been."

Asher's eyes had narrowed, his jaw tightening as he listened. "So it's not forbidden," he said. "No law says Violet can't seek their approval. Faeries just don't bother."

Lila nodded. "Correct. There's no rule against it. The tradition simply celebrates the queens."

"Who gives a fuck about tradition?" Asher continued coldly, "What matters is Violet surviving, and if Queen Iskava doesn't answer her, or worse—rejects her—then what? You expect us to stand there and watch her die because everyone decided the men weren't important enough to wake?"

Lila drew in a deep breath. "I understand your concern, Asher Nightshade. Truly. But the consorts rarely awaken during the Trial of Ascension, they just remain dormant."

Roman snorted. "Probably because no one ever looks for them. I mean, if I slept for a thousand years and every time my wife got summoned for a fun trial like this one, I was left behind, I'd be pissed too."

Griffin let out a low chuckle despite the severity of the situation.

Alaric tilted his head. "He's not wrong."

Violet's gaze drifted back to the holograms of the Queens—row after row of them—and not a single one featured the men beside them. It didn't sit right with her. If she ruled, her men would stand with her, not be erased from history. No wonder Baron wanted to take it all away. The realm had been unfair to the men for far too long—though trying to kill her was definitely not the way to fix it.

Then Violet said to Nirmal, "There surely has to be a way to wake them, right? I'm entering the land of death anyway, that means the rules are already broken. I'll be dead if I fail. So why not go all in?"

Roman grinned. "That's my girl."

Asher supported her. "I don't care if it angers them. If their approval means Violet lives, then she better wake every single one of them. So tell us, is there a way?"

Nirmal hesitated, then said, "Yes, there is a way. Once you cross into the land of death, you can summon more than just the queens."

"Good," A slow, dangerous smile curved Violet's lips. "Tell me how to wake the men history forgot."

"You summon the consorts by calling their true names."

"True names?" she repeated. "Just that?"

"That is not just anything," Nirmal said flatly.

Violet frowned. "Then explain it."

Nirmal began to pace as she explained.

"Among the Fae, names are bindings. When a Fae is born, they are given a calling name—a name for the world, the one that can be spoken freely. But beneath that lies a true name which is bestowed by the gods themselves. And that name holds power."

She continued, "To know a Fae's true name is to know their essence. It grants the speaker the ability to summon them across realms, demand their attention, or, if wielded cruelly, bind them. That is why no Fae gives their true name lightly. It is often shared only with a mate."

"So let me get this straight...." Violet tried to absorb the information, "I need the true names of the consorts to summon them. And I'm guessing those names aren't just lying around in a book somewhere."

"No. They are not."

Violet didn't look surprised. If anything, she looked resigned. "Figures."

"However you are the princess, so you will be given the names."

Huh? Violet straightened at once, her eyes listening up. "I will?"

"Yes," Nirmal continued. "But not while you remain in the land of the living."

The spark in Violet's eyes dimmed. "Of course," she muttered. "There it is."

Nirmal folded her hands behind her back. "True names of the dead are not to be spoken in the living realm. Doing so is considered a grave disrespect."

"So when then?"

"Right before your ascension into the realm of death. The names will be entrusted to you privately."

Asher's gaze sharpened. "And what's the likelihood she remembers them once she crosses?"

Silence fell.

"That," Nirmal said, "depends entirely on her."

Alaric cursed under his breath. "You're asking her to carry divine-level information across a realm shift. That's not exactly stable ground."

"I am aware," Nirmal said. "But this is as far as the laws allow us to bend without breaking. Those names are not trifles. If they fall into the wrong hands, they could be used to enslave an ancestor. Or worse."

Violet lifted her chin. "I won't let that happen."

Griffin turned to her. "Violet—"

"I know," she cut in. "None of you are okay with this. But this trial was never meant to be safe. If I fail, I die. If I succeed, I rule. Either way, I'm walking into danger. I'd rather walk in prepared."

Nirmal gave a single nod. "Very well."

She snapped the heavy book shut with a decisive thud. "That is all you need to know for now."

Roman blinked. "That's it?"

"For that subject," Nirmal said. "Yes."

She turned sharply toward the exit. "Now we move on to general lessons."

"General lessons?" Asher said.

Nirmal looked over her shoulder at all four of them. "The princess will soon be presented to the Fae. Publicly. With her mates at her side."

Her gaze swept over them, unimpressed. "What makes you think we would allow any of you to embarrass her—or yourselves—before our people?"

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 727: The One Who Will Kill The Princess[1,011 words]

Chapter 727: The One Who Will Kill The Princess

"You're all dressed up," a voice drawled from the corner of the room as Consort Baron adjusted the last fold of his royal robes.

He did not object when a pair of slim, pearly hands slipped around his waist from behind. Instead, Baron straightened the rich purple fabric calmly while she leaned into him, resting her head against his back.

"Where are you headed to, my love?" she murmured softly.

And yes, this was none other than Celeste, Baron's lover.

Nearly everyone in the kingdom knew there was no love lost between Queen Seraphira and her consort, Baron. Their union was so toxic that even Baron had no true place in the palace, completely ostracized by the queen herself. It was no secret, then, that he sought elsewhere what Seraphira was expected to give but refused.

Among his many lovers, one stood above the rest.

Celeste.

She was striking, with long dark hair and a willowy grace that made her seem almost fragile at first glance. But beneath that softness was unwavering devotion. Celeste was loyal to Baron to a fault, worshipping him with a fervor that bordered on reverence, as though the ground he walked on was holy simply because it bore his steps.

It didn't help that Celeste was from Baron's House, making them kin.

"What do you think?" Baron asked casually, studying his reflection in the Fae mirror. "The princess is making her debut tonight. As her father by law, it's only proper that I attend and honor it."

At that, Celeste's lips curled before she scoffed. "Really?" She stepped in front of him and adjusted his robe with the confidence of one who's done it a thousand times.

When Celeste was through, she tapped absently at his chest, then lifted her gaze to meet his. "I'm guessing you have plans for her tonight?"

Baron laughed softly. "Plans? Oh, I don't."

"Ron..." Celeste used the endearment, pouting as she slid her arms around his neck. "Don't keep me waiting." Her fingers tightened slightly, coaxing. "Tell me."

The queen's consort wrapped an arm around her waist and drew her closer. "I'm not making any moves for now. At least not at this party, and certainly, not during the competition."

Celeste frowned. "Why not? This could be your chance to deal with the little pest before the people grow attached to her." She hesitated, then added darkly, "Or before she grows stronger. You've heard the news already. The Queen intends to train her herself."

Baron burst into laughter. It was the kind that scraped against the nerves, and it only made Celeste's irritation flare hotter.

"Patience, my love. Patience." He tapped her nose lightly, almost fondly, before releasing her waist and taking her hand.

"Just like you," he continued, "Queen Seraphira expects me to make my move. The Fae Queen has suddenly grown a spine now that her daughter is back." His smile thinned. "It proves the old saying, mothers will go to any length for their child. So yes, she's alert, and very much looking for my head."

Celeste leaned closer. "But she can't kill you. If you die, she dies."

"Just because she can't kill me doesn't mean she can't imprison me for eternity. All that matters is that I remain alive so she remains alive. And we can't have that, can we?"

He lifted her chin with a finger, forcing her to meet his gaze. Her pale purple eyes illuminated her worry.

"No," Celeste said. "We can't."

Baron smiled then. That was exactly why he favored her. She understood him without needing things spelled out.

"What about the Trial of Ascension?" Celeste pressed. "Surely there's something you can do."

Baron's expression shifted, turning cautious. "About that, I'm afraid the Trial is one of the gods' games. I cannot interfere without incurring their wrath. Even I know which lines not to cross." He paused, then added smoothly, "But that doesn't mean we can't place more pieces on the board. Members of our House can still compete and hope to win."

Celeste's hands fell to her sides, disappointment flashing across her face. "That's it? Hope?" Her voice rose, "I didn't follow you this far to gamble our future on half-measures, Ron. The princess is powerful, whether you like it or not. Look at what one of her mates did last night. If she can bind herself to one powerhouse, let alone several, what does that make her?"

She swallowed. "What happens when she wins the trial and grows even stronger?"

"Shhh." Baron pressed a finger to her lips.

But she pushed on anyway, frustration spilling over. "All I'm saying is—"

"What makes you think," Baron cut in, "that I don't already have a plan?"

Celeste fell silent.

"Huh?"

Baron's smile returned, slow and knowing. "Come," he said, taking her hand once more.

Together, he led her carefully out of the room and down into the lower wing of the house. The basement like area was where Baron stored his most valuable and dangerous possessions.

Celeste had been here before, but not all the time. Baron did not like people messing with his stuffs.

This time, however, something was different.

At the center of the chamber stood a pedestal, and upon it rested an object concealed beneath a dark cloth.

Celeste slowed, curious, then glanced at Baron in silent question.

He gave her a small nod.

Carefully, she stepped forward and lifted the veil. Her breath caught.

Beneath the cloth was a small transparent glass dome. Suspended inside it was a caterpillar no longer than a finger. Its segmented body was translucent, almost crystalline, faint light pulsing beneath its skin. The head tapered into a thin, flexible head crowned with microscopic barb.

Celeste's eyes widened.

"Isn't this—"

"The Mindleecher Larva," Baron said calmly, a sinister light igniting in his eyes.

Her breath stuttered. "B-but... that thing is forbidden." She swallowed hard before asking, "Whose mind do you intend to control with it?"

Baron didn't hesitate.

"The one close enough to kill the princess."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 728: The Princess Debut[1,035 words]

Chapter 728: The Princess Debut

The Mindleecher Larva was one of the most forbidden organisms in Fae history. Finding one was nearly impossible because the creature fed on flesh and could only be found where death had occurred in great numbers—not a single grave, but a mass one. And since Fae rarely died, let alone in such numbers — without war —its existence alone was a rarity.

Which was why possession of one was considered treason.

The larva responded only to its breeder. Once the breeder infused it with their magic, it would answer solely to their command. Upon being released, it could enter a victim through any vulnerable opening—the ear, nose, mouth, even the tear ducts—slipping inside with terrifying ease. From there, it traveled directly to the brainstem, anchoring itself deep within the mind.

Once embedded, the victim was no longer free. The Mindleecher did not seize control violently, which made it far more dangerous. The victim often didn't even realize they were being controlled.

The creature threaded itself through the host's thoughts, emotions, and instincts. Commands felt like their own ideas at first until the control became absolute.

If resistance arose, the punishment was unbearable. The larva retaliated by slowly draining cognition, memory, and sanity. Victims who fought it for too long did not survive.

There was no cure.

Extraction killed the host instantly. Magic only worsened the damage, and no divine intervention had ever been recorded.

That was why the High Faeries outlawed it centuries ago, and why possession alone warranted execution without trial.

"Who will kill the princess?" Celeste asked, curiosity glinting in her eyes.

Baron smiled. "It wouldn't be fun if I revealed that to you, would it?"

"Ron..." she pressed softly.

Baron leaned in, cupping her face between his hands before kissing her lips. "It's for your own safety," he murmured against her mouth. "I wouldn't want to drag you into this mess if everything goes wrong."

"But—"

"I might not even get to use it on the princess," he cut in. "For all we know, she could provoke half the Free Fae and end up despised. For once, our people's close-minded thinking might work in my favor."

He kissed her again, slower this time, then added, "Now go get dressed. I want you on my arm while I display the most beautiful woman in the realm..." His hand slid through her dark hair as he finished slyly, "And my future queen."

A bright smile bloomed across Celeste's face. Overcome with excitement, she pressed a deep kiss to his lips before hurrying off to dress.

The moment she was gone, Baron's smile vanished.

He turned back to the pulsing caterpillar beneath the glass dome, his expression cold.

"I'm sorry, princess," he murmured softly. "But you cannot escape your fate."

Meanwhile....

"Oww. Stop pulling at that."

Roman swatted Asher's hand away with a scowl, his fingers instinctively flying to the small flower braided into the west Alpha's hair.

"If you yank it out, I swear I'll make sure they regrow it and style it again."

Asher closed his eyes in irritation. "It looks ridiculous."

Why would he be wearing a flower? It was ridiculous.

"It looks good on you and dilutes your ice cold aura which is the whole point." Roman shot back.

They had barely survived an entire day of lessons on Free Fae customs, etiquette, hierarchy, and taboos. Apparently, stepping on the wrong moss could be an insult. Wearing the wrong color could start a feud. And now, hours later, it was finally time for the princess's debut into Fae society.

Their mate Violet had been whisked away the moment lessons ended. And yes, they were not spared either.

Asher stood rigid while attendants finished adjusting his clothes. He wore a long-sleeved black tunic woven from pure silk, the fabric soft yet structured, with plant engravings stitched in deep obsidian thread that caught the light only when he moved. The neckline and cuffs were stiffened with golden embroidery, and framed him elegantly.

His trousers were fitted and charcoal gray, dark enough to ground the tunic without drawing attention away from it while

Polished black boots hugged his calves.

Then there was the makeup.

A thin line of smoky black liner traced his eyes, extended just enough to sharpen the natural slant of his gaze. It made his gray eyes startling, and almost unreal. Cold, dangerous yet beautiful in a way that made people forget how to breathe.

And the flower was a single blossom woven deliberately into his hair at the temple.

Asher hated it.

Roman, on the other hand, loved it.

The god of love in question lounged comfortably while attendants fussed over him, wearing a short-sleeved green tunic cut in a deep V that showed off his chest and powerful arms. The fabric clung where it mattered and flowed where it should, embroidered with gold-thread vines.

Gold dust had been brushed lightly across his cheekbones and nose, scattered like freckles kissed by sunlight. It caught the light when he smiled, which he did often and shamelessly. Small gold hoops adorned his ears, along with a dangling chain on one side that brushed his jaw when he tilted his head.

His hair was styled loosely, half pulled back with leaves woven through.

Roman caught Asher staring and grinned. "You can stare all you want, I know I'm pretty."

Asher growled under his breath. Shameless bastard.

Then Griffin stepped in and Roman's mouth fell open in surprise.

"Well damn," he said slowly, his eyes lighting up. "Not bad at all."

Griffin's hair was long again, falling past his shoulders in thick waves. It looked exactly like it used to be, untamed and wild, framing his face in a way that made his sharp features even more striking.

"How did they do that?" Roman asked, circling him.

Griffin scratched the back of his neck, a bit shy. "Magic extension."

Roman immediately reached out, fingers sliding through Griffin's hair. "Damn. That feels real."

Griffin flushed but didn't pull away.

Asher watched with narrowed eyes, already tired.

Then the room went quiet as Alaric walked in.

Every gaze snapped to him.

Roman swore under his breath. "You have got to be kidding me."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 729: Meet The Princess[1,530 words]

Chapter 729: Meet The Princess

And yes, there was a good reason Alaric stole the attention of the room right now—or rather, the Alaric they once knew—because the one standing before them was entirely different.

Alaric Storm's snow-white hair was now long and straight. It had been pulled back neatly, flowing down his back in smooth, silken lengths. A silver circlet rested against his forehead, lending him the unmistakable air of high status, or more precisely, royalty.

Despite his natural paleness, there was a light dusting of powder across his face, emphasizing his sharp cheekbones and strong, straight features. Small crystalline patterns crept above both of his well-defined brows, catching the light whenever he turned his head.

Finally, Alaric was dressed in layers of white robes intricately embroidered with swirling patterns resembling ancient Fae runes. The fabric was rich and structured, yet flowed with effortless elegance. Overall, with his calm, distant expression, Alaric gave off an almost untouchable aura. He looked every bit a Fae prince—and had his ears been slightly tapered, the illusion would have been perfect.

Of course, he could have achieved that with a bit of Fae magic — which his attendants had suggested — but he did not care. As much as he appreciated his mate's culture, he was still proudly a werewolf—and he intended to make that clear to the free Fae.

"No!!!!" Roman's wail broke the silence. He looked at Alaric with the expression of a man whose friend had utterly betrayed his trust.

"Dude...." He pointed at Alaric with trembling fingers, still struggling to process his appearance. "Isn't this taking it too far? Do you want to hoard her attention that badly?"

And of course, this was all about Violet. They were all dressing up for her — or at least, that was how Roman reasoned it. And Alaric had gone extra.

Asher, at this point, ignored both of them, focused on adjusting his tunic. Leave it to the two idiots to be dramatic. If Violet only wanted them for how they looked, then he wouldn't have stood a chance from the start.

His gaze drifted to his reflection in the mirror, to the slitted gray eyes he'd spent most of his life despising. "Cursed eyes", people called them.

But Violet had said she liked them.

He blinked slowly, studying the way the new makeup sharpened their edge, how it made them stand out. ...Okay. He admitted it quietly to himself. It did look good.

Asher lifted a hand, tempted to yank the flower from his hair again, but instead he smoothed it into place, admiring the result. He smiled — well just a little because Roman started wailing again, and the moment was ruined.

Asher groaned inwardly, tempering the urge to strangle somebody. Goddess save him. How did he get associated with these idiots in the first place?

Alaric ignored the South Alpha and went to sit on the couch, but Roman, like a persistent housefly, followed him with accusations.

"Tell me the truth," Roman insisted. "You did this on purpose because you know our mate loves long hair. Now Violet's not going to take her eyes off you. What about me? Aren't we brothers? You're supposed to communicate your genius ideas to me too!"

Alaric looked him over calmly and said, "You're showing off your strong arms and sexy chest. That should steal her attention too."

Roman threw his head back and let out an exaggerated groan. Sure, Violet's eyes would drag over his chest all night—that was the plan—but long hair on Alaric? That was novelty. Brilliant novelty. How had he not thought of it?

Griffin spoke up then. "It's just hair, Roman. Nothing else."

"Just hair?" Roman scoffed. "Easy for you to say. You'll be the one with your eyes closed, whining give me more while she runs her fingers through it."

He waved a hand dramatically. "And do you know the extra pleasure that comes when she yanks it so tight you might come undone on the spot—" He jabbed a finger at his own shorter hair. "But look at this. This is a tragedy."

Alaric swore he hadn't meant to laugh, but it ripped out of him anyway. Roman was just so fucking hilarious sometimes. He laughed until he clutched his stomach, and even Griffin had to cover his mouth, shoulders shaking.

"Oh, laugh it up," Roman snapped. "You two majestic shampoo-commercial assholes."

But his outburst only made Alaric and Griffin laugh harder. Asher wasn't spared either; his carefully maintained straight face looked downright tortured as he fought the urge not to laugh his heart off.

Roman Draven will be the death of him.

Then Griffin finally broke through his laughter long enough to suggest, "If it pains you that much, why don't you ask for your own hair?"

That turned out to be a terrible idea.

Roman froze mid-rant, eyes lighting up like he'd just been handed divine revelation. Why hadn't he thought of that? Probably because there wasn't much time—and because there was the tiny, nagging question of what long hair would even look like on him.

But Roman crushed that doubt instantly.

He would look devastating. Exotic. Like some feral forest god stepped straight out of a forbidden smut story. The kind of male Violet had absolutely never seen before—and would never, ever recover from.

Slowly, a grin stretched across Roman's face, only for Asher to crush it instantly.

"Don't even think about it."

Roman's face fell.

"Oh, come on."

Asher didn't budge. Instead, he turned to the remaining attendant, who had been lingering nearby in case of last-minute requests. "You may leave now."

The fae didn't need to be told twice. There was something about Asher's presence that sent a chill straight down the spine. She gathered her silk-lined tray and practically fled the room.

When Asher's attention snapped back to Roman, his gaze was murderous.

Roman huffed and stomped over to the empty couch, dropping onto it with exaggerated annoyance.

Asher didn't spare him another glance. Roman was a spoiled brat with the emotional range of a two-year-old. He'd get over it.

Just like that, everything was back to normal as Roman continued sulking while Griffin and Alaric got into conversation with Asher silent, lost in his thoughts — probably executing plans in his head.

Then the door snapped open and all four heads turned in the direction as if drawn by magnet. They all felt it. Violet.

And yes, Violet stepped in.

She looked like something pulled straight from a dream.

None of the cardinal alphas dared to talk, spell bound by their mate standing before them. Violet's hair was swept back from her face, smoothed and wet gelled so perfectly it framed her features without a single strand daring to rebel. The style bared her forehead and temples, giving her an almost sculpted look.

Her golden eyes were the first thing that held attention. The makeup around them was darkened just enough to make the gold burn brighter and luminous, looking less human.

Then her lips were painted a deep, muted shade of purple, matte and regal, a color that was less decorative, making a bold statement instead. Across the bridge of her nose and the high points of her cheeks, fine flecks of glitters caught the light like stardust.

Resting against her forehead was a delicate circlet, similar in design to Alaric's but unmistakably hers. It was thin, crystalline, and glowed, as though responding to her presence rather than simply sitting upon her skin.

And then there was the dress.

At first glance, it looked as though Violet wore nothing at all. The fabric was impossibly thin, clinging to her like a second skin, translucent in a way that defied modesty without ever crossing it.

It was a soft, radiant shade of purple, one that made her skin appear almost luminous beneath it, as if light lived just under her flesh. The garment was both simple and complex, flowing seamlessly over her body while intricate patterns shifted subtly within it.

When it came to both sides of her belly, Roman and Alaric's rune could be seen through it, and despite how daring it appeared, none of her intimate parts were exposed. The magic of it was so precise, intentional, and reverent. Tiny points of light threaded through the fabric, sparkling as she moved, like beautiful stars trapped in silk.

Violet's expression was calm, and composed. There was softness in her gaze, but commanding as well. She did not need to assert her power, no, it existed at that moment. It was undeniable.

The princess of the Free Fae. Violet Purple. Their mate. Except she looked less like their mate standing before them and more like the living embodiment of magic itself. It was no wonder Alaric had to close Roman's mouth with his hand—it had fallen open.

"Holy shit..." Griffin muttered, unable to believe his eyes. "How...?" He was utterly amazed by the dress.

Violet blinked, releasing a slow breath. She had been anxious, wondering what her mates would think of her appearance, but now it seemed she had worried for nothing, especially with the way Asher stared at her.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 730: Kill Baron[1,527 words]

Chapter 730: Kill Baron

You know the wonder on a child's face the first time they saw the galaxy. Yes, this was how Asher stared at her, as if she were his Milky Way. His world. His everything.

Call it instinct, but Violet knew the bond between them was close to snapping into place. The attraction was sizzling, and heavy in the air. Like the breath a diver held just before plunging into the deep, they were both suspended in that moment.

Violet wasn't naïve. Three of the matebonds had already formed in moments of extreme danger, and she knew this one would be no different. But she was ready for it. No one was taking Asher away from her, not after all the waiting, and the hard-won steps that had led them here.

"Is it disturbing that I get blue balls when you two eye-fuck like this?" someone said, snapping Violet back to the present.

It was Roman of course.

Violet took one look at him and her stomach took a dizzying flip.

Roman Draven was practically engineered to destroy her self-control, and she bet her ass he knew it. Otherwise, he would not be dressed like that. Her gaze dragged helplessly over his arms as he deliberately shifted into a pose that emphasized every sculpted muscle. Then there was the glimpse of his chest, toned in a way she was painfully familiar with in more ways than one.

Holy creator of the universe.

Violet cleared her throat loudly, her hand lifting on instinct to her scalp before she remembered the sheer effort that had gone into fixing her hair and stopped herself just in time.

But Roman caught it all and his grin spread slow and wicked, all traces of earlier sulking gone. He had gotten exactly the reaction he wanted.

Needing distance before she did something reckless, Violet tore her gaze away from him, and that was when it landed on Griffin, and something finally clicked.

"Wait a minute..." Violet's expression turned comically shocked as her mind finally registered Griffin's long hair. She had already gotten used to it being short—and her mates were far too much, and far too damn hot and distracting—that it hadn't fully hit her until now.

"No way..." Violet breathed in disbelief, her eyes lighting up with excitement at the same time.

As if to prove it was very real, Griffin ran a hand through his hair and actually flipped it, smooth and dramatic, like he was shooting a hair commercial.

Violet was still trying to recover from that when Alaric stepped fully into view—and his hair was long too.

"No... no... no..." Violet said, caught somewhere between shock, disbelief, and pure delight. "This is not possible!"

She threw her hands up in frustration, half laughing, half overwhelmed. "Ugh! You can't tell me otherwise, you guys are actually trying to kill me!"

Yes. They were absolutely trying to sabotage her.

Because right after the long education about Fae culture, Nirmal had taken exactly three steps toward the door before stopping.

"Oh. One more thing," she had said, turning back far too casually.

Violet had still been riding the fragile relief of that's over when Nirmal continued, her voice perfectly even, "Following your rather

atmosphere-disturbing intimacies last night, Her Majesty has issued a temporary decree."

Violet already knew this was going to ruin her life.

"Until lightning dampeners and grounding rods are installed across the realm," Nirmal went on, "the princess is to refrain from further rumpy-pumpy for the safety of infrastructure, and trees, and faetizens."

At that moment, there had been a silence so loud she heard her dignity die.

Violet had not said a word. No, she had simply stood there, face burning, while Roman wheezed laughing, Griffin tried to look respectful and failed, Alaric stared up

at the ceiling as if he wasn't the perpetrator of the crime.

And now, they dare to show up like this with glorious, traitorous, finger-combing, pull-able long hair. Her very own brand of kink. Violet died a little inside.

In all honesty, she tried to hold it inside but was unable to. At once, Violet moved towards Griffin and then ran both of her hands through his red hair and moaned.

Goddess. It felt so good.

Thalia's voice roared in her head, urging her to show her mate exactly how much she loved his gift. Violet shoved her down into the deepest recess of her mind. That greedy, horny animal was not about to get her into trouble tonight.

She was so tempted to kiss him. But Violet knew herself. Once she started, she would not stop. And right now, with the entire kingdom waiting and the very real risk of another storm, restraint was important.

So instead, Violet leaned in and rubbed her face against Griffin's in an unmistakable show of approval. A deep, satisfied rumble rolled through him in response.

He definitely liked it.

Then she turned to Alaric.

Unlike Roman, who always vibrated with excitement and never hid his need to be in her arms, Alaric was more composed.

But Violet saw the subtle excitement in the way his eyes followed her every movement. Alaric was just quieter and restrained, but no less intense.

Violet reached for him slowly, and slid her fingers into his hair. Her breath hitched.

There was no difference between his hair and the extension. It was so real and silken beneath her touch, just like Griffin's — as if it had always been his.

"I still feel like this is a dream," Violet murmured, her fingers threading through it again, and again.

A low sound escaped Alaric's throat before he could stop it. He leaned into her touch without realizing he'd moved at all.

Then a wicked thought sparked in Violet's mind and she tightened her grip, giving his hair a sharp tug.

Alaric's eyes widened, then darkened instantly. His breath stuttered, pupils blown wide as desire shone openly across his face.

Violet smiled dangerously.

"How long is this supposed to last?" she asked innocently.

Alaric's heart was racing now, but he forced himself to answer. "As long as I want," he said. "I can even grow my hair out with it."

At that answer, Violet's lips curved. She leaned closer, lowering her voice.

"That should be enough time for the lightning dampeners to be installed, right?"

Understanding struck him hard.

Alaric swallowed, his Adam's apple bobbing visibly. He nodded once, very carefully.

Griffin was the one who broke out in laughter while Roman, on the other hand, looked utterly devastated. That should've been him.

Thus, he made up his mind. He was getting his own hair extension after this party was over.

Before Violet could tease him, the doors snapped open.

Rhara stepped inside, composed and unyielding as ever.

"It's time, Princess."

In the Queen's Quarters...

Queen Seraphira sat on the edge of her bed, her spine straight despite the fatigue settled deep in her bones.

The Fae Queen was already prepared for the party, dressed in deep, regal purple with a fitted bodice embroidered with ancient runes. Soft furs lined the collar and sleeves, it was silver-white and impossibly fine, resting against her shoulders. Even unwell, the Queen of the Free Fae did not look diminished.

Zuru knelt before her, careful hands glowing as they traced patterns over Seraphira's wrists and sternum. The healer's expression was grave, tight with concentration as she worked in silence.

After a long moment, the glow faded.

"You are stable enough, Your Majesty," Zuru said. "However, you must refrain from channeling any magic tonight, especially if you intend to train the princess tomorrow."

Seraphira exhaled softly, then nodded. "I understand. No dramatic demonstrations for my people, then."

Zuru rose, smoothing her robes. "I will check on you again after the gathering."

With a respectful bow, she slipped from the chamber, the doors closing gently behind her.

Only then did Seraphira allow herself to lean back slightly, tension easing from her shoulders. Lila stood nearby, watching her queen with quiet concern.

"Well?" Seraphira asked. "How fares the party? How many of my people honored the invitation?"

"I would say nearly all of them," Lila replied. "They may not be open to the idea of a foreign princess, but they are certainly curious about Violet." She paused, then added carefully, "Your husband as well."

Seraphira's lips curved faintly, humorless. "I expected nothing less. Baron would never pass up an opportunity like this to irritate me."

Her gaze hardened. "Make sure eyes stay on Baron. If he so much as makes a move, incapacitate him immediately."

Lila stiffened. "Your Majesty... if I do that, your life—"

Seraphira cut her off, her voice absolute. "I have no life anymore, Lila. Better I fall with him than leave Violet vulnerable. It is the least I can do."

The room seemed to tighten around her words.

Seraphira looked directly at her and said, "It is a command, Lilarin."

Lila had no choice but to bow her head slowly. "As you command, Your Majesty."

Seraphira drew in a steady breath. "To the party, then. It is time for my daughter to take her rightful place."