

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 731: Find A Husband[1,585 words]

Chapter 731: Find A Husband

Not every Fae was excited to be at the party. Right now, Lord Taryn stood before Hannah's door. Being Hannah's babysitter also meant escorting her to the princess debut party tonight.

The Queen did not trust Hannah enough to leave her alone and wanted her where her eyes could reach her at all times. Queen Seraphira couldn't quite figure the girl out—and honestly, he didn't blame her. He couldn't either. Thus, the responsibility had been pushed onto him to watch Hannah and find out what her game plan was.

If only he knew.

Taryn sighed. He was the pridefather of the lion clan, for crying out loud, and somehow he'd been reduced to this.

Just as Lord Taryn raised his hand to knock, the door flew open and Hannah stepped out, and for a brief, disorienting moment, he forgot how to breathe.

Hannah was dressed in deep, royal amethyst purple, so rich and luminous, the fabric flowing in soft layers of silk beneath sheer organza panels. Tiny floral prints bloomed across the organza, almost seemingly alive, as if enchanted flowers had been pressed into the fabric by magic itself.

The bodice was fitted on her, sculpting her waist perfectly, with subtle embroidery tracing upward like climbing vines. And then from her shoulders cascaded light and airy organza tassels.

But it was the dupatta that stole breath.

It fell from her shoulders in a soft, flowing arc, the edges embroidered with floral motifs and finished with tiny tassels that brushed her arms and back, giving her an air of mystery and power. Hannah did not look like a princess this time, she was a forest enchantress.

Taryn did not even realize he was still gaping at her until she twirled around, the organza fluttering like petals caught in a gentle wind.

"It looks amazing on me, doesn't it?" Hannah giggled, absolutely loving the dress.

That was when Taryn snapped out of it, clearing his throat and forcing himself to regain his composure.

He said sarcastically, "At this point, people might forget all about the princess and stare at you all night."

Although, now that he thought about it, his words sounded dangerously close to a compliment.

But Hannah didn't take it that way. Instead, she said brightly, "Oh, I'm no princess this time. I've played that role already. Right now, I'm a legend."

"Excuse me?" Taryn was utterly confused.

Hannah ignored him and continued, "I didn't think the Fae tailors they sent would be able to pull this off, but they did an impressive job. You can think of me as Little Purple Riding Hood."

"Little Purple Riding Hood?"

"I took inspiration from the original, of course. Little Red Riding Hood." She shifted to the side, the gown flowing with her movement. "But damn," Hannah breathed, admiring herself, "I think I have better fashion sense than the original red, don't you think?"

"Huh?" Taryn was still lost.

Hannah looked up and realized it. "Oh," she said, then explained, "It's a famous lore about a girl in a red hood sent through the woods to visit her grandmother. Everyone warns her not to stray from the path, but she does anyway. She meets a wolf who pretends to be harmless, gains her trust, and uses it against her. In the end, depending on the version, she's either rescued or learns the hard way not to trust easily."

Hannah paused, a sly smile curving her lips. "Although, if I'm the purple riding hood, doesn't that make you the dangerous wolf? Or rather," she tilted her head thoughtfully, "the big, bad Lion King..." And yes, here she was, flirting again.

At this point, Hannah couldn't help it. She just wanted to get a reaction out of him.

For his part, Taryn merely gave her a blank stare so utterly unimpressed that she began to feel ridiculous.

"Fine, you win," she said dramatically. He was such a killjoy.

"Let's go." Taryn moved as if to grab her arm, then thought better of it. His self-control around the girl was already stretched dangerously thin. She was his own special brand of temptation.

Though he didn't show it, Taryn had noticed everything from her lush, plump lips to those childbearing hips. Yes, the gods were definitely out for him this time, and he doubted he'd escape his fate unscathed.

"Wait, you're going like this?"

Hannah's words slipped out before she could stop them.

Lord Taryn paused mid-step and glanced over his shoulder, unimpressed. "Yes. What about it?"

Hannah didn't answer right away. She swallowed instead, heat creeping up her cheeks as her eyes betrayed her and traveled where they absolutely should not have.

Her bargain-bin Mufasa was wearing nothing but fitted dark pants, low on his hips, and some sort of thick, sleeveless fur garment draped over his shoulders. It wasn't quite a jacket, more like something a warrior would wear into battle rather than a palace party. But his arms were completely bare, corded with muscle, while a glimpse of his chest showed beneath the fur, strong and broad and entirely distracting.

Hannah stared and stared, not even realizing she was doing it until a low sound rumbled from Taryn's chest.

A growl.

Hannah's heart leapt thinking she had done something wrong.

But Taryn's eyes had darkened, not with anger, but a heavy possessiveness that sent a shiver straight down her spine.

Before she could take a step back and slam her door in his face, Taryn closed the distance between them in two strides and caught her wrist, pulling her forward. Even with the dress on, Hannah swore their skin was aware of each other.

Her breath hitched.

Taryn lifted her chin with two fingers, forcing her to look up at him. Her heart hammered so loudly she was sure he could hear it.

"Does it bother you?" he asked.

His voice was deep, controlled, and dangerous in a way that made every nerve in her body spark to life.

"No," Hannah rasped without thinking.

His brow lifted slightly, that dark gaze sharpening. She rushed to clarify, words tumbling out. "N-not in a bad way. I-it doesn't make me uncomfortable in the way it's supposed to."

Silence stretched between them.

"In what way, then?" he asked.

Hannah swallowed hard. "You look... hot in it," she admitted, her cheeks burning. "In that kind of way."

For a heartbeat, she could have sworn pride shone across his face.

Then they were staring at each other, breathing the same air while the moment thickened. When Taryn's gaze dropped to her lips, the world seemed to tilt. Hannah leaned in—she must have—because suddenly he stepped back.

The absence hit her like cold water.

"Let's go," Taryn said with a voice so distant, it was as if nothing had passed between them at all.

He turned and walked away.

Hannah stood frozen, watching his retreating back, her pulse still racing, trying to understand the whiplash of what had almost happened—and what hadn't.

"Get a grip of yourself, you fool!" Hannah slapped her cheeks. She couldn't be crushing on that bargain-bin Mufasa who clearly didn't care about her. This was all a game to him.

"Are you coming or not?" Taryn said, glaring at her.

And just like that, they were back to normal.

That was fine by her anyway. Now she could focus on her agenda for the party.

Of course, a strategist like Hannah couldn't attend such a high-class party—with such massive husband potential—without a battle plan.

Operation *Find a Fae Husband and Secure Permanent Residency in the Fae Realm* was still in progress. And tonight was the perfect opportunity to execute it.

There would be hundreds of fine Fae males in attendance. Surely, at least one would fall madly in love with her on sight. They could get married as early as tomorrow. Hannah refused to believe fate would be so stingy as to deny her whirlwind romance.

She just had to play her cards right.

If she could assassinate people, how hard could it really be to charm one young, naive heart?

Hannah didn't know how, but she could tell Taryn was an old man. For starters, they called him Lord. She might not know much about the Fae, but she knew they lived long lives, and Taryn had to be ancient enough to have earned such a position.

Secondly, his manner of speaking and his behavior. Hannah studied people for a living, and yeah, the Fae lord was definitely not in her age bracket. Not with the way he resisted her flirting so easily.

So Lord Taryn was officially crossed off her list of potential men to seduce.

Hannah squared her shoulders and lifted her chin, mentally snapping herself back into focus. Romance was a tool, not a weakness. She could afford a flutter here and there, sure, but getting distracted by one emotionally constipated lion king with murder eyes was not part of the plan.

She hurried to catch up with Taryn, the hem of her purple gown brushing against the marble floor, and miraculously not tripping over it.

The palace corridors opened up as they walked, revealing high arches, floating lights, and Fae nobles drifting past in elegant clusters. Every head turned at their passing, eyes lingering on the human in their midst. Some wrinkled their noses in disdain, while others stared openly, curiosity gleaming in their gaze.

And when they finally entered the grand hall, it was safe to say her dream had come true.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 732: No suitors[1,518 words]

Chapter 732: No suitors

When the name "Fae" was usually brought up, humans often imagined only graceful, willowy beings with pointed ears and glittering wings. But the truth was far broader than that, and Hannah saw it the moment she stepped into the hall.

There were so many variations of creatures gathered in the grand hall that Hannah didn't realize she had stopped walking altogether, her steps slowing until she was simply standing there, gawking.

Closest to the entrance were the nobles or High Fae, the kind human beings most often mistook for the entirety of Faekind. Tall, elegant, and unnervingly beautiful, they wore flowing silks and embroidered robes in various tones.

Their ears were long and tapered, adorned with gold cuffs and chains, skin smooth and flawless, and their eyes too bright to be entirely comforting. They didn't need to be announced, not when they carried themselves with such elegance it bordered on arrogance.

There were the nymphs whose beauty was more elemental than ornamental. The

Dryads wore gowns spun from leaf-silk and bark-thread, their hair woven with ivy and blooming flowers.

They were totally unlike the mountain nymphs, who favored heavier fabrics, their posture proud and immovable.

Their kin, the Naiads wore translucent and layered dresses that clung to them as if they were perpetually damp.

Hannah's breath caught when she noticed the Beast Fae. Lions, wolves, serpents, birds and a whole lot of them walked upright among the crowd, their animal sides seamlessly fused with humanoid forms.

Some of them wore tailored pieces adapted for their tails and wings, while others favored ceremonial armor decorated with feathers, claws, or carved bone. But it was their eyes that drew her attention the most. They were sharp, predatory, and very much alive.

It was also surprising to find sea-born Fae among the crowd. The selkin kin carried a sheen on their skin, scales catching the light along their cheekbones and wrists.

Their gowns fell all the way to their feet, and when they moved, it felt less like walking and more like floating. Those who chose to walk, did so barefoot, leaving damp impressions behind them, the footprints shining briefly before vanishing as if the floor itself drank the water away.

Everywhere Hannah looked, there was a form of magic. The fae in attendance were so numerous it made her head swim.

And suddenly, painfully aware that she was the only human—well, half-human, but who was counting—in a sea of immortals, Hannah swallowed.

So this was it.

And she had just stepped straight into the Fae den in search of a husband.

Yes. Hannah rejoiced inwardly.

There were so many options to choose from.

Just like that, Hannah began to scan for her potential husband. For now, her options were concentrated among the High Fae who looked more human, and the beast Fae, since she was technically half of them herself. The selkin Fae were hauntingly beautiful, but she liked the land and certainly did not wish to be part of their world.

That land–sea long-distance relationship wasn't going to work out, especially not when she was running out of time. Hannah needed a Fae to fall in love with her and marry her as soon as possible—anything less, and she risked the gods judging her case and possibly killing her.

Of course, a certain lion shifter was not ignorant of the way a certain human had been scanning the room.

"What are you up to?" Taryn asked, scrutinizing her with narrowed eyes.

"Admiring the creatures made by the god you serve," Hannah answered shamelessly.

The response did not sit right with him. Admiring other creatures? Taryn was not stupid. He knew exactly what she meant—other males. Yet just minutes ago, she had called him hot. How could she—?

"Oh," Hannah suddenly said, startled when her gaze collided with the haunting blue eyes of a Fae across the room.

"That's cute." She actually smiled when the tall male flushed, clearly embarrassed at being caught staring at the human—his apparent object of interest.

Taryn was slowly losing his grip on sanity.

"Whoops," Hannah whispered excitedly, barely containing herself. "I think he's coming my way."

And true to her words, the Fae began walking toward them.

Taryn's jaw clenched. Since when were their kind so welcoming to outsiders? What the hell was happening?

Hannah cleared her throat, straightening her posture and readying herself. Suitor number one, she thought.

The young-looking Fae stopped before her and bowed slightly. "My lady, might I—"

"No," Taryn said flatly, stepping half a pace closer to Hannah.

"Excuse me?" Hannah turned to him, utterly confused.

The Fae looked startled as well. "I only wished to introduce—"

"She's busy," Taryn finished, his tone brooking no argument.

Hannah's eyes flashed. "I am not busy," she hissed through clenched teeth.

Perhaps it was the look in Taryn's eyes—or the obvious tension crackling between them—but the Fae immediately straightened, bowed again, and excused himself without another word.

He retreated quickly that Hannah could only helplessly stare after him, before she turned back to Taryn, anger burning beneath her skin.

"What the hell is your problem?" Hannah whispered, careful not to draw attention to herself.

"I should be asking you the same question. What are you up to?" Taryn demanded. He badly wanted to know—because there was a nagging feeling twisting in his gut, one he didn't like at all.

"What I'm up to is absolutely none of your business."

"Oh, it's very much my business," Taryn shot back. "You're a prisoner here, remember? I report directly to the queen if you're up to something."

"Well, I'm not doing anything that would harm the princess, so get off my back and let me breathe," Hannah snapped.

She turned to walk away, but Taryn caught her arm at the last second and spun her back toward him.

"You're under my watch," he said lowly. "So behave. That includes not talking to any Fae at this party—especially the males."

"What?" Hannah stared at him, incredulous. Then her lips curled into a slow, sarcastic smile. "You do realize you sound like a jealous asshole right now, right?"

Taryn scoffed. "Stop kidding yourself."

"Is that so?" Hannah replied coolly. "Then you should have no problem watching me flirt with every male in this room, right?"

She yanked her arm free.

A warning growl rumbled from Taryn's chest as he grabbed her again.

Hannah leaned in slightly, her voice calm and deliberate. "You should control yourself, Lord Taryn. The Fae are watching."

That was when Taryn looked around—and realized she was right.

Eyes were on him. On his hand gripping her arm.

Fuck.

He released her instantly, as if she'd burned him.

Hannah shot him a look that clearly said, thought so, then turned and disappeared back into the crowd, finally free of the infuriating lion shifter at her heels.

Taryn could see the judgement on the faces of his people and the way they whispered amongst themselves. They were questioning how a respected leader of the lion clan was getting involved with the outsider — and a young one at that.

He dragged a hand through his hair, jaw tight.

His beast was restless, pacing beneath his skin, snarling with an instinct that had no patience for propriety. Mate.

The urge burned hot and unrelenting, and it made his restraint feel like chains dug into his bone.

This was madness.

Before he could stop himself, Taryn turned sharply.

Where was she?

His eyes scanned the crowd. No Hannah.

"Fuck," he muttered, already moving, shoulders parting the crowd as he pushed forward.

Hannah, meanwhile, was having the time of her life. Kind of.

She stood near the center of the hall, slowly turning in place, her eyes wide as a child dropped into a fairytale.

Crystal chandeliers floated overhead, suspended by nothing at all, refracting light across the polished floor. Music drifted through the air and was played by an unseen orchestra.

The Fae were loud. Laughing, drinking and talking over one another in animated bursts.

And yet not one male had approached her since that first interruption.

Hannah scowled into her glass.

If that bargain-bin Mufasa hadn't stepped in earlier, she'd already have one Fae wrapped neatly around her finger. Instead, all she got were curious, speculative, and wary looks, and no one dared close the distance.

Annoyed, she accepted a drink from a passing pixie, the tiny winged creature hovering politely with a tray before darting away.

She lifted the glass, taking a slow sip.

That was when she heard it.

"...I heard the princess is fat and ugly," a female voice said lightly, somewhere to her left.

Hannah froze mid-sip.

Her brows knitted together as she subtly turned her head.

A small cluster of Fae women stood nearby, their voices pitched low but careless.

"How could something like that lead us?" another scoffed. "The queen should send her back to wherever she crawled out from."

A third laughed softly. "Why bother? She won't last the Trial anyway."

Hannah's grip tightened around her glass.

So that was how this was going to be.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 733: Meet Your Princess[1,534 words]

Chapter 733: Meet Your Princess

If the females noticed Hannah nearby, they clearly didn't register her as a threat. Or worse, they didn't care about her at all.

"I heard she's mated to beasts," one of them snorted, "And not even proper Fae ones."

"So?" another smirked. "They're powerful. That's what matters. I heard one of them caused that storm that nearly tore the kingdom apart. I'm surprised someone like her even managed to bind a mate that strong."

"She probably doesn't deserve them," a third one chimed in, her tone filled with envy. "Four mates? Isn't that just greedy?"

A soft laugh followed. "It's all because of her mother," another sneered. "Queen Seraphira carries her on her back. Without the Queen, she'd be nothing—"

The sentence ended in a shrill scream.

The golden-skinned Fae gasped as liquid splashed down her gown, staining the fabric and dripping to the floor.

"Ahh!"

Hannah stood there, the glass tilted in her hand, and utterly unapologetic.

"Oops," she said lightly. "My hand slipped."

The Fae stared at her in horror.

Hannah's gaze dragged over the ruined dress, then lifted back to the Fae's face, a slow smile creeping up her lips.

"Well," she said pleasantly, "I guess you're uglier than the princess now."

For a moment, there was nothing but stunned silence as the female Fae stared at her, struggling to process what had just happened. Then realization hit her.

A human.

The golden-skinned Fae's eyes flared with fury as she looked Hannah over, taking in the round ears which was an unmistakably mortal feature.

"What the hell?" she snapped. "You're a human?"

Hannah didn't even flinch, instead, she tilted her head proudly.

"Yeah, a human who looks better than you ever will." She looked the Fae from head to toe, unimpressed. "To think all that so-called High Fae blood, and this is the best you turned out? All skin and bones, with arrogance for personality, and nothing to show for it but a title you didn't earn."

She added enough for the insult to land. "It must be tragic to live that long and still end up so forgettable."

The Faeries around them had gone so quiet, it felt unreal. It was the kind of silence where even a pin drop would sound like thunder.

Then the golden-skinned Fae shrieked, her voice sharp with outrage. "You insolent little mortal!"

Just like that, light broke out from her skin, the brilliance increasing in furious waves, and growing brighter by the second. The heat of her power pressed against Hannah's face.

"Oh. Wow," Hannah muttered, nerves finally catching up to her bravado. "I may have pushed that a little too far."

Fae nearby recoiled, some stumbling back, while the others shielded their eyes as the glow intensified. Panic rippled through the crowd.

Before Hannah could react, a solid body moved in front of her, blocking the blinding light entirely. She was engulfed by a familiar presence, his scent wafting into her nose and his broad shoulders cutting her off from danger.

"That's enough," another voice thundered from behind.

The glow faltered and finally dimmed.

Hannah sucked in a deep breath, her heart still racing as the air cooled. When she lifted her head, she found herself staring up at a very familiar lion shifter, his jaw clenched, and his eyes blazing with barely restrained fury.

Taryn.

Hannah swallowed hard.

Yeah. She was definitely in trouble now.

"I leave you alone for one moment, and you're already starting a fight?" Taryn snapped, fury in his voice.

"I wouldn't be starting anything if she hadn't insulted my sister first," Hannah shot back, equally angry. "Or do you think I go around picking fights for sport?"

Taryn's eyes narrowed instantly. "She did what?"

He turned just as Hannah did, and that was when Hannah noticed the golden-skinned Fae was being restrained now, held back by a male who stood between her and the growing crowd.

Hannah lifted a brow.

Oh.

The Fae was handsome. Strikingly so. Broad-shouldered, and solid in a way that screamed predator. Yes, there was something unmistakably beastly about him. Beast Fae were always built differently from the high Fae, heavier, stronger, and made for violence.

Hannah's interest sparked immediately.

"Who's that?" she asked, unable to stop herself.

"That's Lucien..." Taryn stiffened beside her, trailing off as realization hit him. His jaw tightened. What the hell?

Before Hannah could press further, the air in the hall shifted and a clear voice commanded through the space.

"Her Majesty, the Queen, enters."

The moment Queen Seraphira came into the grand hall, everything changed.

All the conversations died off while the music changed into a cinematic one. One by one, Fae turned, and then all at once, the sea of immortals dropped to their knees in a synchronized motion.

Hannah did not need to be told, the pressure of the Queen's presence alone forced her spine to bend. She lowered her head instinctively, her pulse quickening as the queen walked past her.

Queen Seraphira walked through the parted crowd in all her regal glory, her regal robes sweeping against the marble floor.

When she ascended the dais and turned, the hall remained frozen, hundreds of bowed heads waiting for her permission to rise again.

"You may rise," the Queen commanded.

They rose.

Immediately, the Free Fae stood straighter in a composed manner as if anything less would be an insult to their lovely queen. Even the golden-skinned Fae who had nearly incinerated Hannah moments earlier huffed and stalked away, clearly unwilling to risk Seraphira's notice.

Hannah, unable to help herself, made a small, satisfied face in her direction.

Taryn noticed it and muttered under his breath. "Behave."

Hannah rolled her eyes but did as told. Although her gaze drifted, catching sight of Lucien just as he disappeared into the crowd, his dark wings folding neatly behind him.

Whoops. The Fae was so fine.

Before she could dwell on it, Taryn reached out and caught her chin between two fingers, forcing her attention forward.

"The Queen is about to speak," he said.

Hannah frowned. But true to his words, Seraphira stepped forward.

The Queen began, her gaze sweeping the hall, "I must thank you all for answering my call tonight."

A murmur of approval rippled through the crowd.

"I see the strength of our realm gathered in one place," she continued. "And so, it is only right that I acknowledge those who lead our people."

The queen's eyes fell on them.

"Lord Taryn, Pridefather of the Lion Clan."

A deep roar of approval thundered from the lion shifters. Taryn inclined his head in acknowledgment.

Immediately, Hannah leaned closer to him, whispering, "Why do they call you Pridefather? Are you really that old?"

Taryn's nose flared, his jaw tightening. Although he said nothing, it still pissed him off somehow. Would she reject him if she knew?

Taryn did not like the answer his mind supplied.

"Prince Lucien of the Peryton," the Queen called next.

A powerful cheer broke out as Lucien came out briefly, bowing with a confident sweep of his wings. Hannah watched him with renewed interest. Taryn scowled at them both.

"Representatives of the Selkin Kin of the tides," Seraphira continued.

The sea-born Fae lifted their hands, water shining along their skin as their clan responded with soft, echoing calls.

"The Dryads of the Rooted Groves."

They waved at the queen.

One by one, the Queen called the leaders of each clan out until silence returned.

"You all know why you are here tonight," she said. "It is true that the existence of my daughter was not revealed in the manner tradition demands."

A ripple of unease spread amongst the Fae.

"Yes," Seraphira continued, "I broke our laws. I deceived you."

The murmurs continued.

"But I did so to protect her."

The Queen lifted her chin.

"The Princess of the Free Fae was born outside a traditional mate bond."

Shock rippled through the hall like lightning through water.

Some of the Fae had never believed such a union beyond their kind was possible. But the queen just confirmed it, publicly.

Seraphira raised a hand.

"For centuries, we have isolated ourselves from the world. But time moves forward, whether we wish it or not. And perhaps this is the sign from the goddess who no longer dwells with us that the Free Fae must stop cowering in secrecy."

She turned slightly, extending her hand toward the entrance.

"Join me," the Queen declared, her voice ringing through the hall, "in welcoming your Princess, Zinnia."

The doors opened, and for a single moment, the world—or rather, the Fae—held their breath.

Everyone knew the princess was human. However, what stepped through that doorway was nothing short of a goddess, and no one could tear their eyes away.

It wasn't just Violet's stunning attire that stole their breath. It was her aura. Her face was stoic, her expression unreadable, and she walked with the unshakable confidence of one who knew she had been born to rule.

Hundreds of eyes followed her every step, but Violet met them head-on, openly challenging as she moved through the space cleared for her.

And then her mates stepped out behind her.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 734: Violet Zinnia Purple[1,559 words]

Chapter 734: Violet Zinnia Purple

The Fae were struck with awe at the sight of their princess. She looked confident, unshakable, regal. But unknown to them, Violet was anything but calm.

Inwardly, she chanted with every step she took. *You are a fucking princess. Don't trip. Stare at their fucking faces. This is your night.*

Violet was used to being stared at, but usually as the strange human girl with purple hair. Now, having finally found her people, their gazes cut the deepest.

She could see it all in their eyes.

The surprise.

The curiosity.

The judgment.

The half-breed princess who had to prove herself worthy to rule them.

Then the pressure hit her suddenly, constricting around her chest until her breath faltered and her steps nearly did too.

Fingers slid into hers.

Roman.

He must have felt the panic spike because he squeezed her hand firmly, grounding her, then shot her a wink. The simple gesture steadied her instantly. A slow smile curved Violet's lips as her confidence came back in full force.

She straightened.

This time, Violet walked the path like a model on a runway, her chin lifted, and spine tall, daring them to look away. Her focus locked onto her mother standing on the dais, pride blazing openly on Queen Seraphira's face.

"Zinnia."

Her mother had said it was her Fae name. But there was no way in hell she was answering to that alone. She had been Violet Purple her entire life, and she wasn't about to erase eighteen years of identity just like that. The least she could do was attach it to her name, but nothing more.

She wasn't just Fae. She was wolf. And somewhat human too. She was all of it.

As messy as that sounded, she was Violet Zinnia Purple.

"Come, child," her mother said softly, gesturing to her as soon as she was close enough.

Violet stepped onto the dais, a raised structure made of gleaming crystal and stone. She alone was permitted to ascend it while her mates were directed to a slightly raised, semicircular platform just beneath the throne level.

They were seated with the noble Fae, the position close enough to signify honor, but

distant enough to draw a line.

While the cardinal alphas were her mates, they were not her equals in rule. They were future consorts, and nothing more, until Violet was formally recognized and had fully claimed her place as princess.

Violet stepped forward as her mother announced to the gathered crowd,

"Free Fae, I present to you, your princess."

There was no immediate reaction. Not even an applause or cheers. Instead, their low murmurs rippled through the hall.

But Violet was not discouraged. She simply dipped her head slightly, a silent request to continue, and her mother yielded the floor.

Violet stepped forward, facing her people fully now.

"Dia duit is Violet Corcra mé. Hello. I'm Violet Purple." She began, then paused to study the people. "Nó in áit mar a tháinig mé ar an eolas Violet Zinnia Corcra. Or rather, as I have come to know myself, Violet Zinnia Purple."

It was comical the way the murmuring died instantly as every Fae turned toward her in shock. The princess was speaking their tongue.

Violet smiled, knowing she had their attention now. It was reassuring to see the plan working. She had known they wouldn't accept her easily, not when they saw her as an outsider. And what better way to bridge that divide than by speaking their language? Communication, after all, was the first step toward belonging.

Of course, it was impossible to learn the Fae tongue in a single day.

That was when Asher had asked if the Fae possessed a spell or something that could grant temporary memory retention.

As expected, the Fae did.

However, the spell came with consequences which was a pounding headache. The Fae tongue was foreign to Violet after all, and forcing it into place through magic was not natural; she had to learn it.

Still, Violet had only needed to memorize her speech.

And now, as she had the attention of the Fae, she knew it was worth it – even if a headache awaited her after the party tonight.

Violet glanced toward Asher and smiled.

What would she do without him?

Then she turned to her audience and continued in the Fae tongue,

"I know I am not what you expected.

I did not grow up beneath these skies. I did not learn your songs as a child or walk these halls as a daughter of the court. To many of you, I am a stranger who appeared from nowhere to claim a throne she did not earn. An outsider. A disruption. And I will not insult you by denying that.

"But hear this. I am still yours.

"Fae blood runs through me, whether I deny it or not. The magic of this land answers me. It pulls at my bones, my breath, my very soul. I may not have been born on this soil, but I was made from it."

Violet lifted a hand to her chest,

"This throne calls to me. Not because I desire power, but because I belong to it.

"I have not come to shatter your laws or mock your traditions. I have come to learn them. I will speak your language, even when it costs me pain. I will study your ways, even when they feel foreign to my bones. I will honor your customs, even when they challenge me."

Her voice hardened, "And I will defend this realm with my life whether you accept me today or not."

Violet sucked in a sharp breath, holding the gazes of the crowd as she said, "I will earn my place. I will fight for it. Not as a conqueror, but as your blood because I am Violet Zinnia purple, princess of the Free Fae and I will not run from what I am."

Immediately, the hall was frozen in stunned silence with hundreds of immortal Fae staring at Violet with looks of disbelief.

"Yes!" Hannah whooped loudly, utterly unapologetic as she disrupted the silence. "That's how we do it, sister! I am so proud of you!"

She clapped so hard, grinning like she had completely lost her mind.

Violet felt heat rush to her cheeks, embarrassment washing over her. Still, she had to admit having Hannah support her like that didn't feel bad at all.

Every head snapped toward Hannah and

Lord Taryn for half a second, considered pretending he hadn't heard her. Then with a sigh, he clapped too.

On the lower dais, the Cardinal Alphas rose as one. Their chairs scraped against the crystal floor as Griffin, Roman, Asher, and Alaric stood to their full height, their eyes never leaving Violet. They did not shout like Hannah did and simply clapped as one.

And that was all it took.

Like a ripple spreading across still water, the sound carried as one clap became ten. Ten became dozens and dozens became a roar.

The Fae stamped their feet, their voices rising together until the hall trembled with the sound.

Violet stood there, stunned, her breath catching in her chest as the cheers washed over her. The judgment in their eyes hadn't vanished, but there was a shift now. They were giving her a chance.

Queen Seraphira watched from behind, her eyes shining with pride. Just as she had known, her daughter had done it.

But the warmth of that moment died the instant her gaze caught on someone, or to be more precise, her husband.

Baron.

She had been so focused on Violet, and ensuring her daughter's debut succeeded, that she had not spared him a thought until now. And of course, Baron would choose this moment of all moments to appear.

The bastard.

His arm was hooked possessively around his lover, the woman dangling against him as if she were a trophy. He made no effort to hide her. In fact, he flaunted her openly, parading her before the entire court.

The hall that had been moments ago buzzing with approval and celebration fell into a tense, brittle silence at Baron's entrance. And just like that the happiness

curdled into unease.

Baron led his lover, Celeste, all the way to the foot of the dais and lifted her hand to his lips, pressing a deliberate kiss to her knuckles.

Celeste giggled shamelessly, fully aware she was parading herself on the arm of the Queen's husband—and enjoying every second of it.

She slipped into the crowd of Fae afterward, casting a knowing smile toward Queen Seraphira as she went.

But the Queen did not react. She had never been interested in Baron, if anything, he was an irritation—an uninvited presence she endured rather than acknowledged.

Instead, Seraphira watched him coolly as he ascended the dais with infuriating confidence.

Baron paused, dipped his head just enough to be considered respectful, and said to her, "Your Majesty, the Queen."

Then his gaze slid to Violet, sharp and assessing, a glint in his eyes.

"Princess," he added.

Without waiting for a response, or further acknowledging either woman, Baron turned away and moved toward his seat which was a smaller throne positioned beside the Queen.

"You can continue," he said as if he hadn't just fractured the fragile harmony of the hall.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 735: Gift From The Fae[1,568 words]

Chapter 735: Gift From The Fae

"Let the party begin," the queen commanded after Baron's dramatic entrance.

Just like that, the spell broke. Conversations slowly resumed, music flowed once more, and the Fae returned to mingling as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred.

Although Violet sat beside the queen, it was impossible not to be aware of Baron seated at the far end of the dais with Seraphira positioned squarely between them.

Growing up, Violet had often imagined reuniting with her family, but never as Fae, and certainly not trapped in a dysfunctional dynasty locked in a war for power.

"You're beginning to get on my nerves, Baron," Queen Seraphira said coldly.

And just like that, it began.

Baron turned to Seraphira. "Oh really? I thought my entire existence irritated you despite the fact that I'm sharing my life force with you."

Seraphira faced him slowly. "You make it sound as though I should bow to you simply because my life is bound to yours?"

Baron scoffed. "Shouldn't you? After all, I'm the one who gained nothing from this union. You refused your duties as a wife, refused to bear me an heir. I'm the one who was cheated by that pathetic deal your mother made to me."

Seraphira laughed humorlessly. "Oh, trust me, if I'd had a choice, there would have been no deal at all. You would still be Baron Heron of the Faulkner family, married to some noble Fae, but never a queen." She leaned closer, her voice dipping low. "You knew I never liked you, even when we courted. But power mattered more to you, didn't it? Or am I wrong?"

For the first time, Baron had nothing to say.

Seraphira didn't give him the mercy of silence.

"You claim you gained nothing," she continued harshly, "yet the Faulkner family now stands as the strongest house at court. You wield my authority freely, abuse my power, and still have the audacity to say you were scammed?" Her gaze locked onto his, daring him to argue.

Then she added, almost casually, "I don't care what you do with your lovers. But if you don't want me to be painted as the jealous, evil queen who carved your lover into pieces for her disrespect, then you better control your concubines, or you may find yourself an eunuch very soon. You won't die from it, so my life remains intact."

With that, the Queen turned back to the party, as though she hadn't just dismantled her husband in front of her daughter.

Violet tried to hold it in but a small, traitorous squeak of laughter slipped out.

Baron's venomous gaze snapped to her, and

Violet, for her part, kept her face perfectly straight.

It was honestly nice seeing this side of her mother, not the meek, gentle version she had always shown that had allowed not just her husband but other fae to step over her without consequence.

Perhaps there was hope for her after all.

Violet's attention was drawn when one of the sea-born Fae stepped forward from the crowd.

She was beautiful with long green hair that flowed down her back like kelp in open water, woven through with thin reeds and pale shells. The selkie wore no bodice in the way Land-Fae did, instead, strands of beads and sea-glass crossed her chest, covering what was necessary while leaving her stomach bare. Finally, a flowing skirt, layered like waves fell from her hips.

The Fae was not alone, flanked by several selkie kin, all dressed in variations of the same sea-born elegance. Together, they halted before the dais and bowed deeply in unison.

"Your Majesty, the Queen. Consort Baron. Princess Violet," she addressed them, her gaze lingering a heartbeat longer on Violet.

"Rise," Queen Seraphira commanded.

The selkie straightened and lifted her chin.

"Princess Violet Zinnia Purple," she said, her voice melodic, like water over stone. "I am Nerima of the Selkie Tide, and on behalf of the sea-born Fae, we welcome you to the realm."

Violet tilted her head slightly, acknowledging them.

Nerima gestured, and one of her people stepped out with a small, carefully carved box.

"We bring you a gift, princess," the Fae continued. "A token of goodwill, and of hope."

Lila moved at once, ascending the dais. She accepted the box and returned to Violet's side, opening it carefully.

Violet gasped.

Inside the box was a necklace unlike anything she had ever seen. It was a single luminous oval stone, glowing a deep, living purple and it pulsed slowly, like a heartbeat.

Queen Seraphira leaned forward, her eyes narrowing with recognition. "That stone..." she gasped. "Is this Xandrite?"

Nerima inclined her head. "Yes, Your Majesty. It is the Xandrite stone, found only in the deepest abyss of the sea where even light fears to travel."

There was a collective murmur through the hall. Some of the noble Fae had not expected that the selkie fae would give Violet such a heavy gift.

"It holds memory," Nerima said, her gaze returning to Violet. "We gift it to you in the hope that you will store your happiest memory here, made in this realm, among your people."

Violet was speechless and overwhelmed by the feeling of gratitude. This was too much a gift. So she rose from her seat, careful with her movement.

"I will treasure it," she meant it with every part of her.

Nerima smiled, warm and sincere, then bowed once more before stepping back with her people, melting into the crowd.

Once she was seated, Queen Seraphira told her. "That necklace is a gift even gold cannot buy."

Violet nodded, understanding exactly what she meant. Already, she had plans for it. She would fill it with the happiest memories of herself and her mates in this realm.

Lila gently closed the box and carried it away for safekeeping.

As though the selkie's gesture had opened the path, more Fae began to step forward in turn, eager to present themselves.

The Dryads came next in their group, and bowed low before the dais.

"Your Majesty," the leader of the Dryad said. "Princess Violet."

Queen Seraphira inclined her head, and Violet followed suit.

The Dryad lifted his hands, and from his wrist bloomed a small object. It was a fancy wrist circlet made from living wood and threaded with pulsing tiny buds along its curve.

"This is a Verdant Diadem," Dryad explained. "Grown from the heartwood of the First Grove and will respond to your presence alone, Princess. When worn, it will strengthen your connection to this land, and when you are in danger, it will warn the forest itself."

Violet's breath caught. This was too much.

"I accept your gift."

Just like before, Lila accepted the diadem, and took it away for safekeeping. At the end of this, the gifts would be taken to the princess quarters and she would do whatever she wanted with it.

The Dryads bowed once more and withdrew, fading back into the crowd.

Before Violet could gather herself, a sudden flurry of light and noise flew into view, overtaking the others before them.

It was the Pixies.

"Oh boy." Violet swallowed.

Ever since the incident with Roman, it was safe to say she was wary of these creatures.

They zipped into view in bursts of color and laughter. Some glowed gold, others blue or pink, their expressions mischievous and thrilled. They hovered in a loose circle from their position, grinning up at Violet.

"We didn't bring a thing," one chirped unapologetically.

"But we brought something better," another added.

"A wish," they said together. "We gift you a wish you may call upon whenever you desire. One within our capability."

The hall stirred at once because Pixie wishes were rare binding favors that were never given lightly.

One only had to see the way Violet's grin widened to know she understood exactly what that meant.

Just the perfect gift.

"I accept."

The pixies whooped, spinning around her once before scattering like sparks, their laughter lingering in the air.

Then the atmosphere changed again as Lucien stepped forward.

The prince of the peryton was every bit as striking as before with his antlered crown, and wings folded neatly behind him. His gaze met Violet's without hesitation.

From his hands, he presented a long, sleek dark leather threaded with runes.

It was a leash.

The cardinal alphas stiffened instantly, muscles tensing, and instincts flaring. Lucien, however, looked entirely too pleased with himself.

"It is not what you think," he said to their faces before turning to Violet. "This is a rein that you can wear and allow others to ride you safely, while you take flight in your beast form."

There was a pause as he waited for Violet to respond to that.

From their place near the dais, the cardinal alphas looked anything but pleased. They knew this Fae was after their mate, and he wasn't even pretending otherwise.

Violet's face was unreadable as she accepted the gift carefully. "I appreciate your gift, prince Lucien."

Lucien looked pleased, but instead of stepping away, he lingered.

"I also have another request, princess."

At once, heads lifted across the hall. Most notably, the Queen's. Seraphira's gaze narrowed as she studied Lucien.

Violet took a deep breath. "What is it, Lucien? What do you want of me?"

"Nothing grand. Only the honor of having the first dance with you, Princess."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 736: Gifts From Her Mates[1,561 words]

Chapter 736: Gifts From Her Mates

That fucking bastard.

Violet kept her expression polite, serene even, but inside, she was furious. The only thing stopping her from standing up and punching Lucien square in the face was the hundreds of Fae eyes fixed on her, waiting and watching her reaction.

She wasn't stupid. Violet understood exactly what Lucien had been doing since the moment they met. The peryton prince had been circling her like this was some mating display, and apparently, her rejection hadn't lodged itself properly in his skull.

Her mates were the only ones she would ever want. The only ones she would dance with, and the only ones she would share her life with. No one else.

And certainly not this arrogant, pushy, self-important prince who thought persistence was romance.

"Prince Lucien," Violet said in a composed voice, "I am truly honored by your request."

Lucien's posture straightened, hope shining briefly in his eyes.

"But," Violet continued, "my first dance has already been promised to my mates."

Lucien's expression faltered long enough for Violet to savor it.

"I see," he said after a moment, schooling his features. "Then I suppose that cannot be helped."

Violet smiled so hard her cheeks hurt.

She thought that would be the end of it.

Of course, it wasn't.

Lucien tilted his head, unfazed. "Then perhaps the dance after that?"

The audacity.

Violet opened her mouth to respond, but her mother beat her to it.

"The dance following that belongs to me," Queen Seraphira declared, every head snapping toward the dais.

"Surely," the Queen continued, her tone silken and dangerous, "you are not so greedy as to take that moment from a mother and her daughter, Prince Lucien."

Lucien's cheeks flushed. He hesitated, clearly unprepared for the Queen's direct intervention, let alone the intensity of her gaze.

"O-of course not, Your Majesty," he stammered. "I would never presume. I am merely... enthusiastic. It would be an honor to share even a moment with the Princess."

Queen Seraphira regarded him coolly. "Your eagerness is noted. However, I believe it is in my daughter's best interest that she chooses her own dances."

The words were polite, but the message was not.

Lord Taryn snorted loudly from where he stood, not bothering to hide his amusement. Lucien had always been too confident for his own good.

Lucien flushed deeper, mortification creeping in as whispers from the crowd only grew louder.

"I apologize if I made you uncomfortable, Princess," he said stiffly, lowering his head. "Please forgive my excitement."

For the sake of decorum, Violet said, "You are forgiven," even though she didn't mean it.

Lucien bowed once more, then retreated into the crowd. But the murmurs followed him.

"Just because he's the last of the peryton, he thinks he's untouchable."

"I heard the fourth one is unmated yet. I bet he wants to replace her."

"Can't blame him, though. He and the princess would be a power couple."

Lucien kept walking, but not before his gaze collided with the cardinal alphas.

Asher's stare, in particular, was ice-cold, holding a dark promise within it.

Lucien looked away first.

Only then did Violet release the breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding. Her shoulders eased as the tension drained from her chest.

She turned toward her mother. "Thank you."

Queen Seraphira offered a small, knowing smile.

Then she lifted her chin slightly toward Lila.

Lila understood immediately. She stepped closer, and the Queen leaned in just enough to murmur, "Arrange a private meeting with Prince Lucien after the festivities."

Lila nodded and disappeared into the crowd.

However, someone else had been watching.

Baron lounged back against his throne, his fingers tapping thoughtfully against the armrest. His gaze followed Lucien's retreat, then slid back to Violet, and a slow smile curved his lips.

This was interesting.

The gifts continued coming, and Violet lost count after thirty. Lila had a growing stack, and there were Fae attendants moving carefully, already carrying gifts away to secure storage rooms.

Violet kept thinking the same thing, over and over. Would any of this even work in the human realm? Or was it like a charger that only worked in one realm?

And even if it did, how in the world was she going to take all of this back without looking like she robbed a museum?

Nonetheless, Violet accepted them all with grace as tradition demanded, smiling until her cheeks hurt.

Finally, after what felt like a lifetime, the line thinned.

But just when Violet thought the ceremony was done, that was when Roman stepped out.

Not just Violet—everyone's attention shifted to him too.

Roman stopped before the dais and bowed, while Violet lifted a brow as Griffin, Alaric, and Asher joined him too. What were they up to now?

The hall went completely silent, waiting to see what they were up to.

Roman lifted his head first. "Our princess," he said loudly enough that everyone could hear. "We, too, have a gift."

Violet stared at them, stunned.

They had not mentioned a gift. Not even once.

Then two attendants approached, carrying a rack draped in black cloth, and placed it in front of the dais. Roman stepped forward and pulled the cloth away in one smooth motion.

The hall gasped.

Even Violet's mother rose to her feet, shock cutting through her composure.

Four weapons rested on the rack, arranged with reverence.

A sword.

A spear.

A bow with a quiver of arrows.

And twin daggers.

But it was the colors that stole Violet's breath.

The greatsword was edged in crimson light, the metal dark but threaded with red veins. The hilt was wrapped in leather, and the blade's center held an engraved mark—his mate bond.

Griffin's.

The spear was longer than Violet's arm span, balanced and lethal. Its shaft was pale wood reinforced with blue runes that marked his mating bond, and the spearhead was forged from a metal that looked like it held stormlight trapped inside.

Alaric's.

The bow was elegant and cruel in its beauty, curved black like obsidian, but matte. Along its limbs were thin green lines, the string almost invisible, and the arrows in the quiver had green fletching.

Roman's.

And then the twin daggers.

They were smaller, but somehow more frightening. The blades were black enough to swallow light. The edges looked sharp enough to slice air, and their handles had subtle, gold-inlaid symbols.

Asher's.

Violet stared until her eyes stung.

"They're beautiful," she whispered, and it was the truth.

Queen Seraphira's voice cut through the awe. "That metal—" Her eyes narrowed, recognition flaring. "That is Aethiron."

Violet looked at the queen, confused, but the reaction from the Fae was enough to tell her this was not normal material.

Seraphira said, "Aethiron doesn't crack under strain and holds enchantments well."

Violet's throat tightened.

Griffin nodded. "We didn't know what would actually work here," he admitted. "So we asked Lila. She helped us choose what would last and protect the princess."

Lila, standing behind the throne, looked both pleased and exhausted. She had suffered to make this possible in such a short time frame.

Roman said, "We figured if the Trial is death-or-alive, then you deserve options. A blade for close work. A spear for reach. A bow for distance, and daggers for when you need to be fast. You can choose which one is your favorite afterward." He smirked.

Then Asher said, "We don't care what the realm thinks, but Princess Violet will go to that trial and win because we will make damn sure of it."

As Asher spoke, his eyes stayed on Baron as if issuing a challenge to him.

Then, to the queen, he told her, "This is proof your daughter is safe in our hands, Your Majesty. Nothing will happen to her."

Alaric also promised her. "We'll do everything within our power to make sure she survives the Ascension."

For a moment, Queen Seraphira did not speak and simply stared at them.

Then Violet watched something change in her mother's face. It was subtle but real. The last thread of doubt loosened, and pride took its place.

Seraphira's chin lifted. "Then I will hold you to that."

Violet's vision blurred.

She blinked hard, but it didn't help. The tears came anyway, hot and humiliating and impossible to stop.

Then Violet rose fast and did something wildly un-royal. She rushed down the steps, not caring about the eyes on her.

She slammed into them, her arms wrapping around Roman first because he was closest, then Griffin because he was solid and warm, then Alaric, then Asher.

Violet didn't even know how she managed it, but she just held on.

Roman laughed against her hair, his arms tightening around her. Griffin's hand cradled the back of her head, while Alaric simply held her however he could. Asher's hand closed around her waist, firm and possessive. He was never letting go.

After a while, Violet broke away from the hug, and not minding that the entire kingdom was staring at her, she grabbed Roman's face and kissed him on the mouth. It didn't last, because she turned to Griffin and did the same. Then Alaric, and finally Asher, making sure they understood how much their effort meant to her.

In this life and the next to come, it would always be them. She would always choose them.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 737: Fae From The Outside[1,539 words]

Chapter 737: Fae From The Outside

Lucien was nowhere to be found after that incident.

Not that it surprised anyone. After such a public humiliation, only a fool would linger, and Lucien was far too proud for that. Moreover, the crowd did not miss him.

With the gifting ceremony over, it was time for the princess to dance and the Fae watched with open curiosity, — and barely disguised anticipation.

The crowd began to whisper. How would she do it? The princess had three mated wolves and tradition demanded only one partner for the dance.

Then there was Asher. He was the unmated one in the princess harem and they intended to see how she'd handle that without him feeling left out.

Violet knew exactly what they were thinking. So when she stepped forward and all four cardinal alphas moved with her, murmurs started in the hall.

Was she planning on dancing with all four of them? But that wasn't the way it was done. Unfortunately, the Queen was not talking so all the Fae could do was grumble as the cardinal alphas moved towards Violet and flanked her.

Then the music rose and Violet began to move. Fae dancing was not stiff, but fluid and instinctive, and she let the music guide her.

Griffin was the first of the Alphas to reach for her, his hand on her waist as he guided her through measured steps. With his size, it was easy to conclude that Griffin could not dance but the reverse was the case. His steps were so light and accurate as they danced to the rhythm. They turned once, only for Roman to steal her.

A laugh burst from Violet as Roman spun her out of Griffin's hold, his grin wicked, and his movements smooth. Roman

pulled her close, their hips aligning just long enough to draw a sharp breath from her before he sent her flying again, arms outstretched, with her dress catching the light like a living thing. The sight was stunning.

Then Alaric caught her next. His steps were elegant and he slowed the tempo with nothing more than a hand at her back and a look that burned like the lightning he wielded. Their bodies moved in a tight circle, the sexual tension between them thick and undeniable.

Then he dipped her low.

So low the world tilted, and for a suspended heartbeat his gaze dropped to the swell of her chest and her pulse betrayed her.

Alaric lingered there, and from their position, it would have been easy to steal a kiss—or at least what the crowd imagined would happen. The Fae who had been grumbling about Violet not dancing the traditional way were now so invested they could practically feel the sexual tension wafting off the group—and wouldn't have minded being given a show.

Alaric must have sensed it because he leaned in, and the crowd held its breath. Violet's breath stuttered too. In this position, she was completely under Alaric's control, and they were so close there might as well have been no clothes between them.

She wanted him. Them. This was supposed to be a dance, but it had turned into foreplay—and the goddess help her.

Just when the Fae thought Alaric would crush his lips against Violet's, he pulled her upright, and the hall groaned in disappointment.

Such a tease.

Alaric wore a knowing smirk as he whirled Violet in Asher's direction.

The air in the room sharpened as soon as she ended up in Asher's arms. Violet was unable to breath, spellbound in the magic that was Asher's stunning slitted eyes. Asher didn't even smile nor tease her, instead he danced with concentration as if making a mistake would have devastating consequences.

He drew Violet in with a hand at her lower back, their foreheads nearly touching as they moved in a slow rhythm. Then Asher lifted her—not high, but enough that her feet left the ground—and turned with her in a slow, powerful arc. Violet laughed softly, trusting him completely. When he set her down, she followed his lead without hesitation, then he spun her away.

Griffin reclaimed her, only for Roman to intercept, then Alaric pulled her back. It felt chaotic the way they passed her between them, yet it was so seamless and natural that the Fae were completely hooked.

By the time Violet reached the center again, her heart was pounding, and her cheeks flushed. Her head was swimming, it was all too much.

The music climbed as one by one, the alphas closed in, circling her, their hands brushing her body as they guided her through a final sequence. Griffin, Roman's Alaric's, and Asher's scent enveloped her until Violet felt she was losing her mind.

On the final note, they struck a pose.

Violet arched back slightly with one of her arms around Asher and the other braced against Alaric. Roman knelt at her side, while Griffin stood behind her with his arms around her waist.

There was silence for a moment until applause thundered against the walls, cheers breaking loose as the Fae rose to their feet. This was incredible. They had never seen a dance like this.

Violet stood breathless, her heart racing, and surrounded by her alphas as the music faded and the crowd's roar washed over them.

Then out of nowhere Alaric grabbed her face and his mouth was on hers, stealing her breath away. He kissed her hard and

Violet stumbled from the shock of it, a small gasp slipping between them. Alaric steadied, and kept her from falling. His other hand cradled the back of her neck, his thumb brushing her jaw as he deepened the kiss just enough to make the crowd lose its mind.

The Fae had lost it now, screaming their lungs as Alaric gave them the show they wanted.

Someone even shouted,

"We love you, Violet!"

The words hit Violet like magic.

When she finally pulled back, breathless and flushed, her eyes were bright, her lips swollen, with her pulse roaring in her ears. She let out a giddy laugh, and lifted one hand to wave at the crowd, drunk on the attention, and relishing the way the Fae looked at her now.

They no longer thought of her as an outsider and it felt good.

Then Roman leaned in first, pressing a quick, shameless peck to her lips, followed by Griffin, and finally Asher whose kiss was much more brief, and restrained. But his hand lingered at her waist just a heartbeat longer than necessary, his eyes saying everything his mouth did not.

Then they returned to their seats as one, leaving Violet standing alone in the center of the floor.

It was time for the queen to dance with her daughter. Violet turned toward the dais, already smiling when her mother rose from the throne.

Queen Seraphira stepped forward, her expression alight with joy when suddenly the doors to the hall slammed open and Rhara burst into the hall.

Her steps were fast, and urgent, while her face was pale beneath the glow of the chandeliers. She didn't slow as she crossed the floor, her eyes locked on the dais. Guards poured in behind her, weapons at the ready.

The shift was immediate as the joy drained from the room like a breath pulled from the lungs.

Rhara mounted the steps and leaned in close to Queen Seraphira, whispering something urgently. Violet watched her mother's face change in real time, the joy hardening into a scowl.

The Fae noticed too and a ripple of unease spread as more guards flooded the hall, lining the walls, and blocking exits. Murmurs rose in the hall immediately.

Queen Seraphira announced at once. "There is a matter requiring my attention, the celebration will continue. There is no cause for alarm."

But her words did little to soothe the sudden tension.

She turned and moved swiftly from the dais with Rhara at her side, the guards closing around them in a tight formation.

Lila stepped forward immediately, lifting her hands in a calming gesture. "Please," she said, "enjoy the festivities. Everything is under control."

Violet didn't wait to hear the rest. She slipped into the crowd, moving fast, and weaving between bodies before anyone could stop her.

The cardinal alphas noticed instantly.

Asher cursed under his breath, going after her. Griffin was already moving. Alaric and Roman followed without a word.

The corridors beyond the hall were unrecognizable.

Guards lined every passage, weapons drawn, and their faces grim. Violet's pulse quickened as she followed the flow toward the palace entrance as adrenaline took over.

Then she saw it.

Standing at the threshold were figures she did not recognize.

They carried banners unlike any she had seen, marked with foreign sigils. They were not Free Fae.

A woman stepped forward from their ranks.

She was tall, broad-shouldered with an expression that seemed to be carved from stone. Armor hugged her form, and her gaze was unflinching as she came to a halt before Queen Seraphira.

She bowed.

"Greetings, Queen Seraphira of the Free Fae," she said, her voice calm and unyielding. "I am Annequin, Queen of Astaria. The neighbors you have hidden from all this while."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 738: Queen Annequin[1,015 words]

Chapter 738: Queen Annequin

They were the neighboring Fae. The ones the Free Fae had hidden from for centuries.

Violet turned just in time to see her mates arrive, along with a handful of Fae who had slipped out of the party behind them. She watched their expressions shift in real time from curiosity to confusion, and then alertness.

None of them needed to be told, these were not guests. They were invaders.

The tension thickened instantly, and one glance at her mother confirmed she was not pleased. Queen Seraphira's posture had gone rigid, every line of her body coiled tight with restrained fury.

"How did you get here?" Seraphira demanded.

Annequin answered calmly, as if she hadn't just trespassed into another's territory. "The walls are down, Queen of the Free Fae. We have been attempting to establish contact—"

"By sending your people to intrude on our land?" Seraphira cut in, her eyes blazing with suspicion.

Annequin did not raise her voice, nor bristle. Instead, she inhaled slowly, deliberately, before responding.

"I apologize for the intrusion," she said. "Astaria is vast. With the unification of the Fae courts, there are times when actions are taken before word reaches me."

She paused, then added, "But you may rest assured. I mean no harm. I came for diplomacy."

The word landed heavily.

Then she gestured subtly to the small force behind her, surrounded on all sides by Free Fae guards.

"In simpler terms," Annequin continued, "I am here in mercy."

Seraphira's lips thinned.

"Convenient," Asher said, stepping forward, and all heads turned toward him. His voice was calm, but the threat beneath it was unmistakable. "Choosing today of all days, I'd almost say it was planned."

Annequin turned her attention to him.

She studied Asher slowly, and openly, her gaze sweeping from his face to his stance, the way he held himself, and the dominance in his posture. Something like interest shone in those eyes.

Violet didn't even realize it until it happened but a low warning growl slipped from her throat.

Thalia was not having this.

Annequin's eyes shifted to Violet then, and her lips curved into a smug, knowing smile. The look she gave her was condescending, if not dismissive, as if Violet were a child playing dress-up in a crown too big for her head.

"You are correct," Annequin answered. "I chose this date deliberately. The princess's debut."

Gasps rippled through the gathered Fae. Some stepped back instinctively, their eyes darting between Violet and the armored queen.

"It was the one moment I knew I would have your kingdom's full attention," Annequin continued, spreading her hands slightly. "And it appears I was right."

The murmurs grew louder.

Beside Violet, Griffin muttered under his breath, "There's a spy among the Free Fae."

Roman snorted. "You don't have to look far. My bet is on the Queen's unhinged husband."

His gaze went toward Baron, who stood off to the side, watching the exchange with far too much interest and not nearly enough concern.

Annequin went on, unbothered. "My intentions are clean. What better time for two queens to meet than the night a princess claims her place?"

Her eyes locked on Seraphira.

"Or will you turn me away, and continue reinforcing the reputation your people have for being unwelcoming to outsiders? Because tell me, how long do you think that will last now that the walls are gone?"

Violet clenched her fists.

She didn't trust Annequin. Not for a second.

But she hated that the woman wasn't wrong.

The barriers that had hidden the Free Fae were down. Whether they wanted it or not, the rest of the world now knew they existed, and others would come with curiosity. Ambition. Or an army.

Rhara leaned in toward the Queen.

"What do we do, Your Majesty?"

All eyes turned to the Queen, waiting for her final decision.

Annequin smirked. "This is the change your people need, Your Majesty."

Queen Seraphira stared at her for a long moment, trying to discern her intention with her ability. There was nothing on her.

"The Free Fae are not uncultured people," she announced. "You are welcome to celebrate with us."

Annequin smiled in clear satisfaction.

The murmurs among the Free Fae, however, swelled immediately. It was already enough that they were being asked to accept a foreign princess. Now their Queen had invited an entirely unfamiliar Fae court into their hall.

Outrage rippled through the crowd.

"However..." Queen Seraphira continued, her voice lethal as power thickened the air around her, "if I discover even the smallest deceit, or a single dangerous intention toward my people, you may rest assured, not even your bones will be returned to your kingdom."

Instead of shrinking back, Annequin looked impressed—almost amused.

"I left my kingdom without a ruler to come here," she told her. "Queen to Queen. Do you truly think that would be a wise decision if I had ulterior motives?"

"Not necessarily," Asher replied flatly. "Unless you're reckless enough to gamble. Sometimes risks pay off."

Annequin turned her gaze to him again, a slow smile curling her lips.

Violet scowled.

She didn't need feminine intuition to see the calculation in that woman's eyes. And since when had Asher become this talkative? The irritation sparked hot and fast.

Queen Seraphira turned to Rhara. "Before they enter the hall, search them thoroughly. Any concealed weapon or enchantment, and they leave immediately."

With that, Queen Seraphira left.

Annequin extended her arms arrogantly as Rhara and several guards approached.

"Go ahead," she said with a smirk. "Touch me however you like, sister."

Rhara's scowl was immediate, but she quickly schooled her face into professional neutrality and conducted a thorough search.

Violet remained where she was, watching closely — and waiting for something to happen.

Rhara straightened. "There is nothing on her."

Annequin's gaze slid back to Violet. She winked.

That did it.

Violet had never considered herself the jealous type, but at that moment, she decided she would never like this fae. Ever.

She gathered her skirts sharply and turned away, leaving without another glance.

Her mates followed.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 739: Her True Intention[1,021 words]

Chapter 739: Her True Intention

If Violet had ever thought she had it bad with the Free Fae's unwelcoming nature, then Annequin had it far worse.

The party that had once been vibrant was gone, replaced instead by uneasy murmurs. Every head in the hall turned toward Annequin as she approached the dais.

Yet the foreign Fae Queen did not look bothered in the slightest. Her steps were confident as she walked through the parted sea of Fae, completely alone, without even a single guard at her side.

Violet couldn't decide whether it was blind trust or sheer stupidity. Or perhaps Annequin was simply confident that no harm would come to her.

Violet knew her mother would never strike an outsider lightly—at least not without cause—but even so, the display was unsettling.

Annequin stopped at the foot of the dais and, for the first time since entering the hall, inclined her head. It

"Queen Annequin of Astaria," she said clearly, her voice carrying through the vast hall, "greet Queen Seraphira of the Free Fae."

The moment the name Astaria left her lips, the air shifted.

A ripple of murmurs swept through the Free Fae. Heads leaned together while the whispers grew louder, and incredulous. They had always known, in theory, that other Fae realms existed beyond their barriers, but knowing and seeing were not the same thing. To have another Fae queen standing on their sacred ground felt unreal. If not invasive and dangerous.

Queen Seraphira rose from her throne and the movement alone was enough to quiet the hall. She descended the final step of the dais and stopped at its edge.

Her gaze rested on Annequin.

"You may rise," Seraphira said.

Annequin straightened immediately, lifting her chin as she met the Free Fae Queen's eyes.

Seraphira turned then, not to Annequin, but to her people.

"I know this moment is unsettling," she began. "I know many of you are confused, even angered. But this was always inevitable."

The murmurs lowered, though they did not disappear entirely.

"The barrier that kept us hidden has fallen," Seraphira continued. "And when walls come down, visitors will follow whether we welcome them or not. But Queen Annequin has come not with armies, nor demands, but with an open heart, to honor the debut of our princess. That, at the very least, deserves acknowledgment."

Annequin in question remained still, her expression unreadable.

"We have lived in secrecy for generations," Seraphira said. "And while it has kept us safe, it has also kept us unseen and unknown. Tonight is proof that the world beyond us exists, and that change, while uncomfortable, is not always a threat."

"So let us show the Queen of Astaria who the Free Fae truly are. Let her witness the beauty, the magic, and the strength we have preserved all these years. That is all I ask, free Fae."

Silence followed her words. Then, slowly, the tension eased just enough.

Some of the Fae straightened, their expressions thoughtful. A few nodded, moved by their queen's conviction. Others, however, remained stiff and distant, arms crossed, and their eyes wary as they watched Annequin.

The divide was clear.

Queen Seraphira returned to her throne while Rhara directed Queen Annequin toward her assigned seat among the honored guests.

Violet's gaze never left the Astaria queen and she nearly rose from her seat when she realized where Annequin was being led.

No. No, no, no.

Whether it was terrible timing or cruel fate, Annequin was guided directly to the row reserved for the cardinal alphas. And worse—far worse—she was placed right beside Asher.

Violet's jaw tightened.

Annequin settled into her seat with infuriating ease, her armor glinting beneath the lights. Then, as if she had planned it all along, she turned her head and offered Asher a smile on acknowledgment.

Asher merely tilted his head in polite recognition before looking away, his attention returning firmly to his brothers.

That should have been enough but it didn't stop Violet's fingers from clenching around the armrest of her throne, her grip so tight a crack was heard.

Queen Seraphira turned instantly. "Violet?"

"Nothing," Violet bit out through gritted teeth, her knuckles white.

Seraphira studied her daughter for a moment longer, then looked away. She had enough problems to deal with at the moment.

And as if summoned by tension itself, Baron chose that moment to speak.

"It's quite funny," he said loudly, amusement dripping from every word, "how you're suddenly all for embracing outsiders, when you were vividly against me pushing the same notion in the first place."

Seraphira's cold gaze snapped to him. "At least I am acting in the best interest of my people, unlike you who would gladly invite external forces to unseat me, regardless of how that damages the Free Fae."

For a heartbeat, they stared at one another, eyeball to eyeball.

Then Baron threw his head back and laughed loudly. "You always did love having the final word."

Seraphira did not rise to it. She turned away, dismissing him entirely, her attention shifting back to the party, or rather, to the foreign queen now seated among her people.

Annequin sat comfortably, observant, and unreadable.

Seraphira frowned deeply. She could only hope she had not just welcomed a blade into the heart of her court.

Meanwhile, the cardinal alphas were busy discussing amongst themselves when Annequin, who had been left alone all this while, finally spoke.

"Aren't you curious about me?"

At once, the cardinal alphas stopped talking, and all four turned to her with expressions so synchronized it was almost comical.

Then, as if planned, they ignored her entirely and went right back to their conversation.

Annequin scoffed. "So this is how it will be, then?"

Asher was the one who finally answered. "You've already told us you're the Queen of Astaria. Any other important information that would reveal your true intentions is something you'd never give freely, so there's no need to ask especially when we'll find out ourselves."

He added flatly, "And our mate gets jealous easily so we'd rather not upset her. So enjoy your stay, Queen Annequin of Astaria."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 740: The Blessings[1,075 words]

Chapter 740: The Blessings

The party was pretty much over after Annequin's arrival. The atmosphere that had once been full of laughter and music thinned into polite conversation and guarded glances.

Sure, the feast that followed was lavish, but the Fae ate out of politeness rather than appetite. By the time the last goblet was cleared, it was time for the princess to receive her blessing.

The double doors opened and a hush spread through the hall as the priestess stepped forward.

The priestess was an elder Fae, tall and reed-thin, her skin so pale and weathered by the years she's lived. Long ash-silver hair fell in a single braid down her back, and was threaded with bone charms and flowers.

Her eyes were milky and unfocused, yet when she looked at Violet, it felt as though she saw everything about her. And for someone who looked blind, she didn't need any help being assisted as she easily climbed the dais.

Queen Seraphira rose and inclined her head in respect with Violet following suit.

When the priestess reached them, she lifted one gnarled hand and gestured.

"Kneel, child of two worlds."

Violet obeyed.

She lowered herself onto one knee, her head bowed, and palms resting on her thighs. Every gaze fixed on them, and the world narrowed until nothing existed beyond her and the priestess.

The priestess removed a small stone bowl from within her robes, and inside of it was a thick, pearlescent clay. She dipped her fingers into it, murmuring in the ancient Fae tongue. The words were not loud, but they carried power that vibrated through her.

She pressed her thumb to Violet's forehead. At first, the clay was cool, then it got warm, and began to burn such that Violet took a sharp breath.

"By soil and sea," the priestess intoned, rubbing the clay into Violet's skin in slow circles, "by root and fang, by crown and claw, you are seen."

The clay seeped into Violet's skin like water, leaving behind a glowing mark before fading entirely.

The priestess moved to Violet's temples, then her brow, tracing sigils that pulsed once only to vanish.

"You stand at the threshold," she continued. "Neither fully claimed nor unchosen. But the land knows you and the throne hears you. So you must prove that you can earn it."

A ripple of magic passed through Violet's body like electricity, awakening something deep and feral in her chest. She clenched her hands, grounding herself, refusing to flinch.

Finally, the priestess drew back at last, studying her with unsettling intensity.

"The blessing is given," she said. "Success is not promised, but victory is always assured to the one the gods favor. Their eyes are on you, Princess. I only hope you don't fail them."

Violet stared at the woman with conflicted emotions. What exactly did those gods want from her? She had no desire to be part of their twisted games, but unfortunately, she had been entangled in them since the day she was born.

Then the priestess stepped away, and Violet rose to her feet with trembling legs. She felt so weak.

The priestess turned to the audience and announced, "Free Fae, behold your princess!"

At once, cheers broke out among the Fae as they celebrated their princess. At the same time, the priestess descended the dais as quietly as she had climbed it. Her role here was over.

The doors to the hall opened, and more wine was wheeled in. The Fae were famous for their parties, and this time, they had every reason to revel.

In a way, the wine brought life back into the party, laughter and conversation slowly resurfacing.

But Queen Seraphira was already done with the festivities. She turned to her daughter, her expression softening in a way only a mother's could.

"I am afraid this is time for me to retreat. I have great matters to attend to."

Violet knew exactly what those matters were. Her gaze flicked briefly to where Queen Annequin of Astaris sat.

"Can I come with you?" Violet asked.

Seraphira smiled, amused. "Silly child. This is your debut. You only get one so enjoy it." She reached out and squeezed Violet's hand. "Let your people see you. Have fun with your mates."

The Queen shifted as if to rise, but Violet caught her wrist.

"You'll tell me everything afterward, right?"

Seraphira paused.

Violet's voice firmed. "We promised. No more secrets. Whatever happens to the Free Fae concerns me now."

For a heartbeat, Seraphira studied her daughter, really looked at her. Not the child she'd lost and found again, but the woman sitting beside her. The princess.

Then she nodded. "Yes, I'll tell you. I promise."

Only then did Violet let her go and Seraphira stood. Her gaze slid sideways to Baron. "I trust you will behave," she said coldly. "I am not in a forgiving mood tonight."

Baron made a low sound in his throat, a half-laugh, half-scoff. "Don't worry," he drawled. "I have more than enough females to perform my wife's sacrimonial duties."

Seraphira didn't even blink. "My biggest thanks to them for reliving me of such a burden."

Beside them, Violet sighed, grateful for the fact she had mates who loved her — and not literal weapons fashioned against her.

Baron suddenly added, "Need help dealing with the foreign queen?"

The temperature in the air seemed to drop.

"Remain where I put you," Seraphira told him with a dangerous voice. "Do not cross that boundary, husband." The title dripped with disdain.

Baron laughed. "Good joke."

The Fae Queen didn't dignify that with a response. Instead, she turned on her heel and strode toward the side door. Lila was already there, falling into step behind her as the Queen disappeared from the hall.

The moment Seraphira was gone, Rhara moved.

She approached Annequin, who had made herself perfectly comfortable with the silence the boys gave her.

"Our Queen requests your presence in her private study."

Annequin's eyes lit up. "Finally," she said, rising to her feet. "I have been waiting for this moment."

She brushed invisible dust from her armor, then glanced at the cardinal alphas with a grin. "I suppose I'll see you boys later?"

Roman snorted. Griffin shook his head. Alaric merely arched a brow while Asher didn't even look at her.

Annequin was unfazed as she followed after Rhara. This was fun. After all, she planned to spend a good time with them.