

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 751: Take My Throne[1,014 words]

Chapter 751: Take My Throne

Just like President Roy, Alpha King Elijah had called a meeting of his own. At that moment, all the Alphas and sub-Alphas of the various wolf packs were gathered within the king's palace.

Unlike the others, the West Pack had the smallest representation—if not nearly nonexistent. Alpha Ezra Kings had officially taken temporary charge of the West Pack in Alpha Asher's absence, that is, if he was still alive.

No one said it aloud, but the other sub-alphas clearly thought the cardinal alphas were gone.

It had been two weeks, and there had been no sign of them. No messages nor sightings. Many believed their parents were clinging to false hope. After all, not even the seers nor the priestesses had spoken of them and that alone was damning.

If the cardinal alphas were still alive, why hadn't the Goddess answered? Unless—
their Alphas were not telling the whole truth.

Chattering filled the hall as the alphas fell into tense, low conversations, every discussion circling back to the virus. It was bad enough that a drug existed capable of granting humans unnatural strength, but now one of their own had been killed in a public attack.

That alone was enough to stoke their fury.

The announcement rippled through the hall like a struck bell.

"The Alpha King arrives!"

At once, conversations snapped shut mid-sentence while the wolves straightened instinctively, their spines stiffening as the massive doors opened.

Alpha King Elijah entered without haste.

He did not need guards flanking him, not when his presence alone was enough. Every wolf in the hall lowered their head in respect as he walked between them. Until he reached the front of the hall, only then did he turn.

His gaze swept across the gathered alphas and sub-alphas, assessing each of them. He counted them silently, making sure everyone was in attendance.

After a moment, he nodded once, satisfied.

"You may rise."

The wolves straightened, shoulders squaring as they lifted their heads. No one sat down and that alone spoke volumes. This was an emergency, after all, blood had been spilled.

A few whispers still continued, but they faded quickly as Elijah raised a hand.

"I will not waste your time," he said, his voice calm but carrying effortlessly across the hall. "You all know why you are here."

Murmurs rippled through the crowd.

"There has been a rise in targeted attacks against werewolves," Elijah continued. "One confirmed death of one of our own, and alongside that, the emergence of a strange outbreak spreading through Aster City. Today, we are gathered to shed light on what is happening."

Except someone scoffed loudly.

Then a sub-alpha stepped forward. He was broad-shouldered and visibly furious, the lines of his face carved deep with grief and rage.

"Are we truly here to shed light," he snapped, "or are we here to demand justice for a wolf who was beaten and slaughtered like nothing by a human?"

A surge of growls and approving murmurs followed.

The sub-alpha's fists clenched. "Ken was South Pack. One of ours and he was mocked while he died."

Cheers of agreement rose at that .

Alpha Leon of the South Pack stood rigid, his jaw tight. He did not join the outcry, his own grief controlled, but no less deadly for it.

"I saw the video," a different sub-alpha said bitterly. "A human laughed while Ken bled out. He fucking laughed at him as if our boy meant nothing."

Before the tension could snap, Alpha Irene stepped forward.

"You mean the same human who turned into a zombie moments later?" she said coolly. "Did you finish watching the footage?"

The sub-alpha rounded on her with a snarl. "Do not taunt me with the death of a wolf, Alpha Irene. Not when he's not a member of your pack!"

Her eyes hardened. "It was not my pack member, but he was still a wolf. That is enough. However—" her voice sharpened "—this rage is exactly what our enemies want and we will not grant them that."

"What enemy?" someone demanded. "You keep saying that word. So who exactly are we fighting?"

Elijah raised his hand again, and the hall quieted instantly.

Elijah continued, his voice steady. "I'm sure you've all heard of the drug called Ignis. Yes, the drug is real, and it is being produced by a mad doctor named Patrick, who, according to my findings, is a direct descendant of Gerald. The general who started the war that nearly led to the decimation of our kind."

Snarls and growls erupted from half the wolves in the hall.

Elijah raised a hand, pressing on. "Patrick's intent is not just to weaponize humans against us. He intends to wipe out the wolf race. So he is playing both sides and trying to ignite a second Great War."

"And whose fault is that?" a sub-alpha from the East snapped.

Elijah turned slowly. "Excuse me?"

The sub-alpha lifted his chin, unafraid. "Patrick was employed by you, Alpha King. Didn't you hand him the very platform he needed to destroy us?"

Murmurs rippled through the hall.

Elijah's gaze darkened. Briefly, it fell toward Irene, as though blaming her for not reigning in her people.

Irene exhaled slowly before turning to face the room. "Patrick comes from generations of werewolf hunters. With or without the Alpha king, he would have found a way to create that drug."

"But it was our Alpha King who let him rise," the sub-alpha pressed.

Irene shot back with equal intensity. "Mistakes have already been made. There is no undoing them. And we do not have the luxury of pointing fingers when there are far greater threats at hand."

"Then let him," Elijah said suddenly.

Irene frowned. "Excuse me?"

Elijah stepped forward, his boots echoing as he crossed the hall, straight toward the sub-alpha.

"What is your name?" he asked calmly.

The man stiffened but answered, "Alpha Will."

Elijah smiled almost pleasantly, but dangerous.

"Tell me then, Alpha Will," he said. "Since this is my mistake, would you like to take my throne?"

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 752: Fight For The Humans[1,028 words]

Chapter 752: Fight For The Humans

Alpha Will hesitated, the bravado draining from his face. "I—" he stammered, clearly taken aback by the Alpha King's request.

"You heard me," Alpha King Elijah said quietly as he stepped forward.

One step.

Then another.

Until there was barely any space left between them.

Elijah stood so close that Alpha Will could feel his breath, and the heat of his presence pressing into him. He did it deliberately. A dominance move no wolf in the room failed to recognize.

"Yes," Elijah continued evenly. "Tell me. Do you want the throne?" His lips curved slightly. "Say the word, and it's yours. After all, I'm clearly no longer a competent king."

He shifted forward again, his chest brushing Will's, forcing him back and Alpha Will had no choice but to step away.

A low murmur rippled through the hall at the scene.

"That's enough," Irene said sharply as she stepped between them. "I'm sure he's gotten the point, your majesty."

Elijah's gaze snapped to her and for a heartbeat, the room held its breath.

Irene didn't flinch. She met his stare head-on, her expression unyielding. She wasn't challenging him—but she wasn't backing down either.

Finally, Elijah straightened.

"Very well," he said coolly, stepping away from Alpha Will. He turned to face the gathered wolves, his voice carrying easily through the hall. "Then I take it everyone here still wants me as their king."

No one said a word.

As Elijah walked back to his previous position, Irene shot a hard glare at Alpha Will. He looked away immediately, his jaw clenched tight. The fucking fool wasn't smart enough to control his temper.

"Well," Alpha King Elijah continued, his voice steady, "on the bright side, it appears the Goddess has not abandoned us after all. The humans intended to use Ignis as a weapon against us, but whatever Patrick altered in that drug has turned against them instead. And now, there is a virus loose in Aster City."

Another round of murmur echoed across the room.

One of the sub-alphas raised a hand. "Are you saying it affects only humans?"

"So far," Elijah replied, "there have been no reported infections among were kind whether full wolves, or half-breeds—none. It appears to target humans alone." He turned his head. "Am I correct, Alpha Caspian?"

Caspian cleared his throat. "Based on all current reports, yes. Hypothetically speaking, werekind possess a far stronger metabolism and regenerative system than humans."

Immunity is... plausible." He paused. "However, to confirm this conclusively, I would need access to one of the infected subjects."

That statement sparked murmurs again.

A sub-alpha from the back let out a harsh laugh. "Isn't that fucking amazing?" he said. "For once, humans will be the ones watching their loved ones die, helpless."

A few wolves snickered but the sound was cut short.

"Are you fucking stupid?" Alpha Ezra snapped, facing them.

The laughter died instantly.

"Have you never watched footage from the old world?" Ezra continued sharply. "Have you not seen what happens when creatures like that are allowed to spread unchecked?"

He swept his gaze across the hall. "Yes, we might be immune. But those things survive on flesh. And when the humans are gone—" his lip curled, "—who do you think they'll feed on next?"

The sub-alpha who had laughed shifted uncomfortably as heat crept up his face.

Leon spoke up, "We do not celebrate the suffering of humans because chaos does not stop at species boundaries. If this virus spreads unchecked, it will become everyone's problem."

No one argued this time.

A sub-alpha raised his hand, unease clear in his voice. "So what do we do this time?"

Before Alpha King Elijah could answer, another sub-alpha spoke up, louder and more confident.

"Why don't the wolves in Aster City return to their packs? We fortify our territories, build our numbers, and fight those things when they eventually come for us."

A few nods followed only for Irene to laugh at them, mockingly.

Irene sneered. "So your solution is to sit back and let the monsters multiply?" She shook her head. "Sometimes I genuinely wonder how some of you even became alphas of your tiny packs."

The sub-alpha flushed, his jaw tightening, but he said nothing. Low conversations resumed around the hall, everyone with their own opinion.

Alpha King Elijah lifted his hand, and the noise gradually receded.

"Thank you," he said, "for all your contributions. This is precisely why we are gathered."

He stepped forward, his presence commanding attention.

"Our first objective is clear," Elijah continued. "Patrick Elias Turner must be captured alive. President Roy has made that demand as well. He believes Patrick is the only one capable of reversing this disaster."

A ripple of skepticism moved through the room.

"He has avoided capture so far," Elijah continued, unbothered, "but I have requested assistance beyond conventional means. By tomorrow, Patrick Elias Turner will be in our custody."

That drew attention but Elijah went on.

"To prevent further escalation and to reinforce cooperation between humans and werewolves, each pack will release a number of warriors to assist in eliminating the infected currently roaming Aster City."

The hall erupted.

"What?"

"Absolutely not."

"You expect us to risk our people for humans?"

"They started this!"

The uproar grew louder, but Elijah kept speaking, his authority cutting through the noise like a blade.

"Werewolves are immune to the virus," he said firmly. "That gives us an advantage. One we will use."

One alpha barked angrily, "We are not even certain of that, and you want us to throw our warriors into a city crawling with monsters that aren't even our responsibility!"

Elijah's gaze snapped toward the speaker. "Then we will remove uncertainty. Alpha Caspian will receive a captured infected and conduct immediate testing. If immunity is confirmed, and all current data suggests it is, then we proceed."

The reaction was instant.

"This is madness."

"They killed one of ours."

"You expect us to protect them?"

Anger pulsed through the hall, raw and unchecked. Ken's death still burned in their chests, and now they were being asked to fight the consequences of a human war.

That was outrageous.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 753: Human land[1,005 words]

Chapter 753: Human land

The noise had grown into a near riot with

sub-alphas raising their voices in outrage and open disagreement over the Alpha King's demands.

For as long as they could remember, humans had been the source of their pain. They had abused, tormented, and persecuted the were-kind. So why shouldn't they taste that same pain for once?

"That's enough!" Alpha Leon roared, his voice thundering across the hall. And the effect was immediate.

The clamor died mid-breath, conversations snapping shut as every head turned toward him.

Alpha Leon stood rigid, fury rolling off him in palpable waves. The veins along his neck bulged, his jaw clenched so tightly it looked like it might crack, and his eyes burned red with barely leashed power.

No one dared to speak, not when the south pack Alpha looked one heartbeat away from striking them down where they stood.

Even Alpha King Elijah paused, a brow lifting in surprise as his gaze settled on Leon. Of all the alphas present, Leon had always been the chill one, hence seeing him this furious was shocking.

Alpha Leon laughed. Except it was not the kind of laugh born of humor, rather it was loud and mocking.

"Oh, listen to yourselves," Leon said, spreading his hands theatrically. He began to mimic them, pitching his voice high and petulant.

"No, we won't do it!"

"No, let the humans die!"

"No, it's not our problem!"

A few growls rippled through the room, but Leon did not stop.

"Goddess, it's like listening to frightened pups whine because the world got hard."

He took a step forward, his heated gaze sweeping across the room, pinning alphas and sub-alphas alike.

"Have you all conveniently forgotten," he continued, his voice rising, "that the only reason were-kind still exist is because we learned to live alongside humans?"

An uneasy silence followed.

"Or have you forgotten how deeply tangled our lives are now? Humans aren't just neighbors, they're our wives. Our husbands. Our children." He jabbed a finger toward the crowd. "They're your nieces, your nephews, your friends."

He spread his arms wide. "So tell me, are you going to save some and let the rest rot?" Leon demanded. "Or are you planning to draw a line and say, 'Sorry, you weren't wolf enough'?"

No one answered.

Leon scoffed. "That's what I thought."

He turned, addressing the room again. "And what about the accords?" His voice hardened. "The treaties our ancestors bled for. The agreements that said when one species faces annihilation, the other stands with them. Have we forgotten that too? Or are we ready to tear it all apart and go back to warring with humans?"

Murmurs rippled through the crowd.

"And where exactly do you plan to wage this war?" Leon continued relentlessly. "What land do we reclaim?" He gestured at the floor beneath their feet. "Last I checked, this is called the human realm, not the were realm."

He laughed again, humorless.

"There's no record of where we came from. No sacred homeland waiting to welcome us back. Every territory we claim sits on human land."

He paused, then added dryly, "Unless, of course, you're suggesting we abandon everything and live deep in the forests like Neanderthals."

A few snorts escaped from the alphas despite the tension.

"Yes," Leon said mockingly. "Living in the dirt. Hunting with sticks. No electricity. No cities. Very romantic, right?"

"So," he said firmly, "stop whining like frightened cowards and do what you were always going to do in the end." He turned his back on them.

The hall fell completely silent until someone whistled from her corner.

"Damn," Irene said casually, resting her elbow against Alpha Caspian and placing a hand on his shoulder. "Didn't know Leon had balls that big."

Caspian turned slowly, staring at her like she'd just set the room on fire.

He subtly leaned away, clearing his throat as if the physical distance might absolve him of her shamelessness.

Alpha King Elijah took over immediately.

"Thank you," he said, "for that wonderfully necessary speech, Alpha Leon."

A few heads turned toward Leon.

Leon, now standing off to the side with his arms crossed, scowled deeply, eyes sharp with irritation. He had not spoken to earn the king's approval, and he certainly hadn't done it for Elijah.

Elijah noticed the look and ignored it.

"At least someone here understands responsibility, and as Alpha Leon so clearly stated, whether you whine like frightened pups until tomorrow or not, the outcome remains unchanged."

His gaze hardened. "This is an order. Each pack will release a number of warriors. The exact figures will be communicated by dawn. You will comply."

A sub-alpha near the front clenched his fists. He demanded, "What about justice for our fallen brother?"

Growls of agreement followed but Elijah did not flinch.

"The perpetrator," he replied, "the source of this infection, is still at large. Justice has not been forgotten and punishment will be addressed once he is captured."

That answer did little to soothe them.

Another sub-alpha spoke up. "And what do you expect us to do when another human attacks us?"

Elijah paused, clearing his throat.

"Aster City is currently under full lock down. At this moment, we anticipate no further civilian conflict."

Still, that did not relieve them.

Then Elijah's expression shifted, gaze so sharp locked onto the speaker, "If a human attacks you, by every means defend yourself."

For a moment, there was no sound at all.

For someone preaching restraint, Elijah was not naïve enough to demand martyrdom. And no one challenged it.

They weren't stupid enough to be killed by the same species they were being ordered to protect.

Elijah straightened.

"If that is all," he said, "the sub-alphas are dismissed."

There was a beat of hesitation, then the sub-alphas bowed and filed out of the hall, their conversations muted.

The doors closed behind them and only the alphas, Irene, Leon, Ezra and Caspian remained.

Elijah exhaled slowly.

"Now the children are gone, let the adults speak plainly."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 754: Destroy The Wolves[1,074 words]

Chapter 754: Destroy The Wolves

Each of the remaining alphas glanced at one another, tension in their posture. A private meeting with the Alpha King was never delightful and they bet their ass they were going to regret this.

Elijah clasped his hands behind his back, deliberately weighing each of them in turn with those knowing eyes.

"I know you're curious about this meeting. And you're right to be uneasy because while the world is distracted by the virus, my concern lies elsewhere.... " he announced, "...With my heirs."

And there it was. The moment they had been dreading

"Have there been any developments," Elijah asked calmly, "regarding the whereabouts of the cardinal alphas?"

His eyes settled squarely on Irene.

"No," Irene answered without hesitation. "There's been no sign. No trail. Nothing concrete."

Elijah studied her for a long moment. "So not even your priests or seers have spoken of my heirs' location?"

Irene inhaled slowly. "The last time I consulted Alice, the seer, she told me only this: the boys are safe, and they will return when the time is right."

Elijah's eyes narrowed. "She did not say where they are."

"No," Irene admitted. "She did not."

Silence pressed in again.

"And you," Elijah said quietly, "do not know where your son is."

Irene's jaw tightened. "I've searched every place Griffin would reasonably go. And if he were able to return, he would have. Griffin would never torment me with silence." Her voice hardened. "That isn't how I raised him."

Elijah hummed softly. "Mm. Is that so?"

He turned away, pacing once before stopping again. "Unfortunately, the times do not afford us patience. I need my heirs back. Now."

Once more the alphas shared a look, wondering how he was going to make that happen.

"To that end," Elijah said, "I will be employing witches to assist in tracking Patrick Elias Turner."

Heads turned up and stared at Elijah accusingly. Werewolves and witches had never coexisted peacefully and associating with them was considered taboo at best.

But Elijah continued, unbothered with the looks on their faces, "And tomorrow, I will also ask those same witches to track down my heirs."

Irene stiffened. "Track them how?"

Elijah turned back to them. "with the help of each of your blood."

The reaction was instant.

"No."

"That's not happening."

"You've lost your mind."

Their voices overlapped, filled with anger. Was Elijah kidding them right now?

Elijah raised his hand, his expression hardened. "Are you disobeying me?"

The room went cold.

Irene stepped forward first. "If you believe this demand is just, then make it publicly. Ask for our blood in front of our people, let's see how that turns out, your majesty."

Leon shook his head. "I'm not a man of faith," he said, "but I believe in the goddess. And I will wait for my son to return when she wills it."

Caspian exhaled. "I would grant you any other request, your majesty. Any. But not this." He turned and walked away without another word.

Ezra didn't speak at all, he simply shot Elijah a dark, dirty look, then turned and followed the others out of the hall.

The doors closed behind them one by one.

Elijah remained standing alone, staring at the empty space they'd left behind. His jaw clenched, his hands tightening at his sides.

Those ungrateful fools.

Unfortunately, there was nothing he could do in this case even with all his authority.

Meanwhile...

The forest which should have been quiet was alive with the sound of pursuit. The girl didn't know how long she'd been running, only that stopping meant dying.

She screamed for help but none came.

Her family had been camping when the city wide alert was announced, and by the time they tried to flee, it was too late.

She was the only one left. Her parents had sacrificed themselves so she could escape. But now, it seemed like it was all in vain.

Behind her, shapes crashed through the trees. They were quite fast and many as well. There was nothing human about them, not with their wet and broken snarls. Not to mention, creatures like them should exist in movies and not in real life. Why was this happening to her?!

Right at that moment, she burst into a small clearing, and slammed straight into someone. The impact sent her sprawling backward and she hit the ground hard, pain flaring up her spine as she scrambled away on her hands.

Her heart leapt with fragile hope. There was someone.

"Please—" she sobbed, looking up.

And the hope died instantly.

The boy standing over her looked her age. But he was just like them, the infected. One side of his face twitched, the mouth pulling into a crooked smile that didn't reach his eyes.

She screamed.

Immediately, the girl tried to get up and run but the infected emerged from the trees, forming a circle around her.

There were dozens of them, all with heads tilted at unnatural angles, and lips pulled back from teeth that looked sharper than they should be. They growled with such intensity you could feel their hunger.

"No," she whispered, shaking. "Please... please don't."

They didn't listen.

The boy stepped closer.

The girl's chest heaved as she tried to crawl away, but his shadow swallowed her. He crouched, savoring the moment. Then he reached out, brushing down her cheek with unsettling gentleness.

"So beautiful," he murmured.

Her breath hitched. The voice was hoarse, and broken, but there was awareness there.

"Shh," he rasped. "Don't cry."

She stared at him, confused, and terrified. For one fleeting second, she thought she saw something human in those eyes. Then his lips peeled back and pain exploded as his teeth sank into her flesh.

She screamed as he tore her flesh away and laughed manically. Then the others surged forward as if on command.

Hands grabbed and pushed her down, crushing her completely. The girl's screams became muffled, frantic, then weaker as the infected descended in a frenzy of snarls and tearing sounds.

Noah straightened slowly as the last of the movement stilled.

He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, his chest rising and falling with satisfaction. Around him, the infected fed mindlessly, lost in their hunger.

Noah lifted his face toward the sky. The full moon watched him without judgment and he smiled.

The goddess made him for this purpose.

He'd destroy them all.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 755: Story Book Romance[1,544 words]

Chapter 755: Story Book Romance

"It's time for you to leave."

Those were the words the bargain-bin Mufasa delivered, even though the party was still in full swing—princess absent or not. The Free Fae might be racist and all, but one thing they undeniably knew how to do was party.

Of course, Hannah had refused. The night was still young, and more importantly, she hadn't secured a husband yet. She didn't say that last part out loud. Taryn didn't need to ruin her plan further.

Unfortunately, after he'd threatened to hoist her over his shoulder and carry her out himself, Hannah had conceded defeat. She wasn't about to destroy her reputation in front of potential husbands by being hauled out like a misbehaving child.

And so here she was, trudging back toward her quarters, her steps heavy. Tonight had been a spectacular failure in Operation: **Secure a Fae Husband**. She hadn't even managed to so much as enamor a single Fae thanks entirely to the irritating beast who had made his mission to chaperone and chase away potential husbands.

Hannah shot Taryn a glare. He walked ahead of her, unbothered, while she deliberately dragged her feet behind him like a spoiled child making a point.

Then an idea struck her.

Hannah stopped abruptly but Taryn didn't.

He kept walking, his footsteps unhurried. If he'd heard her halt, he gave no sign of it, or he didn't care enough to check.

Hope bloomed in her chest as he continued down the corridor, farther and farther away from him.

This is it.

At this rate, she might actually make it back to the party and secure herself a husband.

So the moment Taryn turned the corner, Hannah moved.

She pivoted immediately, stepping off with light steps, her shoes barely whispering against the floor as she picked up speed.

For an assassin like her, Hannah should have known this was way too easy. But desperation had a way of blinding even the sharpest mind.

Hannah didn't take the same route back. On the way to the party—and on the forced walk away from it—she'd memorized the paths, and the turns. She had no intention of escaping the Fae realm — she didn't even want to — but knowing the way was essential.

She'd barely taken the next turn when she froze. The Taryn she had watched walk away was now standing directly in front of her.

Hannah had to clear her face with her hands.

"Oh shit," she breathed when it dawned on her that this was no illusion or trick of the light. It was him.

But how—? When did—?

There was no time to think, Hannah spun on her heel and bolted.

Just like that, the chase was on.

It reminded her of the first day they'd met except then he'd been in his lion form, but it didn't make the moment any less dangerous. Right now, those eyes belonged to a predator wearing a man's body, and they were locked on her with a singular intent.

"Fuck me..." Hannah muttered as she ran, pushing herself faster.

Fine.

If Taryn wanted to catch her, she'd make him earn it.

For someone his size, Taryn was frighteningly fast. His strides were long and sure, his movements fluid despite his bulk as if he had learned how to wear restraint only when necessary.

Hannah didn't even know where she was running anymore. The corridors blurred past, the only thing clear in her mind

was this: don't get caught.

She heard him gain on her, and felt the displacement of air when he reached for her. Goddess, he was too close.

So Hannah called forth her supernatural speed, power surging through her veins as she showed him exactly what she was made of. The sudden acceleration put precious distance between them, just enough for her to smirk over her shoulder.

And intentionally, she veered sharply toward a cluster of approaching faeries.

Hannah slipped through them neatly, twisting and ducking easily and totally Lord Taryn who followed a heartbeat later, and nearly plowed straight through them.

"Watch it!" one faerie hissed as another stumbled.

"Careful, beast!" someone cursed.

Taryn swore under his breath, slowing just long enough to mutter hurried apologies as he pushed past them. Hannah, on the other hand, laughed breathlessly and kept running, the sound floating back to him like a challenge.

The look Taryn shot her promised only one thing. She was as good as dead once he caught her.

Except the thought sent a thrill through her instead of fear. That was how Hannah made it outside into the garden, the cool night air hitting her lungs while the Faelight spilled over her path.

Taryn was right behind her, his pursuit unbroken. Inside the palace, he'd been forced to restrain himself, but out here, there was no such limitation.

He moved like an unbound predator now, faster, deadlier, and perfectly in his element.

Hannah tried to outmaneuver him, taking

sharp turns and leaping over low hedges, but this was the lion shifter's domain. The open space favored his strength and speed, and his determination was absolute.

She felt it an instant before it happened.

Taryn slammed into her from behind, his weight driving her down as they crashed hard onto the grass. The world jolted, and the air punched out of her lungs in a gasp as she hit the ground.

Hannah struggled beneath him, twisting her hips and trying to throw him off balance, but Taryn was already prepared for it. He shifted his weight and wedged his legs firmly between hers, locking her in place.

Before she could react, his hands closed around her wrists and slammed them back against the ground, pinning them above her head.

She froze, not from fear, but from the sudden certainty that she wasn't getting free.

Taryn leaned down, his face inches from hers, and a low growl rolled out of his chest. It was deep, territorial, and unmistakably that of a lion shifter, vibrating through her bones and sending a shiver straight down her spine.

The sound was a warning.

Hannah stared up at him and laughed.

"Well," she said breathlessly, "looks like I'm at your mercy, King Mufasa."

Taryn growled again, eyes blazing as they locked onto hers, the gold burning hot with a strange, unreadable intensity.

"Alright, alright," Hannah said, finally stilling beneath him. "I give up. You win, Lion King."

Her shoulders relaxed, her resistance melting away.

It did something to him.

She felt the slow easing of the tension that had coiled through his body like a drawn bow. The scene almost reminded her of a challenged Alpha wolf—how they never backed down until the other submitted. Wolf shifter or lion shifter, she supposed it didn't matter. Beasts were beasts.

Taryn still didn't get off her.

Hannah smirked. "You know, this is usually the part in books where the shifter male kisses his conquered female."

The words slipped out before she could stop them.

The instant regret was immediate.

The way Taryn's eyes darkened sent her heart lurching violently in her chest.

Uh-oh.

That was not smart.

Her mouth, as usual, had betrayed her.

"I—I don't mean that," she rushed out. "Not like, you should kiss me. I just meant—" She let out an awkward laugh. "That's usually how these scenes go. But we're not like that. Obviously. I mean, you're bargain-bin Mufasa for crying out loud."

She laughed again, except it was too forced as she tried desperately to lighten the moment.

It didn't work.

If anything, the tension around them thickened, heavy enough to suffocate.

Taryn released one of her wrists and for

half a second, Hannah thought she'd been given freedom, until he captured her cheek instead. His palm was warm, and rough, grounding her in a way that knocked the breath straight out of her lungs.

"Or maybe not..." she muttered, her heart slamming wildly against her ribs.

What the hell was happening?

Taryn looked at her with a gaze so dark and smoldering, and Hannah hated how easily she fell victim to it. The air between them crackled, charged with something that had nothing to do with the chase anymore.

And her traitorous pulse raced, her heart threatening to jump out of her chest.

"We shouldn't—" Hannah started, even as his face dipped closer.

Too late.

His lips brushed against hers, just a whisper of contact and Hannah gasped as electricity surged through her, lighting every nerve in her body on fire.

This was not her first kiss.

As a secret romantic, Hannah had done her fair share of experimenting back in Duskmoon village. Those kisses had been sweet, curious, and sometimes clumsy. It was pretty much fun. They'd taught her what lips upon lips felt like.

But none of them had ever felt like this.

None had stolen her breath like this.

Back then, there had been no lightning striking her spine, no sudden rush that made her head spin. No heat blooming so fast it felt like it might consume her whole.

All romance book she read always talked about sparks, about stars bursting behind closed eyes, about the world narrowing down to a single touch—and she had always assumed that part was exaggeration.

Until now.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 756: Bond-Shamed[1,518 words]

Chapter 756: Bond-Shamed

Right now, Hannah's pulse was racing, her senses buzzing as if someone had struck a live wire inside her chest. Her vision swam not from dizziness, but from the sheer intensity of it. It was frightening and intoxicating all at once.

And that was barely a kiss.

Then Hannah wrenched her captured hand free with a burst of strength and claimed his mouth, kissing him hard.

Taryn stiffened in surprise, clearly taken aback, but only for a moment. A low groan escaped him as he recovered, his grip tightening as he kissed her back with the same fierce intensity.

Hannah might have been the one who started this but Taryn was determined to bring them both to ruin.

His mouth claimed hers with deliberate pressure and hunger, lips moving against hers like he intended to devour her whole. Hannah's head swam, melting into the kiss right before she bit him.

Taryn might hold the reins here but she was a wild cat and would stand her ground.

He growled low in his chest, the sound vibrating straight through her as his hand slid into her hair, gripping hard and tugging her head back just enough to deepen the kiss.

Holy creator of the world.

Hannah knew she was completely and thoroughly fucked.

Had she known kissing Taryn would feel like this, she would have devoted all her energy to seducing him.

Wait—what?

A sweep of Taryn's tongue across hers turned her thoughts to complete mush again.

Okay, maybe bargain-bin Mufasa had been annoying at first, but if he could kiss her like this for the rest of her life, then this was a win, not a loss.

After all, he wasn't bad to look at. And that body. Goddess save her.

This was everything her romance novels had promised and more, finally brought to life. She'd just have to learn how to manage his surly temper and caustic tongue—

which, unfortunately, was doing very sexy things in her mouth right now.

Hannah clawed at him, her fingers threading into his hair and pulling hard, refusing to be the only one undone. She arched into him with a breathless sound she didn't bother to hide. The world narrowed to heat and the brutal rhythm of their mouths colliding, over and over again, until neither of them remembered how to pull back.

Well—until the need for air became impossible to ignore and Hannah found herself pounding her hand against his chest because Taryn wouldn't let her up. By sheer will and strength, she finally broke free, gasping as fresh air flooded her lungs. She swore bargain-bin Mufasa was trying to kiss her to death—and that would be a first.

But even then, Taryn wasn't satisfied. His eyes darkened with lust as a low growl rumbled from his chest.

"Mine."

Hannah's oxygen-deprived brain barely had time to register the word before he dragged his mouth along her jaw, lingering deliberately at the sensitive skin beneath her ear.

She sucked in a sharp breath, every nerve in her body flaring to life even as her instincts screamed that this was dangerous. She didn't care. Her thoughts scattered, leaving only sensation as Taryn's mouth closed over her sweet spot near her shoulder, a helpless moan slipping free.

What was it with this lion king that made him different from the others? How could he turn her into a horny teenager—which she technically was. Perhaps it was the experience and if she experimented with the other fae, perhaps they'd kiss her better than this. But even deep down, Hannah knew this was all Taryn.

It was almost like the moment in her romance books when the main character finally realized he had found his one true mate.

The thought slammed into Hannah's mind so hard everything else screeched to a halt, like brakes locking on wet pavement.

Mine.

That was what he had called her earlier. A word reserved for mates—or lovers, her other mind supplied. And the way Taryn could set her on fire with a single touch, that could only mean one of two things. Either they were bonded— or he was devastatingly good with his mouth, her ever-doubting inner voice added.

Then it all rushed back to her at once.

The way Taryn chased other males away without a word.

The way his gaze lingered on her, caught somewhere between wanting to throttle her and wanting to pull her close.

The possessiveness he never bothered to hide.

No... way.

The realization settled, heavy and undeniable.

It was almost absurd that at the exact moment everything clicked, Hannah's eyes were wide open while Taryn's lips found hers again, savoring her. Joy bloomed in Hannah's chest, bright and overwhelming.

This time, she kissed him back with intention, meeting him blow for blow, bite for bite.

The kiss was still burning on Hannah's lips when the sound of approaching footsteps reached them, accompanied by voices.

"Did you really see him come this way?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

Hannah felt Taryn stiffen instantly as if a switch had been flipped. One second his body was pressed to hers, heat and desire consuming them, and the next he was pulling back as if she'd burned him.

He straightened abruptly, his breath uneven, nose flaring and eyes snapping toward the shadows beyond the hedges.

"Taryn?" Hannah whispered, confused.

The rustle suggested they were close now.

"Go," he hissed under his breath, scanning the garden. "Hide behind the bushes. Now."

"What—? " Hannah started.

"Go," he snapped at her, those eyes glowing with authority.

Hannah scrambled to her feet and ducked behind the thick hedge just as two figures emerged from the path. She crouched low, her heart pounding so loudly she was certain it would give her away. And through the leaves, she watched the scene.

It was two beast Fae, both broad-shouldered, and sharp-eyed, their forms unmistakably predatory even in their humanoid state.

"Lord Taryn," one of them said cautiously. "We heard reports you were pursuing the human girl."

Taryn crossed his arms, shoulders tense. "And?"

The second Fae exchanged a glance with the first. "We just wanted to check if everything was under control."

"It is," Taryn replied flatly.

They studied him more closely now, their gazes lingering. "Are you well, my lord?"

The other fae sniffed as if scenting something, his eyes widening slightly only to meet Taryn's darkened ones.

"Why wouldn't I be?" Taryn said while holding the other Fae's gaze, daring him to say something.

The first Fae hesitated. "You've been... different lately. To be more precise, ever since the human girl arrived."

From her hiding place, Hannah watched, intrigued now.

"Different how?" Taryn asked, as if he didn't know what they were talking about.

The Fae cleared his throat. "Distracted. Agitated. Protective." He paused, then ventured, "Surely you don't have an interest in the human female?"

Taryn snarled. It was the raw, vicious sound of a lion shifter deeply offended.

"Don't insult me," he growled. "Entangled with her? She is nothing but a foolish prisoner who made a mistake she will soon pay for."

Hannah's breath caught painfully in her chest.

Taryn continued coldly, "She will die soon anyway. Either way, she is no concern of yours. I have everything under control."

"Our apologies, Lord Taryn," the second Fae said quickly, bowing. "We meant no disrespect."

"You should learn when to mind your business," Taryn snapped. "Or I'll find more work for you since you seem to have so much time on your hands."

They bristled, clearly unhappy, but bowed again.

"As you command," they murmured. "Good night, Lord Taryn."

They turned and disappeared down the path.

Silence fell on them, heavy and suffocating.

Taryn exhaled harshly, raking a hand through his hair. He looked wrecked, angry, and frustrated. Like someone who had just torn out his own heart and didn't know what to do with the pieces.

Hannah didn't move at first. Or rather she didn't want to. Then she slowly stepped out from behind the hedge.

Taryn turned to face her. He didn't need to be told, her face gave her away. She heard it all.

Fuck his life.

Taryn opened his mouth, then closed it again. What was he going to say anyway? It was the truth.

"So," Hannah said, her voice trembling despite her best effort, "that's what I am."

"That's not—" he started.

"A foolish prisoner," she cut in. "Not your mate."

Taryn's eyes widened. She knew?

Her laugh was brittle. "You should've said something sooner, lord Taryn. It would've saved us both embarrassment and you wouldn't be entangled with the likes of me."

"Hannah—"

"No," she said, shaking her head. "I get it now."

It dawned on her with brutal clarity. He was ashamed of her. All because she was human. Half though. But what did it matter? That was all the Free Fae would ever see.

Her chest tightened painfully.

"Don't worry, I'll die either way. So you wouldn't be burdened with the pain of a bond you never sealed."

She turned before he could respond, and left.

This time, Lord Taryn didn't follow.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 757: Do Not Woo The Princess[1,081 words]

Chapter 757: Do Not Woo The Princess

Lucien was summoned to the throne room early that morning.

The hour was chosen on purpose, just before the pale light filtered through the tall windows, and announced the dawn of a new day. That way, she had time for her daughter's training.

Queen Seraphira had not attended to Lucien the night before because her meeting with Annequin had run long and tense, but that did not mean the matter had been forgotten.

Now Lucien stood before the dais.

Queen Seraphira sat upon her throne, her posture composed, and her expression unreadable. At the far end of the dais, Lila and Rhara stood watch, silent as statues.

Seraphira regarded him. "You know why you are here, prince Lucien."

Lucien inclined his head politely. "I have a suspicion, Your Majesty, but I may be mistaken and would rather hear it from you."

The queen's fingers tightened slightly around the armrest of her throne. "You have shown interest in my daughter."

Lucien did not hesitate. "Yes."

The bluntness of his answer made her brow lift in surprise. At least he was honest. But that confidence was also a problem.

Lucien said to her. "I admire Princess Violet. Her power, her will, and her presence. I would be a fool to deny it."

Seraphira's gaze narrowed. "Even knowing she is already mated? Three bonds confirmed, and if the goddess wills it, a fourth soon to follow?"

Lucien's expression remained calm. "I do not mind."

The words landed heavily.

"You do not mind," the queen repeated.

"No," Lucien said. "If Princess Violet welcomes me into her harem, I would consider it an honor."

Seraphira studied him closely.

"And if she does not want you?" she asked. "Why would you subject yourself—and her—to such a fate?"

Lucien lifted his chin. "Because I am the last of the peryton."

The queen frowned.

He continued. "My kind is dying. But Violet is powerful and strong beyond measure. A union such as ours would produce heirs capable of reviving my people."

Seraphira's eyes hardened. "So you seek my daughter for the children she can give you."

Lucien met her gaze. "It is a profitable union. And more than that—Princess Violet was not raised among the Free Fae. She does not yet belong fully to our people. If she were joined to me, I could help her rule, guide her, and teach her our ways. She would be better positioned among her own."

As Lucien spoke, calm and articulate, Queen Seraphira felt a familiar chill creep through her bones. This was a repeat of her own fate. Except it was her own mother seated here and sealing her own fate.

"Those were the same promises Baron spoke to my mother, before she bound my life to his." Seraphira said, her mind far away.

Lucien stiffened. "I am not Baron."

"No," the queen agreed. "You are not."

She leaned forward then, her presence filling the room. "But one thing remains constant, Prince Lucien. Change. Time changes people. And power corrodes intent."

She rose from her throne.

"Have you considered what Violet choosing you would do to her bonded mates?" Seraphira demanded. "You claim to respect the bonds of the Free Fae, yet you would disregard one between the were-kind—as if it were lesser."

Her voice rose, thunderous now.

"It is an abomination to interfere with a blessed bond. No matter the reason."

Lucien's jaw clenched.

"I am not my mother," Seraphira continued, fire blazing in her eyes. "And I will not subject my daughter to the same fate. I will not trade her freedom for promises that would lead to her doom."

She pointed at him.

"You may court any powerful Fae in this realm, Prince Lucien, but not my daughter.

Should I catch even a whisper of you wooing Princess Violet again," Seraphira said, her voice deadly cold, "the consequences will be dire."

Lucien's face flushed red with restrained fury, but he bowed deeply. "As you command, Your Majesty."

"You may leave."

Lucien straightened, his eyes briefly locking with Rhara's in a scowl before he turned and strode from the throne room.

Queen Seraphira watched Lucien until the heavy doors closed behind him, only then did she allow the tension in her shoulders to ease just slightly.

The throne room felt colder now, but Seraphira returned to her throne, and sat with grace. For a long moment, she said nothing. Then her gaze shifted to her right.

"Tell me, Rhara," Seraphira asked. "What do you think of Prince Lucien's proposal?"

Rhara stiffened. The question was innocent but it carried weight.

She swallowed before answering.

"Lucien was rude," she said carefully. "Trying to interfere with a matebond is disrespectful."

Seraphira nodded once, encouraging her to continue.

Rhara hesitated, then added, "However, he is not entirely wrong. Princess Violet is still a stranger in this land. The Free Fae do not know her yet. It would help for her to have someone from this realm by her side. Someone to hold things together politically."

The queen remained silent.

Rhara took that as permission to continue. "She doesn't even need to marry him. She could simply keep him close and produce an heir that would be raised among the Free Fae. It would secure her future and that of our people."

Seraphira inclined her head. "Nice words."

Relief flickered across Rhara's face—only for it to vanish when the queen spoke again.

"Is that why you tried to convince Prince Lucien to pursue my daughter?"

The air went still.

Rhara's mouth opened. "Your Majesty, I—"

"You may answer truthfully," Seraphira said. "Or not at all."

Rhara's shoulders sagged. She stepped forward, then dropped to her knees, pressing her forehead to the floor.

"Yes, I did," she whispered. "But I swear it was never for personal gain."

Seraphira rose slowly from her throne.

"I warned you," she said, her voice cold. "I told you not to interfere in my daughter's love life."

Rhara lifted her head, tears streaking her face. "Please, Your Majesty. Everything I did was for the Free Fae. For the kingdom."

"I am your kingdom," Seraphira said sharply, standing in front of her. "And so is my daughter."

Rhara trembled. "Please—"

"Enough," Seraphira said.

She turned away. "From this moment on, you are stripped of your position at my side. You will no longer serve as my attendant or adviser."

Rhara gasped. "Your Majesty, please reconsider—"

"It is done," Seraphira said with a tone of finality.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 758: Training With The Queen[1,066 words]

Chapter 758: Training With The Queen

Dawn mist still clung to the grass, silvering the blades beneath their boots. Just like the day before, Violet stood at the center of the training ground with her mates flanking her, the wide sky stretched open above them.

And yes, her mother was still not here.

"Maybe she's running late," Roman said, glancing toward the tree line before he added, unsure, "...again?"

"Or she's not coming," Asher replied flatly. He leaned back against a stone marker, arms crossed, his dark gaze fixed ahead. "Which is far more likely."

Alaric frowned. "She promised, though."

Asher shot him a look. "And you think queens are not capable of breaking promises?"

Griffin let out a sigh, running his hand through his now long hair. "Let's cut her some slack. She's probably dealing with that strange Fae from last night. She'll come."

Asher huffed. "You're all too optimistic."

"And you're so pessimistic," Griffin shot back.

Violet said nothing.

Her lips were pressed together tightly as she stared out over the empty field. Fae were supposed to be promise keepers, and yet her own mother, the queen, failed at it.

Violet straightened her shoulders, ignoring the ache in her chest. She finally said, "It's fine. With or without her, I can still train."

Asher turned his head slowly toward her. His brow lifted. "Yeah," he said dryly. "Train yourself for a trial where everyone expects you to fail and die."

"That's not helpful, Asher," Griffin muttered.

"It's honest," Asher shot back, then softened his tone as he looked at Violet. "I'm not saying you can't win. I'm saying this isn't a game, my love."

Violet opened her mouth to respond—and then every one of them froze.

Four pairs of heightened senses snapped toward the same direction at once as they picked up footsteps.

Through the thinning mist, figures emerged. There were the guards first, then attendants, then familiar silhouettes, and at the center walked Queen Seraphira—and to everyone's shock, Queen Annequin.

Queen Seraphira was not dressed for ceremony today. She wore fitted leather beneath flowing outer robes, her hair pulled back, her expression focused.

Behind her trailed Lila, Rhara conspicuously absent, and a small escort of Fae whose eyes swept the field with alertness.

Roman let out a low whistle. "Well," he murmured. "I stand corrected."

Griffin looked impressed.

Asher, of course, said nothing.

The queen stopped a few paces away, her gaze sweeping over her daughter, acknowledging her before falling over the group.

"Your Majesty," all four of them bowed their heads.

"It's fascinating," she said coolly, "to discover that I'm the subject of such lively debate this early in the morning."

Yep. She heard them talking about her.

Alaric tried to explain. "We were just—"

Seraphira smiled. "Relax. I find it amusing." She clapped her hands. "Now then. If you're done speculating about my reliability, shall we begin?"

While the others got to work, the queen reached out and pulled her daughter into a firm embrace, one arm wrapping around Violet's shoulders and the other pressing her close.

"How are you faring?" Seraphira asked quietly, her voice lowered so only Violet could hear.

Violet stiffened for half a second, then relaxed into her. "I'm fine," she answered. It was the truth—mostly.

Seraphira leaned back just enough to study her face. "I'm sorry I left the celebration so abruptly. But I'm here now."

Violet nodded, then frowned. Her gaze slid past her mother toward the familiar and very unwelcome figure standing a short distance away.

Annequin, Queen of Astaria, lifted two fingers in a lazy wave.

Violet's jaw tightened. She looked back at her mother. "What is she doing here?" she asked, her tone careful but strained.

Seraphira followed her gaze. "Annequin will be staying for a while."

Violet blinked. "What?" The word came out louder than she intended. "But why? You don't even trust—"

Seraphira placed a hand on Violet's arm, cutting her off. "We will discuss it later."

Violet swallowed, frustration burning in her chest.

"For now," the queen continued, "your focus is training. The Ascension draws closer, and distractions will not help you. And Queen Annequin may have one or two techniques worth learning."

Annequin's grin widened. She stepped forward just enough to be irritating. "Oh, I have far more than that. I have a lot to teach the pup."

Violet snapped, baring her teeth at the annoying queen. The air around her seemed to tense, power stirring dangerously close to the surface.

But Annequin only laughed softly, clearly pleased.

"Violet," Seraphira said, her voice calm but edged with command.

Violet forced herself to breathe. She slowly reined her temper in. She looked away from Annequin, jaw tight, obviously still pissed.

Annequin said, "This is going to be fun."

Violet deliberately turned her back on Annequin and focused on her mother instead.

Around them, the Fae moved about, setting up a strange-looking crystalline device. There were runes written all around it that she couldn't read, including on the metal stand it was placed on. The whole thing reminded Violet of a crystal ball witches used for their magic.

Violet asked, "What are they doing?"

Seraphira followed her gaze. "They're setting up the dome."

"The device is an attuner," Seraphira explained. "It's designed to call magic to the surface."

Violet's shoulders tensed. "So it's going to pull my power out."

"No," Seraphira corrected gently. "It will draw your awareness to it. Your magic is already there, Violet—perhaps buried and layered between what you are—but the dome untangles it one after the other by amplifying resonance."

Seraphira continued. "Think of it as a tuning fork. When you place your hands on it, your magic will recognize itself. It will rise because it wants to, not because it's being dragged out."

Violet swallowed. "And if it doesn't?"

Seraphira straightened and met her gaze. "There's no room for doubt now, Violet. You are what you are. And that is a powerful princess. I know it."

Violet stared at her mother, speechless at the confidence she had in her.

"And what's with the guards?" Violet observed.

Seraphira smiled. "You never know what you might summon. In case you tear through another dimension, there should be enough force to deal with it."

"Moreover..." the queen's gaze narrowed this time, "there's a queen and her daughter in an open space, and vulnerable. You never know what might happen."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 759: Answer Her Call[1,521 words]

Chapter 759: Answer Her Call

It took a while for the full setup to be completed, and at some point, Queen Seraphira was summoned aside by an attendant, her attention briefly drawn away.

The moment her mother stepped away, Annequin seemed to decide the space Violet had been given was hers to occupy.

She drifted closer, hands clasped loosely behind her back, her smiling expression filled with calculation.

"I have a feeling you don't like me," Annequin said.

Violet did not look at her, offering no response. Instead her gaze remained fixed on setup ahead, expression unreadable.

Annequin waited a moment.

Then another.

When Violet still did not rise to the bait, Annequin tilted her head. "Jealous?"

That finally earned her a reaction.

Violet's brows drew together slightly. She exhaled slowly through her nose, before turning to face the Queen of Astaria.

"Jealous of what, exactly?" Violet asked.

Annequin shrugged, feigning thoughtfulness. "Oh, I don't know. Perhaps of the fact that I am already a ruling queen at such a young age, while you"her gaze swept Violet once, deliberately, "know next to nothing about your own people and are only just learning the ropes like a babe."

She smiled, clearly pleased with herself. "I am accomplished. You are just a Free Fae princess."

For a heartbeat, Violet stared at her with such intensity that it felt as though the air itself tightened. If looks could kill, Annequin would have been ash.

Then Violet smiled, except it didn't reach her eyes.

"I see what the problem is now," Violet started.

Annequin blinked. "What?"

"You're starved for attention."

The words landed cleanly.

Annequin's confidence flickered, just slightly, though she tried to mask it. Violet noticed and pressed.

"You're brilliant," Violet continued, studying her as if she were a puzzle. "Talented. Powerful. The perfect daughter. The perfect queen." She tilted her head. "And yet it's still not enough, is it?"

Annequin's expression hardened.

"Because," Violet went on calmly, "you're spoiled, arrogant, and so deeply narcissistic that you believe everyone should bow simply because you exist."

The amusement vanished entirely from Annequin's face.

But Violet wasn't finished.

"You boast about being a young queen," she said, voice sharp now. "But Fae live long lives. By our standards, you're nowhere near young." Her lips curved. "If I apply human

years to you, that makes you an old woman who should be ruling her kingdom peacefully, with a husband, perhaps a child, not wandering into another realm to stir chaos."

From the sidelines, Roman failed to suppress a snort of laughter.

Violet didn't even glance at him.

"Instead," she finished coolly, "you're here flirting with a mate that was never yours to claim."

Annequin bristled. "And you're a princess who can't control her emotions over a male—"

"That you will never have," Violet snapped,

Power flaring in her eyes and the air tensed.

"What is going on here?" Lila cut in, stepping forward.

Annequin smoothed her expression instantly, returning to pompous composure. "Perhaps ask your princess why she's being cruel to her guest over a man."

"Queen Annequin," Seraphira's voice rang out.

The Free Fae Queen approached, her presence commanding immediate silence.

"I have observed you provoking my daughter since last night, and I will not tolerate it. Mated or not, Asher Nightshade belongs to my daughter. Is that understood?"

Annequin smiled thinly. "Of course. I wouldn't want to be expelled over something so embarrassing. Imagine the headlines, two queens quarreling over a fine male."

Violet met her stare. "Then mind your business."

Annequin inclined her head. "All resentments buried. I look forward to becoming such close companions, Princess."

Violet wanted to throw up. That was not happening.

"Good," Seraphira said, turning to Violet. "Come, daughter. It's time."

Queen Seraphira took Violet's hand without ceremony and led her where the device stood.

Up close, it was more imposing than Violet had expected.

The crystal sphere sat atop a tall, circular platform of pale stone, its surface smooth and flawless, almost mirror-like. The platform itself was carved with curved plaques that

spiraled inward, each etched with subtly glowing Fae runes. The dome itself was cradled by an arched metal brace, the metal bent into an elegant sigil that wrapped protectively around it.

"Do the runes mean something?" Violet asked.

Seraphira lifted her free hand, pointing to one of the markings nearest the base. "Creation," she said. Her finger drifted to another. "The elements." Then another. "Life." Another still. "Death."

"The gods bless us with such powers," Seraphira continued. "These runes acknowledge that gift. Some of them act as conduits, directing the flow of magic while the others are simply markers."

Violet nodded slowly, absorbing every word.

Her gaze lifted to the dome itself. Despite its significance, it looked dull and ordinary. There was no glow, or anything to suggest it held anything special at all.

She frowned. "It doesn't look like much."

Seraphira followed her gaze knowingly. "Not yet."

"So it comes to life when I place my hands on it?"

"Not really," Seraphira replied. "Someone must activate it first."

Violet turned to her. "You."

"Yes."

Seraphira stepped forward, positioning herself directly in front of the platform. She released Violet's hand and lifted both arms, palms open toward the dome.

She glanced over her shoulder at Violet,

"You are my daughter, and that means you are expected to be powerful. But the attuner requires an initial source—someone strong enough to supply it with the energy it needs to awaken. That part is my responsibility."

Without warning, a surge of violet energy poured from Seraphira's hands, brilliant and luminous. The magic arced forward in rippling streams, sinking into the dome as though being absorbed into its core.

The cardinal alphas' eyes locked on the spectacle. Even Annequin, standing a distance away, went quiet, observing the whole process.

The dome stirred. At first, it was a little shimmer beneath the crystal's surface. Then color bloomed inside it, slow and swirling, bands of deep indigo, silver, and gold folding into one another.

Seraphira's magic continued to flow. The more energy she poured into the device, the more violently it responded. The colors within the sphere brightened, rotating faster.

But Violet noticed the change in her mother before anyone else did. Seraphira's shoulders tensed while her breath hitched. The veins along her neck glowed with the strain.

"Mother—" Violet started.

Seraphira did not answer only for her

knees to buckle suddenly.

"Your Majesty!" Lila shouted, lunging forward just in time to catch her before she fell.

Guards came closer to help too.

"I'm fine," Seraphira said immediately, waving them off even as Lila steadied her. She straightened, forcing herself upright, her jaw set in determination. "I'm fine."

The energy finally receded. The dome dimmed, its violent colors dissolving into a soft, misty white glow that pulsed gently as if it had settled into a resting state.

Seraphira took a slow breath, then lifted her chin.

"It's done," she announced.

Violet stared at the dome, her heart pounding. This was the moment everyone was waiting for and she was so nervous.

Seraphira must have noticed because she said to her, "When you place your hands on it, it will call to what already exists inside you. Nothing more. Nothing less." She looked fatigued but she masked it with a reassuring smile.

Violet took a deep breath. Well, what's the worst that can happen?

Every eye followed Violet as she lifted her hand.

It's just a touch, she told herself.

Her palm met the smooth surface of the dome and for a moment, nothing happened.

Then pain slammed into her stomach with the force of a sledgehammer.

Violet gasped, a soft, broken sound tearing from her throat as her knees nearly buckled. It felt as though something deep inside her had been struck awake. Heat. A swelling force coiled tight in her belly, pulsing and expanding, demanding release.

Warmth spread outward from her core, rushing through her veins like liquid fire.

Her fingers twitched.

"I—" she breathed, not even sure who she was speaking to.

Instinct took over and Violet thrust her hand forward.

Flames erupted from her palm in a brilliant burst of red and gold, roaring outward in a sudden arc of heat and light. The Fae nearest to her stumbled back with startled shouts, stumbling over each other.

The fire vanished as quickly as it had come, leaving only the scent of scorched air behind.

"Oh gods—" Violet whispered, her heart racing. "I'm so sorry."

Silence followed.

For a long, suspended moment, Violet stood frozen, her hand still outstretched, fear curling tight in her chest.

Then a sudden applause rent through the air.

Fae clapped, and cheered, staring at Violet with open awe.

Huh?

Queen Seraphira stepped forward, pride clear in her voice.

"The princess can manipulate the element of fire."

The applause grew louder with mostly Roman whistling and calling her name at the top of his lungs.

Violet smiled, then looked down to see the dome beneath her palm had changed. Its soft white glow was gone and was replaced by a deep, molten red.

Fire had answered her call.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 760: Titty Rights[1,516 words]

Chapter 760: Titty Rights

"That was pretty predictable," Asher said in the midst of the celebration. Violet had always shown signs of being a fire wielder, ever since their first encounter with Baron during dinner with the queen. And with a temper like hers, fire manipulation fitted her perfectly.

"So let's make it fun," Roman said, his eyes glinting. "Let's predict what her next power will be."

"Sounds fun," Asher said, surprisingly joining in immediately.

Griffin pinched the bridge of his nose. "You're all starting things now," he said flatly, already regretting the look in Roman's eyes.

Roman scoffed. "Starting things? No. We're just making things interesting." He leaned back on his heels, arms folding casually. "Besides, you'd be interested too once you hear what the reward is."

Griffin's eyes narrowed, wary. "What reward?"

Roman announced with his signature sheepish grin. "Simple. Whoever correctly guesses Violet's next power gets exclusive tit rights for a week."

The words landed heavy such that Alaric made a choking sound in the back of his throat while Asher let out a breath that sounded suspiciously like a growl.

"That," Alaric said carefully, "is the worst idea you've ever had."

Roman blinked at them, mock-offended. "Really? Nobody wants exclusive titty time with our mate?" He tilted his head, eyes gleaming. "I thought you'd all be ripping each other's throats out by now."

Silence fell and it was not the calm kind, but the type where predators assess each other.

Griffin shifted uncomfortably as he realized even he was considering it. The realization alone annoyed him.

Roman noticed. Of course he did.

"See?" he said smugly. "Perfect revenge material. Think of it as friendly competition."

Alaric crossed his arms. "One week is too long."

Asher shot him a sideways glance. "Why? Not confident you'll win?"

Alaric gave him a sharp look. "Oh, I'm very confident. I just can't wait to see your face when I do."

Griffin raised a hand. "We're shortening it. I am not surviving a week of any of you holding that over my head."

Roman considered it. "Fine. Four days."

"Two," Griffin countered immediately.

"Three," Asher said without hesitation.

"Two," Alaric snapped back.

Roman laughed, his eyes bright. "Two days it is."

Just like that, the decision was made. At once, their gazes sharpened, and instincts ignited. Uninterrupted access to Violet's boobs for two full days? None of them wanted to lose.

"Hold on," Alaric said, thinking. "There are no defined rules in this game yet."

Roman glanced at him, amused. "Such as?"

"For example," Alaric continued, "what happens if two people call the same power?"

Roman shrugged easily. "Then I guess you share. Our mate has two breasts after all."

A low growl of dissatisfaction rippled through the group. They had turned this into a competition and exclusive access to Violet's boobs was the whole point, but now?

"Fine." Griffin said this time, "Then I add a condition." He raised a finger. "No more than two people can call the same power."

Roman considered that, then smirked. "Smart and annoying."

"So you agree?"

"Yeah," Roman rolled his eyes. So much for his hidden plan.

So far Alaric and Asher were the most brilliant ones which meant he would likely follow after either of their guesses. Unfortunately, Griffin just put a stop to that.

Griffin shifted his weight. "Then what's the order?"

Asher answered immediately. "Rock, paper, scissors."

Griffin turned on him at once. "Oh no. Absolutely not." He pointed between Asher and Alaric. "You two want to rig this before it even starts."

Everyone knew that both of them were good at it.

Asher didn't even blink. His face remained infuriatingly blank.

Alaric shrugged. "Not my fault I'm brilliant."

Griffin scowled. "That's exactly my point."

Roman laughed, enjoying this far too much. "Alright, alright. We'll leave it to fate." He reached into his pocket. "Coin flip."

At that, all four of them paused.

There was something about chance that made it feel fair even though it could still be rigged.

"Heads," Asher said calmly.

"Tails," Alaric countered.

Griffin watched the coin closely as Roman flipped it into the air. It spun, catching the light, then slapped back into Roman's palm.

Roman peeked, then looked up slowly. "Heads."

Asher inclined his head slightly, satisfied.

Alaric clicked his tongue. "Whatever."

Asher and Alaric had already claimed their places earlier. That left Roman and Griffin, and one last coin toss would settle the order once and for all.

Alaric rolled the coin across his knuckles once, the metal flashing in the light before he pinched it between two fingers. "Alright," he said. "Roman versus Griffin."

Roman straightened immediately. "I like these odds."

Griffin snorted. "You like every set of odds."

"As long as I win," Roman replied smoothly.

Alaric lifted a brow. "Call it."

"Heads," Roman said without hesitation.

Griffin frowned. "Of course you'd choose heads."

"Then take tails," Roman shot back.

Griffin waved him off. "Just give me tails."

Alaric didn't give them time to second-guess themselves. He flicked his thumb, sending the coin spinning high into the air. It arced once, twice, catching the morning light before clinking back down into his palm.

All eyes locked onto his hand.

Alaric glanced down, then slowly looked up.

"Tails."

Griffin let out a shout of joy, triumph flashing across his face before he could stop it. Roman, on the other hand, groaned dramatically.

"You've got to be kidding me."

Griffin smirked. "Fate has spoken."

Roman squinted at Alaric. "You didn't rig that, did you?"

Alaric scoffed. "Please. If I were rigging it, I wouldn't waste it on either of you."

"So what's the order now?" Asher asked

Alaric ticked it off on his fingers. "Asher goes first. Then me. Griffin. Roman last."

Roman threw his head back. "Last?" He looked personally offended. "I come up with the game and I go last?"

"That's the price of creativity," Griffin said smugly.

Roman narrowed his eyes at him. "Careful. If I win from last position, I'm never letting you hear the end of it."

Griffin shrugged. "If."

Roman smirked. "Don't underestimate me."

"We'd see."

The four of their attention drifted back toward Violet, who stood unaware of the ridiculous—but deadly serious—stakes being set around her.

Roman clapped his hands together as he turned toward Asher. "Alright," he said, voice filled with anticipation. "Your guess."

Asher barely even looked at the dome before answering. "Earth manipulation."

There was a beat of silence. They had not seen Violet manifest that power at all hence it was strange for him to mention it.

Alaric's eyes narrowed, a slow, calculating look crossing his face. "Atomization."

Roman blinked. "Atomization?" He turned his head toward Alaric. "You're going to have to explain that one."

Alaric's lips curved into a smug smile. "Breaking matter down to its most basic structure. That's the ability Violet manifested in the North pack and brought everyone to their knees. They called her a goddess, our mate. Not that she isn't."

Roman's brows shot up. "Oh. That actually sounds fun."

Everyone turned to Griffin.

He scratched the back of his neck. "Earth manipulation," he said simply. "Same as Asher."

Roman burst out laughing. "So you're following after him? That's boring." He waved a dismissive hand. "Fine. I'll take atomization then. Asher versus Alaric. Let's see who wins."

Meanwhile, the dome's surface, which had become a molten red, began to change again and Violet braced herself as that familiar tug hit her again.

This one was different. It was not as violent or overwhelming as the first, but deeper. It felt like something pulling at her from beneath her feet.

Violet sucked in a breath, her fingers curling as warmth surged through her legs, her spine, and her bones.

The ground beneath them trembled. A sharp crack echoed across the field and the Earth split open.

Fae screamed as the ground yawned wide, jagged fissures ripping through the training field. Several attendants and guards lost their footing as the soil gave way, swallowing them whole.

"Move!" someone shouted.

Earth-benders reacted instantly.

Fae with control over stone and soil slammed their palms down, magic flaring as they forced the ground to obey. The earth opened no further, and with a collective effort, the fallen were lifted back up, dragged free from the earth and deposited onto solid ground.

Silence fell, all eyes on the dome which now

glowed a deep, steady green-brown now, veins of light pulsing through it like roots through soil.

Queen Seraphira's lips curved upward. She looked proud.

"The princess is an earth wielder," she announced.

Cheers thundered through the space as applause broke out once more, Fae shouting in approval and awe. Such a raw display of power was magnificent.

Asher didn't say a word, he simply smirked in victory.

Alaric stared at the dome, disbelief written plainly across his face. Roman's mouth hung open for a full second before he groaned.

"You have got to be kidding me."

Griffin chuckled, shaking his head. "Who lost now?"

"No way!" Roman said to Asher, "You have to tell me, how did you predict it?"

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 761: Most Powerful Fae[1,567 words]

Chapter 761: Most Powerful Fae

"Yes, how did you predict that?" Alaric was curious about it too. If there was any ability Violet had displayed the most, it was atomization, and he'd assumed that would surface next only for the opposite to happen.

Asher shifted his weight and explained, calm as ever. "Earth, air, water, and fire. Those are the core elements. In some Fae lore, there's spirit, and possibly a sixth—shadows. These are the foundations from which other abilities are derived. Since Violet started with fire, I figured she'd work her way through the basics."

"And you chose earth over air?" Alaric pressed. "That feels like a stretch."

Roman and Griffin exchanged a look. Alaric had just revealed his next guess, and both of them silently filed that information away.

Asher shrugged. "A bit of luck and critical thinking. If we're starting from the foundation, I'd rather begin with the most ideal one. In case you haven't noticed, Queen Seraphira—Violet's mother—is a healer."

"And?" Roman said flatly. He still didn't see it.

But Alaric's mind was already racing. "Healing is a branch of earth magic," he murmured.

"Bingo," Asher said, eyes twinkling.

"So you're saying..." Griffin began slowly, "...healing is a specialized expression of earth magic, not a default ability."

"To the Fae, at least," Asher replied. "An earth elemental can heal, but healing isn't guaranteed just because someone controls earth. I figured if Queen Seraphira can heal, then Violet might inherit the potential. She's strong enough for it. Looks like my gamble paid off." He smiled smugly.

"I swear, I hate how observant you are sometimes," Alaric groaned, defeated.

Asher tapped his temple. Alaric was brilliant, no doubt—but intelligence alone wasn't enough. Observation required awareness, instinct, and reading what others overlooked. That was one lesson he'd learned well from Henry.

"So Violet is a healer too? I don't get it," Griffin said. "Didn't Violet heal Alaric when he nearly died during the North Pack attack?"

Asher turned sharply. "Didn't you say that was the mating rune?"

Alaric touched his side. "I swear it was. The same way she drew energy from me—"

"But if she's an earth elemental," Roman cut in, "we might not know for sure."

"Not until she trains," Asher finished.

Then Griffin grinned. "I hope it's both. If she's an earth elemental and a healer..."

"She'll be terrifying," Roman muttered.

None of them disagreed.

"Then we move on to the next section," Roman announced, rubbing his hands together like a man about to enjoy himself far too much.

Alaric groaned loudly. "Are we still doing this?"

Roman flashed him a grin. "Of course we're still doing this. We're doing this until it's over."

Griffin snorted. "At this rate, we might as well violate the no-sex rule."

For once, Asher surprised them. "Honestly," he said dryly, "we might as well put a dampener on Alaric while we're at it."

Alaric's jaw dropped. He turned slowly to stare at Asher, utterly blank.

Roman lost it, snickering outright, while Griffin slapped a hand over his mouth, shoulders shaking.

Alaric blinked at him. And then he laughed sarcastically. "Nice one. And you'd be the dampener, I suppose?"

Asher didn't even flinch.

Roman clapped his hands once. "Alright, that's enough. Let's get this going before our mate ruins it by casually manifesting another ability."

That wiped the humor from Alaric's face. "Fair."

They gathered closer, lowering their voices instinctively as the Fae moved around the field. Just like before, the decision would be left to chance.

"Same rules," Roman said. "Coin toss."

Alaric straightened. "I'm calling first this time."

Asher's mouth twitched. "Naturally."

Roman flipped the coin into his palm. "Call it."

"Heads."

Asher snickered. "Of course you'd choose that this time."

Alaric rolled his eyes. Now the asshole thought he was copying him.

Roman was about to toss it when Alaric lifted a hand. "No. Griffin should do it."

Roman raised a brow. "You don't trust me?"

"Sorry," Alaric said unapologetically, eyes flicking to Asher. "Asher's your buddy."

Roman laughed, unbothered. "Fair enough."

Griffin stepped forward, rolling the coin over his knuckles before flicking it high into the air. It spun high, and landed on the stone.

"Tails."

For a heartbeat, there was silence.

Then Asher buckled over laughing.

He laughed so hard he had to brace himself on his knees, tears streaking down his face.

The nearby Fae hissed sharply.

"Quiet!" someone snapped. "No distractions for the princess!"

Asher waved a hand in apology, still laughing as he wiped his eyes.

Alaric, meanwhile, sulked like a scolded child with his arms crossed and jaw tight.

Roman grinned. "That's rough."

Alaric muttered something unkind under his breath.

"Alright," Roman said. "My turn with Griffin."

Asher straightened, clearing his throat. "I'll toss."

Griffin cracked his neck. "Tails."

Roman didn't hesitate. "Heads."

The coin spun again. It hit the ground.

"Heads."

Roman burst into a victorious celebration, pumping his fist once before a chorus of Fae hisses reminded him where he was.

Griffin only shook his head, resigned.

Alaric squinted. "What's the price this time?"

Roman's grin turned dangerous. "Winner gets exclusive cuddle rights. Full bed access. Two days."

Alaric and Griffin groaned in unison.

"That is totally unfair," Griffin muttered.

"If I'd known that was the prize," Alaric added darkly, "I would've fought harder."

Roman laughed. "Someone's going to be making the coach their best friend for a while."

Then he sobered. "Alright. Guesses."

Asher went first.

The answer was too obvious. However, he shared a brief look with Alaric before saying, "Shape-shifting."

Alaric frowned. "I don't need your pity."

Asher shrugged. "I'll take back my words if I can. Unfortunately, rules are rules."

Alaric exhaled. "Air manipulation."

Roman didn't hesitate. "Air manipulation."

Griffin sighed. "Atomization."

Roman grinned. "Let's see who wins."

"Asshole." Griffin muttered.

All four of them turned back toward their mate Violet who was still unaware of the madness unfolding behind her.

The dome changed again and a great pressure swept across the field right before the wind came.

It was not a breeze nor a gust, rather a

roaring surge of air tore outward from the dome, ripping across the ground with violent force. Fae cried out as they were lifted off their feet, their hair whipping wildly.

The air wielders reacted instantly, slamming their palms down and seizing control of the currents before anyone could be hurled away completely to Goddess knows where.

The wind spiraled upward, forming a towering vortex around Violet. Her hair lifted, eyes glowing while the others had to shield their faces away from the current.

As if the wind was done with their performance, it died down immediately, the dome glowing a soft, swirling blue.

For a moment, no one said a word. Instead Fae stared at Fae. Cardinal alpha at cardinal alpha. Even Annequin for once looked impressed. It was obvious to everyone that princess Violet was not just gifted, she was powerful.

Then Queen Seraphira announced with the proudest smile, "My daughter wields the third element. Air!"

Applause rippled through the training field, rising and falling like waves as the Fae celebrated Violet's awakening.

The cardinal alphas were already gathering together once more, ready to continue their games when Violet suddenly groaned aloud.

It cut clean through the celebration like a blade and then her knees buckled.

"Violet?" All of her mates said at the same time.

She doubled over, clutching her stomach as a sharp crack of bone grinding against bone sounded through the space.

The applause died instantly as Violet screamed. Her spine arched violently, her limbs twisting at unnatural angles as gasps tore through the crowd. Her color bled away, reshaping. Same with her hair which darkened and reshaped. Her face contorted, bones shifting beneath flesh as her new identity formed.

"What is going on? Should we help her, your majesty?" one of the Fae asked Queen Seraphira concerned.

"No, let her be," Queen Seraphira breathed, seeing through what was happening.

Before their eyes, Violet's form finished settling and standing where the princess had been moments ago was Queen Annequin.

This was not an illusion nor glamour. It was perfect and exact down to the sharp cut of her jaw, the color of her eyes, and the very domineering presence she carried.

The field fell into horrified silence.

Annequin stared at her—at herself—with naked shock, her composure cracking for the first time since her arrival.

"What—" she started, then stopped, lips parting as she took a slow step forward. "That's not possible."

Violet—no, Violet as Annequin—looked down at her hands, flexed her fingers as if they didn't belong to her.

"I—" Her voice came out as Annequin's.

Roman broke the silence with a low, stunned whistle. "Well," he said, "I guess that's the end of our games."

"Shapeshifting came a bit early," Asher said. "Perfect mimicry."

Queen Seraphira stopped beside Violet, eyes blazing with equal parts awe and fear.

On the other hand, having overcome her shock, Annequin finally laughed. "Oh," she said, "this just became very interesting. Of all the people to mimic, Princess, you chose me. You must love me so much."

But as proud as Annequin sounded, there was a hint of fear in her eyes. If Violet could mimic her, did that include her powers as well? Because if that were the case, then Violet might very well be the most powerful Fae alive.

And that was a problem.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 762: Cannot Be Measured[1,081 words]

Chapter 762: Cannot Be Measured

"Incredible," whispered Nirmal, one of the Fae tasked with witnessing the unleashing of the princess's powers. Her role was to document each manifestation, and she did so with barely contained excitement.

Nirmal stepped over to Violet, circling her with her quill in hand. Her keen eyes traced every detail of this new form of hers from the exact shade of black-blue hair down to her feet.

She stopped in front of Violet, then turned her head toward Annequin.

"There's literally no difference," Nirmal said with an awe filled voice. "If I didn't know better, I'd swear the Queen of Astaria was standing before me. The princess could pass as you without raising a single suspicion."

Conversation arose amongst the Fae. They were more used to the idea of glamouring than shapeshifting. It must be her beast side, they reasoned.

"If only it wasn't this body," Violet shifted uncomfortably, trying to adjust to the unfamiliar presence layered over her own.

Of all the people to Shapeshift into, why the bitch?

"Well, not entirely," Annequin countered Nirmal's words, "Your princess may be able to mimic my physical form, but power is another matter entirely. Or can she?" She lifted a brow, studying Violet.

Murmurs rippled through the space, Fae nodding at the question.

Though Annequin's posture was relaxed, only someone watching closely would notice the tension coiled beneath her confidence. She was dying to know, can Violet copy her powers as her?

"That is a good observation," Nirmal said, her gaze lingering on Violet with open anticipation, as though she expected Annequin's power to erupt from the princess at any moment.

Before Violet could so much as lift her hand, Asher cut in.

"A good observation," he said, "that should be explored in private, during the princess's training." His gaze slid to Annequin, unmistakably hostile. "A princess's strengths and weaknesses should not be exposed in a field full of strangers."

Annequin laughed lightly, masking the irritation beneath her smile. "You still think I intend to harm your princess?"

"It's not about intent," Asher replied. "Where I come from, it's called a national secret."

"Moreover," Alaric added, stepping in beside him, "this is the princess's unveiling, not her examination. Her limits can be tested later, privately. And if you're invited..." He clicked his tongue. "Good for you."

Annequin glanced around. Too many eyes were on her now and from the look of things, the Fae seem to agree with them.

Queen Seraphira intervened. "The Alphas are correct. We will move on. Violet's powers will be studied in depth later."

"If you say so, Your Majesty," Annequin said pleasantly. But the moment she turned away, her smile vanished.

Her gaze caught Asher's. For a heartbeat, the world narrowed to the two of them—his slitted, shadowed eyes boring into her icy blue with a pressure that could have cracked stone. Lesser beings might have flinched but Annequin did not.

If Asher Nightshade thought she would retreat with her tail between her legs, he was gravely mistaken. His darkness did not frighten her. Not when she was the abyss itself.

Darkness recognized darkness.

She winked at him.

Asher looked away, a deep frown carving itself into his face. He didn't trust the Fae Queen one bit.

And Queen Seraphira was definitely playing with fire letting the snake into her kingdom.

At the same time, Violet was relieved to finally shed that skin from her body. She slammed her palm back onto the dome without hesitation and waited for the change to occur.

Barely a minute passed before her knees buckled again. She dropped to them with a sharp groan as her body began to distort once more. Her muscles tightened and bones protested. She moaned through clenched teeth but refused to lift her hand from the dome.

She didn't know about anyone else, but she had no intention of using this ability often—only when it was absolutely necessary. In no time, her form snapped back into place. She was herself again, panting hard, sweat slicking her skin.

At least it was her own body. No matter how much it hurt like hell.

But the relief barely lasted a heartbeat.

Another groan tore from her throat as something else stirred deep inside her. This power arrived with overwhelming force, far stronger than the others, slamming into her so hard it made nausea surge up her throat.

"Oh boy... here we go," Roman muttered grimly as he watched the grass around Violet wither, blacken, and crumble into fine dust.

The nullification spread outward in a widening circle, the ground dissolving as if reality itself was being erased. The Fae closest to her stumbled back instinctively, fear rippling through them.

"Goddess..." Nirmal gasped, her eyes wide with awe and terror. "She has the power to unmake."

The words sent murmurs racing through the crowd. Faces paled while some stepped farther away. Others froze where they stood, unable to look away.

"Uh—excuse me," Alaric said tightly, "I don't think we should be anywhere near Violet right now. At all." He had seen this power once before and knew what it could do.

The dome had turned completely black now, its surface swallowing light instead of reflecting it. Energy churned violently inside, and Violet, on the other hand, was clearly struggling. The veins along her temples bulged, her jaw clenched in agony.

Queen Seraphira noticed. "She's sending too much—"

Lila stepped forward, her face ashen. "Your Majesty, I think you need to move."

"What? No," Seraphira refused at once.

"It's not safe anymore," Lila insisted, panic breaking through her composure. "We don't know what this power can do."

As if to prove her point, a sharp cracking sound split the air.

Everyone turned just in time to see a fracture spiderweb across the surface of the dome.

The queen sucked in a breath. "Foolish us," she whispered. "Her power cannot be measured—"

"Violet!" the cardinal alphas shouted together.

"Take your hand off the dome!" Asher yelled, fear bleeding into his voice.

The darkness that had crept across the ground now lifted into the air itself, swallowing the space. Panic spread as Fae began to retreat in all directions.

"I can't!" Violet cried, her voice breaking.

It was as if an invisible force had fused her palm to the dome, dragging power out of her endlessly, and mercilessly.

"Your Majesty!" Lila screamed.

And then, the dome shattered.

Darkness exploded outward in a tidal wave, engulfing everything in its path.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 763: A Bond Like Theirs[1,127 words]

Chapter 763: A Bond Like Theirs

Nothing made sense anymore.

The world fractured into noise and motion and fear all at once, as if reality itself had lost its footing.

The darkness pouring from Violet swelled outward like a living tide, hungry and unstoppable.

Fae screamed. Guards were already retreating, instincts screaming at them to run, but there was nowhere fast enough to escape.

"Leave now!" Lila yelled at the queen but she wouldn't.

"I need to get to my daughter!" Queen Seraphira yelled.

Then Annequin stepped into the chaos, raising her hand as shadows answered her call. They poured out from inside of her where they have been living in all this while. They spiraled outward in perfect symmetry, meeting Violet's unmaking head-on.

The collision was immediate as darkness slammed into darkness with the force of colliding worlds.

For a heartbeat, the two powers locked with Violet's raw, devastating void pressing outward in chaotic waves, and Annequin's shadows folding around it, compressing, restraining, and canceling it. The air screamed as pressure built between them, light bending violently, and sound collapsing into a high, piercing whine.

Then—BOOM.

The impact detonated like a sonic blast.

A shockwave ripped across the grounds, flattening grass, and shattering stone markers like glass. Fae were thrown through the air like broken dolls—guards, attendants, nobles alike and unfortunately, Queen Seraphira—slamming into the ground, skidding, rolling, and groaning in pain.

The cardinal alphas were no exception.

Asher was flung backward hard enough to knock the breath from his lungs. Griffin crashed into a fallen pillar, pain exploding through his shoulder. Alaric barely managed to twist midair before hitting the ground, skidding through the earth. Roman landed on one knee, claws digging deep as he fought to stay upright.

At the center of it all, Violet and Annequin were hurled apart.

Violet's body lifted from the ground as if struck by an invisible fist, the darkness tearing free from her in violent recoil. She hit the earth hard, rolling once, twice, before coming to a stop in the churned soil, gasping, her vision swimming.

Annequin fared little better. Her own shadows collapsed inward as she staggered back several steps, her boots carving lines through the ground before she dropped to one knee, one hand braced against the earth. For the first time, shock flashed through her expression.

Violet was insanely powerful.

And where in the world had she sent her soldiers?

Silence followed for a long time.

Dust hung thick in the air, drifting slowly as the last remnants of darkness dissipated, fading into nothingness.

Around them, the Fae struggled to their feet, staring at the devastation with shocked expression. For once fear struck them at what their princess was capable of.

Queen Seraphira pushed herself upright, the world still spinning, only for Lila to rush to her side and steady her before she could stumble again.

"Your Majesty," Lila said urgently, gripping her arm. "Easy."

Seraphira barely heard her. Her eyes were already scanning the ruined grounds, heart pounding.

"Violet," she said hoarsely. "Where is my daughter?"

Lila turned and pointed to the scorched ground where the cardinal alphas knelt in a tight circle around her daughter.

Seraphira wrenched herself free and moved toward them, her skirt dragging through ash and crushed grass. She dropped to her knees beside Violet just as Asher looked up, his face stripped of its usual control.

"I don't know what's happening to her," he said, with genuine fear in his voice. "She won't stop."

Violet's body jerked violently against the earth. Her breaths came in shallow, broken gasps, her limbs twitching as raw magic rippled beneath her skin.

Seraphira sucked in a breath. "It's her energy, it's unbalanced," she said. "The dome was not strong enough to handle the amount of magic it pulled."

She took Violet's hands in hers, fingers closing tightly, and began to channel her healing power. Light flared where their palms met, a soft but growing glow that spread up Violet's arms. Seraphira leaned in, murmuring words under her breath, pouring calm into the chaos raging inside her daughter.

For a moment, it worked as Violet's convulsions eased slightly and her breathing slowed.

Then the glow faltered. Pain flashed across the Queen's face as she swayed, her grip tightening instinctively even as her strength began to give out.

"Your Majesty!" Lila cried out, "Stop, you've already given too much. Remember your health!"

Health?

The cardinal alphas exchanged quick, tense looks but said nothing. Whatever the queen's condition was, this was not the moment to question it.

Seraphira forced herself to withdraw her hands, the effort visibly costing her. She sucked in a shaky breath and straightened.

"Call the healer immediately," she ordered. "Take Violet to Zuru. Now."

Griffin frowned, "Won't that take too long?"

Before Seraphira could answer, Alaric felt this urge to do something stir deep in his chest. He swallowed and looked up at the queen.

"May I try something?" he asked. "Once Violet healed me through my rune. I don't know if it will work in reverse. I mean we're her mates after all."

Seraphira studied him for a heartbeat. Then she nodded. "Do it."

She'd let them do anything as long as her daughter recovered right now.

Alaric took Violet's hand, and closed his eyes, focusing on the bond. He prayed—harder than he ever had—that it would answer.

But nothing happened. Seconds stretched and there was no sign of Violet getting any better.

Seraphira lost her temper. "We're wasting precious time—!"

Roman moved without a word. He placed his hand over Alaric's, his jaw set. Griffin followed, adding his own hand to the growing stack.

Asher hesitated only a fraction of a second before Roman nudged him. Then Asher placed his palm atop the others, his eyes locked on Violet's face.

What in the world were they even expecting? To be honest, they had no idea.

So they waited and nothing happened.

Lila shook her head, annoyed. "I don't understand what you're trying to achieve here but the magic inside her is—"

Light flared.

The rune at Violet's neck ignited first, glowing brilliant golden. Then the matching runes on her stomach blazed to life, the symbols pulsing in perfect synchrony beneath their hands.

Violet sucked in a sharp breath and jerked upright with a gasp, her eyes flying open.

"Violet," Alaric breathed.

She looked disoriented but alive.

Before anyone could say another word, Alaric pulled her into his arms, holding her tightly. "It's okay," he murmured. "You're safe."

Violet clutched him back as if afraid he might disappear, her fingers fisting in his shirt, her face buried against his chest.

Around them, the recovering Fae stood frozen in stunned silence. They had seen mating bonds before but never one like this.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 764: The Cornered Rabbit[1,108 words]

Chapter 764: The Cornered Rabbit

Patrick woke up with a sharp gasp. Instinctively, he tried to sit up only for a calm voice to stop him.

"You shouldn't do that, sir. You're in no position to move right now."

As if to prove the point, white-hot pain tore through him, slicing through his body like a blade. Patrick sucked in a shaky breath through his nose, every muscle locking in protest.

He lifted his head slowly and focused on the man standing beside the bed. Recognition hit him.

"Y-you..." His voice came out hoarse.

The man was one of the intern doctors. One of the ones he had worked with during the production of Ignis. They were in a small room with bare walls and a single closed window, clearly not meant for comfort.

"Yes," the man said, offering a polite smile. "Me."

Patrick groaned softly. "What happened?" Even speaking felt like dragging broken glass through his throat.

The intern leaned closer, checking the monitors and bandages. "You nearly died, that's what happened."

"Oh." Patrick breathed, the word heavy with resignation.

The memory of Vera's betrayal flooded back all at once. He had always known his sister was ruthless, but trying to murder him? Her own brother? That crossed a line even he hadn't believed she would step over.

And yet, she had.

Patrick closed his eyes, pain pulsing through him in slow, punishing waves.

"How am I even alive?" he asked.

If Vera wanted him dead, she would have finished the job. As far as he remembered, his sister had never been sloppy.

"It was your brother, sir," the doctor confessed. "After your sister murdered your mother—"

"What?" Patrick stiffened, every muscle going rigid. He looked up at the man, dread flooding his chest. "What did you just say?"

"I'm sorry," the doctor murmured, sympathy etched into his face. "Madam Moira is gone as well."

The color drained from Patrick's face. His stomach twisted violently, nausea surging up his throat. For a moment, he had foolishly hoped that the memory had all been a hallucination.

But it was real.

His mother had fought for him and Vera had killed her too.

Grief slammed into him, followed closely by bitterness and rage. This was his fault. All of it. If he had never brought Ignis into their lives, none of this would have happened. His mother will still be alive.

The doctor hovered uncertainly as Patrick broke down, sobbing openly now, no longer caring about the pain ripping through his body.

"I'm going to kill that bitch," Patrick snarled through gritted teeth. "Even if it's the last thing I do, I'll make sure she suffers. I'll teach her the real meaning of pain."

"U-um..." the doctor began, clearly uncomfortable. He shifted on his feet before forcing himself to continue. "Perhaps... perhaps that should wait until after you recover."

Patrick let out a harsh, humorless laugh.

"You were stabbed through the lower abdomen," he went on carefully, trying to ground the conversation. "The blade missed your spine, but it tore through muscle and narrowly avoided major organs. You lost a dangerous amount of blood. If your brother hadn't gotten you here when he did—"

"I'm a doctor," Patrick cut in sharply, "I know how close I came to dying."

"Even so, you're looking at weeks before you can stand properly, possibly months before full recovery. Any strain before then could reopen the wound—."

"That is enough!" Patrick thundered.

The man shut up at once. He looked around the cramped space, wishing he could be anywhere but here.

"I'll heal and get her," Patrick whispered, making the promise more to himself.

The doctor said nothing this time. Not that there was anything he could say. This was not his business. Joseph had merely paid him enough to sneak Patrick out of the hideout and nurse him back to health. Once Patrick could stand on his feet again, he was out of here and back to his family.

Suddenly, there was a sharp knock on the door.

Both the doctor and Patrick stiffened.

Their eyes met, alert and tense.

"Who is that?" Patrick asked, his voice tight.

"I... I don't know," the doctor answered nervously.

Patrick's pulse spiked. "Who knows I'm here?"

"Nobody," the doctor said quickly. "Not even Joseph. He didn't want to risk implicating you if Vera found out what he did."

"Fuck," Patrick cursed.

He groaned loudly as he tried to sit up, pain ripping through his abdomen.

The doctor panicked. "You shouldn't be moving! You'll reopen the wound!"

"Not if they've found me," Patrick snapped. "I have to get out of here."

But where was he going to go? There was only one entrance, not even a back door, and the window was not wide enough to escape through. Still, Patrick wasn't about to lie there like a sitting duck and let them take him.

Then the door exploded inward.

The hinges screamed as the metal frame tore loose, the door ripping completely off its mounts and flying across the room with brutal force. It slammed into the opposite wall in a crash of splintered wood and dust.

Patrick and the doctor shouted, instinctively throwing their arms up to shield their heads.

Before either of them could recover, boots thundered across the floor.

In the blink of an eye, the cramped room was flooded with soldiers clad in black uniforms, their weapons drawn. Every gun in the room was aimed at him.

Patrick's heart pounded violently against his ribs as reality sank in. Neither he nor the doctor dared to move.

They were surrounded.

Then the soldiers began to part, forming a narrow way.

The first thing Patrick noticed was the slow, deliberate sound of boots striking the floor.

Alpha King Elijah stepped into view and stopped directly in front of him.

"Finally," Elijah said sarcastically, "the rabbit runs out of holes."

Patrick swallowed, staring up at Elijah. Though the Alpha King's expression was calm—almost relaxed—there was a storm brewing beneath it, and waiting to break.

Then Elijah turned his back on him.

He spoke to the soldier nearest him, his voice detached. "Take him," he said. "Kill the other one. We have work to do."

The doctor's eyes widened.

He opened his mouth, perhaps to plead, or explain, but the sound never came. A gunshot cracked through the cramped room, and the doctor's body collapsed instantly, lifeless before it hit the floor.

Patrick shouted, straining against the hands grabbing him, pain ripping through his abdomen as blood soaked through the bandages. Yet he was hauled roughly to his feet despite his injuries.

And Elijah never looked back.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 765: Let Fate Decide[1,094 words]

Chapter 765: Let Fate Decide

Unfortunately—or perhaps inevitably—not just Patrick was undergoing a life-altering reckoning.

Vera stormed into the bunker with force. The place which was meant to house their people—the workers, the doctors, the trained fighters who had sworn loyalty to their cause — was empty.

Joseph was right behind her, having been the one to inform her of the situation at hand. He slowed down as soon as she stopped short.

Rows of narrow bunker beds lined the walls, metal frames bare except for rumpled sheets. Lockers, footlockers, bags —everything that was supposed to make the place feel occupied had vanished.

For a long moment, Vera didn't move. Her eyes swept the room intensely as if she expected the people to materialize if she stared hard enough.

"They left," she said finally, her voice flat with disbelief. "They all left."

Joseph said with bitter amusement. "What were you expecting them to do? You killed our mother, Vera. You murdered Patrick. What did you think would happen?" His voice cracked with anger. "They were terrified knowing they knew they'd be next."

Vera turned on him, eyes blazing. "They were supposed to be loyal! They needed to understand the bigger picture. Sacrifices are necessary."

Joseph gestured around the empty bunker. "Well, congratulations. They understood perfectly."

Something in Vera finally broke and she let out a raw, furious scream, and lunged for the nearest bed. She flipped it onto its side, the frame crashing loudly against the floor.

Then she grabbed a loose mattress and hurled it across the room. Sheets, pillows, anything within reach was ripped away and thrown.

Joseph stood frozen, watching as she lost her mind.

"Cowards!" she shouted. "Every single one of them!"

When the destruction wasn't enough, she turned on him.

She shoved him hard in the chest. Joseph staggered back a step, catching himself.

"Are you leaving too?" she screamed, hysterical now. "Is that it? One by one, you all abandon me?"

"Vera!" Joseph shouted, grabbing her wrists.

She froze at his touch.

For a heartbeat, she stared at him, and then laughed. Her shoulders shook as the sound spilled out of her, wild and broken. Then, just as abruptly, the laughter collapsed into sobs.

Tears streamed down her face as she clutched him, her hands framing his jaw even as he tried to pull away.

"You can't leave me," she whispered desperately. "Please. You're all I have left now. Don't go too, Joseph. Please."

Joseph stood stiffly in her grip, discomfort written plainly across his face. He didn't return the embrace, but after a long, strained pause, he nodded.

"I'm not going anywhere," he said.

Her eyes searched his. "You're sure?"

He nodded again, slower this time. "I'm sure."

Vera sniffed hard, wiped her face with the back of her palm, and straightened. The tears vanished as quickly as they had come. Her spine squared while her expression smoothed into cold composure, as if the breakdown had never happened at all.

"Good," she said briskly.

Joseph stared at her, unsettled by the speed of the shift in her emotion. He had always suspected Vera was a little out of her mind.

"Gather the ones who are still left," Vera ordered. "Bring them to the hall. I need to speak to them."

There was something in her commanding tone that made his stomach turn.

Joseph hesitated. For a moment, he looked as though he might argue, or refuse. Instead, the moment passed and his shoulders slumped.

"As you wish." He turned and left without another word.

Moments later, the remaining members of Vera's faction were gathered in the central hall.

The sight almost made her laugh.

Where there had once been dozens of her fighters, tacticians, men and women who believed in the cause, there were now barely a handful.

It was just ordinary workers. No soldiers, nor loyalists with teeth. Just frightened people packed together, clutching their coats and staring at her like she was the devil come to life.

The reality of it hit her hard. They had taken the strength with them when they ran.

She had run this mission to the ground.

However, would Vera Turner ever admit she had failed her ancestors?

Never!

Vera paced slowly before the line, saying nothing at first. She let the silence stretch and suffocate the people. Fear always spoke louder when given time.

Then she stopped.

"I know what you're thinking," she said calmly.

No one answered.

Her lips curled. "You all think I'm a monster for murdering my own mother and brother."

A ripple of whisper passed through the group and died just as quickly.

"Yes," Vera continued coolly. "I did. And I'd do it again."

Joseph stiffened at the edge of the hall.

"They turned against the cause," Vera went on. "Unfortunately, weakness spreads like disease, and diseases must be cut out before they infect the rest of the body."

Her gaze swept over them, assessing.

"But what disappoints me most is not that they fell. It's that the ones I believed would stand with me ran."

Her voice hardened.

"They abandoned me."

A woman in the front row shook visibly.

"So now," Vera said, spreading her hands, "you will pay the price for that betrayal."

A low murmur of panic broke out.

"Please—" someone whispered.

Vera ignored it.

"I wanted to save humanity," she said, her tone almost reflective. "That was the goal. That was always the goal." She laughed, short and bitter. "But humanity doesn't want to be saved."

Her eyes burned.

"So I'll let it burn."

The whispers turned frantic.

"No—"

"She's insane—"

"We didn't do anything—"

Vera raised her voice just enough to silence them. "Take the remaining stock of Ignis," she ordered. "All of it. Move it to District One. That's where the fight for survival begins. Let humanity prove it deserves to live. Let fate decide what remains."

The color drained from several faces.

Joseph stepped forward, horror breaking through his restraint. "Vera, what are you saying?" He grabbed her arm. "Wasn't fighting for humanity the entire point of this?"

She turned slowly to him.

"I thought so too," she said. "Until they betrayed me." Her voice dropped in a deadly way. "Now let the strongest species win."

Joseph swallowed hard. "We're facing an active viral epidemic. Introducing mass quantities of Ignis into a high-crime district will destabilize the region entirely."

She smiled cruelly. "Then they were never meant to survive." Her gaze sharpened. "Now, unless you plan to stop me the way our mother tried to, I suggest you move."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 766: Violet Will Join Me[1,074 words]

Chapter 766: Violet Will Join Me

Duskmoon Village

"It's been confirmed," one of the wolves reported to Angus. "Your brother has found the doctor, Patrick."

Angus and his advisers were gathered in their meeting place, planning their next course of action, especially with the disturbing news that had reached them lately.

Angus scoffed. "My little brother must have finally woken up from his slumber after my last visit."

"What do we do now?" his beta, Jericho, asked, his eyes fixed on him.

"We do nothing," Angus replied. "The time is not ripe."

"Are you sure about that?" another adviser pressed. "There are reports of humans turning into... cannibals—"

"Zombies," Ziva supplied casually. "That is what they call them."

As was common in every meeting her father permitted, the witch made sure she was in attendance.

The older man glanced at Ziva, slightly flustered, then waved a hand. "Fine. Zombies." His eyes gleamed with determination. "That makes this the perfect time to step out and be the hero our people need, Alpha."

"No," Ziva said. "It is not."

All heads turned toward her at once, murmurs rippling through the room. None of them ever liked Ziva speaking in their meetings — she was female, young, and, in their eyes, far too bold. But if Angus allowed it, who were they to object?

Ziva felt the displeasure rolling off the men, but she did not care one bit. Left to her, she would not have surrounded her father with these old fools at all. But it was her beloved daddy's choice, and she respected it.

Holding their gazes boldly, Ziva continued. "There isn't enough death yet."

A hush fell.

"Enough death?" one of them lifted a questioning brow.

"It's too early for Father to step out," Ziva declared. "If he does, he'll dilute the impact of his return. But if he waits—" her lips curved slightly, "—until enough blood is shed to form a river, until werewolves cry out for help with no one to answer... when there is nothing left but pain and sorrow—"

She paused, letting the image sink in.

"Then Father appears like the messiah he is and takes control. With his army, we cleanse the vermin, and my father takes his rightful place as Alpha King."

For a moment, no one spoke. The wolves at the table simply exchanged looks, as though her words had finally settled and begun to make sense.

Even Angus wore a proud expression. "I'm impressed," he said.

Ziva's cheeks flushed at once. She liked it when her father looked at her like that.

Then Jericho spoke up, his tone cutting through the moment. "Your plan is good," he said, "but it isn't foolproof."

Ziva turned to him with a sour expression. She hated that man.

"You're relying on waiting for things to escalate," Jericho continued, "and that's dangerous. You forget that humans are like the sands of the earth—countless — and unlike them, we are numbered. If the werewolves are wiped out, who exactly will your father rule over in the end? Zombies?" He scoffed. "And with what army will he fight?"

Ziva opened her mouth to answer, but Jericho wasn't done.

"The second reason why your idea of waiting is flawed," he added. "You're counting on the werewolves becoming helpless, but they aren't, are they."

Ziva closed her mouth, scowling as he pressed on.

"There are still the Cardinal Alphas," Jericho reminded her, "And your powerful sister, Violet Purple."

A sharp tick appeared in Ziva's jaw at the sound of that name.

"—And Elijah," Jericho went on. "Elijah will not sit back and do nothing while wolves are slaughtered like animals. Even now, he's already captured the doctor, hoping to produce a solution for this virus."

He looked around the room, making sure everyone heard him.

"Our people see that," Jericho finished. "And they're not stupid. They already love him."

This time, loud murmurs broke through the room as the wolves broke into heated discussion, voices overlapping as they debated the problem.

Ziva, however, no longer looked so confident.

She lifted her gaze slowly, locking eyes with Jericho. He met her stare without flinching, his expression pointed.

That fucking bastard.

Ziva's fingers dug into the arm of her seat, nails biting into the wood. If he hadn't been her father's beta, she would have ripped his face off already and watched how quickly that confidence bled out of him.

"Silence," Angus finally commanded.

The room went dead at once.

His gaze moved between Ziva and Jericho, measuring them both. "You both make valid points."

Ziva's jaw tightened, her displeasure obvious. She did not appreciate her father handing that compliment to Jericho, especially when it should have been hers alone.

"Yes," Angus concurred. "Elijah is doing everything he can to preserve himself as the ruling king. And that is precisely why his fall will be so much louder."

Eyes gleaming, he said, "He lied to the wolves. Told them their king was dead. They will not forgive him easily. And as for the Cardinal Alphas and my daughter—" his mouth curved coldly, "—I will handle them."

"And how exactly do you plan to do that, Father?" Ziva asked.

A ripple of unease moved through the room.

"My sister has made it very clear she will never work for you."

Ziva knew she had crossed a line by questioning him so openly, in front of his men. But she had no choice. Every time she raised the matter of Violet, he dismissed her or treated it like a minor inconvenience. So here, under the weight of their gazes, she had forced his hand.

Angus turned slowly to her.

The intensity of his stare pinned Ziva to her seat, those hard eyes stripping her bare. Her throat tightened and for a moment, she couldn't breathe.

Then, abruptly, he looked away, redirecting his attention to the others.

"Previously," Angus said calmly, "I intended to take the easy path. I wanted my daughter, and my mate, to join me of their own free will."

At the word 'mate', Ziva's hands balled into fists, nails biting into her palms until she nearly drew blood.

Why was he still clinging to that woman?

She had done everything for him. Everything. Wasn't that enough?

"And that," Angus continued, his voice hardening, "is no longer an option."

He declared, finality in his tone.

"My daughter Violet will stand at my side, whether she wishes to or not."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 767: Go To Lunaris[1,114 words]

Chapter 767: Go To Lunaris

Duskmoon Village

Lauren sat upright the moment the door creaked open. Her sister Layla stood in the doorway of what used to be their room, her expression guarded and unreadable.

Lauren swallowed. Ever since the night everything had fallen apart—since Father had discovered the lie about Hannah—Layla had moved out. She slept elsewhere now, and lived as if this room no longer existed.

Hence aside from the brief, stiff encounters in the halls or moments like this when she came to check on her, Layla practically treated her like a stranger now.

"Hey," Layla said finally.

Lauren pushed herself higher against the headboard, the blanket slipping down her arms. "Hey."

There was an awkward pause.

Layla shifted her weight. "I-I came to check on you again. See how you're doing today."

"I'm fine," Lauren said quickly. The word came out automatically. "Really."

Layla didn't respond. Her gaze drifted slowly over Lauren's body.

The scars were still there. They had faded from angry red to dull, livid pink, but they marked Lauren's skin like a map of pain with thin lines running across her back, and bruises along her ribs.

Layla's jaw clenched.

Their father Angus had forbidden any witch in Duskmoon from healing her. He'd wanted the wounds to stay and remind everyone that no one lied to him and walked away untouched.

"You're healing," Layla said at last, her voice tight. "If that's the case I'll leave you be."

She turned toward the door.

"Layla—wait."

Lauren pushed herself off the bed, ignoring the sharp protest from her muscles.

"I'm sorry," she blurted. "Okay? I'm sorry. I shouldn't have made you lie. I shouldn't have dragged you into it. I just—" Her voice cracked. "I didn't want you to get hurt."

Layla froze. Slowly, she turned back. Her eyes were hard now.

"Get hurt?" Layla repeated. "Being under Ziva's thumb is torture enough, Lauren. If we'd let her face her crime, if we'd told the truth, we'd be free by now."

Lauren shook her head fiercely. "Free?" she challenged. "You think we'd be free?"

Layla didn't answer.

"You'd be dead," Lauren said, tears welling despite her effort to hold them back. "You know it. I know it. No matter what Ziva does, Father will always choose her over us. She's important to his mission and unlike her, we're disposable. And Ziva I know would have reminded you of it one way or the other."

Her voice broke completely then.

"There's no getting rid of her," Lauren whispered. "And I'd rather take all the punishment in the world than lose you forever. I love you, L."

For a long moment, Layla didn't move.

Lauren's words left her stunned.

Layla wiped at her face with the back of her hand, embarrassed by the tears spilling freely now.

"I'm sorry," Laura said again, "The days without you they've been hell. I don't sleep. I don't breathe right. I know I messed up, but please—please forgive me."

Layla's resolve shattered.

She crossed the room in three strides and pulled Lauren into her arms, holding her so tightly it almost hurt. Lauren melted into her, clinging back just as fiercely.

"I missed you," Layla said hoarsely, her voice buried in Lauren's hair. "I missed you so much."

"I'm sorry, Laura," Lauren sobbed. "I'm so sorry."

"It's alright," Layla murmured, even though it wasn't. Nothing about their lives was. "We'll get through this. Together. Like we always do."

Slowly, they pulled apart.

The air between them tightened, heavy with the fear, guilt, love, and the fragile relief of not being alone anymore. Layla's hand lingered at Lauren's wrist, neither of them ready to let go.

Then Lauren leaned forward instinctively, forehead nearly touching Layla's, their lips close enough —

A sharp knock cut through the moment.

"Sorry to interrupt..."

Ziva stood in the doorway, amused.

"Or maybe, I'm not," she added coolly.

Layla didn't even think.

"You fucking bitch," she spat, fury exploding out of her as she rushed forward. "What are you doing here?"

She lunged at Ziva with every intention of hitting her but she barely took two steps before Lauren slammed into her from the side, arms wrapping around her waist and shoving her back hard.

"Layla—stop!" Lauren snapped. "I've got this."

Layla struggled against her for a heartbeat, her teeth clenched, and breath wild, before she finally stilled. Her hands shook with restrained violence as Lauren stepped forward, placing herself squarely between her sister and Ziva.

Lauren lifted her chin, eyes cold. "What do you want?"

Ziva leaned against the doorframe, her arms folded, watching them the way one might watch unruly children throwing a tantrum.

"Temper, temper," she said lightly. "Honestly, you'd think I came here to kill one of you."

Layla barked a laugh. "Give it time."

Ziva ignored her. "I'm here because I have an errand for you both."

"Hell no," Layla shot back instantly. "You'd have to literally break my limbs before I do anything for you again."

"Oh, trust me, I'd be thrilled to," Ziva said sweetly. "But unfortunately, this errand comes directly from Father. And he wouldn't be very pleased to learn you're suddenly too incapacitated to carry it out."

She chuckled, fingers drumming against the wood. "He's rather fond of you having legs. Makes you useful."

The room went still.

Lauren and Layla exchanged a look heavy with resignation. If it was their father's command, there was no refusal.

Layla exhaled through her nose.

"What is it," she demanded.

Ziva straightened, her tone turning businesslike. "You're going to Lunar Academy."

Lauren stiffened. "What?"

"The South House," Ziva clarified.

Layla's eyes narrowed. "Why the South House?"

"Because that's where Roman Draven resides."

Lauren frowned. "And what do you want with him?"

"I need a personal item belonging to him for a spell."

Layla scoffed. "You're joking."

"You know how it works," Ziva continued, "Bodily items are the strongest. Hair. Blood. Tissue. But I doubt you'll be able to get something like that with him being away for a while now."

Her eyes flicked between them. "So clothes will suffice or any item you perceive it's important to him."

Lauren asked, curious. "Why Roman and not Violet?"

"Because," Ziva told her, "to get to Violet, we go through her mates." She took a step closer, her shadow stretching across the floor. "And Roman," she finished, almost lazily, "is the weakest link."

Ziva stepped back toward the door, satisfied. "You leave tonight, and try not to get caught."

She paused, glancing over her shoulder with a grin that promised nothing good.

"And do be careful," she added. "I'd hate to explain to Father how his little errand went wrong."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 768: A Zombie Holiday[1,044 words]

Chapter 768: A Zombie Holiday

MOON FEED EXCLUSIVE: LOCKDOWN WITH ZOMBIES.

Written by: The Oracle

Posted 6:00AM | Comments: Exploding | Shares: Unholy

Good morning, my undead-curious darlings. Yes. Undead-curious.

Gather close, stretch your claws, wrap yourselves in your blankets, and sip whatever keeps your sanity intact, because your Oracle has learned—tragically—that she should be very careful what she wishes for.

You see, last week I wished for more action.

More drama.

More chaos.

Except I should have been more specific.

Because instead of the usual scandals, secret hookups, and academic betrayals, Lunar Academy woke up to what I can only describe as a pre-apocalyptic fever dream.

So tell me, sweethearts, how are we enjoying our **zombie holiday**?

LOCKDOWN AT LUNARIS: SCHOOL'S OUT. BRAINS ARE QUESTIONABLE.

Imagine my surprise — and yours — when Principal Jameson, a woman who frankly should have been replaced from this school long ago (or at least offered as a peace sacrifice to the undead), marched out yesterday morning to announce that Lunaris Academy is officially under lockdown.

Yes. **Locked. Down.**

As if that wasn't enough, she followed this announcement with the academic equivalent of "don't panic" by inviting a witch with the energy of *I bill by the hour*, slapping a ward around the entire academy.

No one in.

No one out.

No permission. No exceptions.

If this feels familiar, congratulations, we now live in what feels like **Harry Potter's Hogwarts**, except instead of wands and butterbeer, we have wolves with anger issues, humans with zero survival instincts.

Ten points to whichever house survives.

IS THE ZOMBIE THING REAL?

Naturally, your Oracle did what she does best — asked the obvious question:

Is there actually a zombie outbreak happening?

Short answer: **Yes.**

Long answer: **Yes.**

This is not a drill.

This is not a prank.

This is not a themed spirit week.

There is, in fact, something roaming the streets of Aster City and has sent everyone scrambling.

So here is my official advisory:

If you're feeling adventurous and want to audition for *Night of the Living Lunarians*, by all means, attempt an escape. I support self-expression.

Just remember two things:

1:Do not bring the rest of us down with you.

2:Lock the ward behind you. Courtesy matters.

We've all seen how this ends.

I've watched enough zombie movies to know that the first rule of survival is:

Do not be the idiot who opens the gate "just to check."

That's how everyone dies.

And for those of you already plotting dramatic escape attempts, a gentle reminder that the new wards electrocute.

So unless you are Violet Purple, blessed with plot armor and an affinity for Alaric Storm's lightning, I strongly suggest you sit your brave little selves down and rethink your life choices.

I repeat: curiosity kills the cat, and also the sophomore who thought he was special.

Would this end soon?

No idea.

Do I hope it doesn't?

Yes, please.

What I do know is that boredom will not be an issue. Not while your Oracle is here, delivering tea so hot it could sterilize the undead. Even in zombie land, I serve.

But in all seriousness, someone find a solution quickly. Because eating brains cannot be part of my upgraded diet, and I refuse to develop a taste for it.

CONTENT, CORRUPTION, & WHEN GIRLS TURN ON GIRLS

Now. On to something far uglier than zombies.

Let's talk about **standards**.

Usually, my darlings, I stay neutral. You know, observe, sip and report.

But when one woman decides to drag another woman through the mud in the name of "content," then the Oracle has no choice but to return the energy — with interest.

A few weeks ago, blogger Nicole released what she called a "bombshell" involving Natalie Avax and Kate Avax, tossing it into the public like bait and walking away as if she hadn't lit a match in a room full of gas.

No investigation.

No care.

No conscience.

Just a headline and a hunger.

What she didn't tell you?

Kate had been abusing Natalie since childhood.

Yes. Childhood.

And instead of calling out the abuser, Nicole tore the victim apart, harassing her until she spiraled, emotionally destabilized, and ended up in an accident.

Content, apparently, tastes better when seasoned with cruelty.

But then again patterns don't lie because investigations have since revealed something far more educational.

A FAMILY PATTERN, OR JUST BAD MORALS?

It has now come to light that Nicole's own brother, Hermes, **a thirty-year-old man**, had been "dating" **a fifteen-year-old girl** until she turned twenty.

Yes. You read that correctly.

Hermes and Ursula had "known each other since childhood," which, apparently, made it acceptable for him to sleep with a minor while everyone conveniently looked the other way.

Funny how morality becomes flexible when it's personal.

So yes, we see where the taste came from.

And for someone who preaches righteousness with a ring light, I find it interesting that I have in my possession numerous messages and clips featuring Nicole sleeping with students and sources to extract information.

I suppose the local, bargain-bin Oracle-in-training couldn't sit quietly in business class long enough to learn how a real operation runs. Journalism, darling, requires ethics. Not thighs.

But then again, I guess someone's as slutty as her content.

Let this be a lesson, my lovelies: be careful what you allow into your soul — sometimes it comes with a verified badge and a poorly written exposé. Some things rot quietly before they stink.

WHERE ARE OUR CARDINAL ALPHAS? WHERE IS THE QUEENBEE?

Now, before I let you return to barricading doors and clutching holy water — Any news on our missing Cardinal Alphas and our Queen Bee?

None.

Nothing.

Silence.

I can only hope they return soon, preferably before Lunar is becomes the first academy governed by brain-eating creatures. Unless Violet plans to be queen over the undead, in which case... bold platform.

FINAL NOTES FROM YOUR FAVORITE OBSERVER

So here we are.

Locked in.

Ward-wrapped.

Zombies adjacent.

But fear not. I'll be here. Watching. Reporting. Stirring the pot with grace and precision.

So stay tuned, my lovelies. As always, I'll be watching—and sipping tea—to bring you the juiciest updates. Until next time, keep your claws sharp and your secrets sharper.

And **please—do not be stupid. Being a zombie is so not cool.**

Stay safe.

— The Oracle

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 769: Witches At Lunaris[1,016 words]

Chapter 769: Witches At Lunaris

"You know, you didn't have to do this for me." Natalie Avax told Dion.

They were lying on her outrageously huge bed, facing each other. Dion was propped slightly on one elbow, their faces close enough that she could stare into his beautiful black eyes.

"I know," he replied. "But I wanted to."

Natalie shouldn't even be back on campus yet. Everyone knew that. The doctors had insisted she rest, and supervision. But the hospital had felt unbearably empty and her father—busy, distant, and brilliant as always—hadn't been there.

So she came back — or more precisely to spend time with her new love interest, Dion.

He'd brought her meals, and checked her vitals over and over again. It was beginning to get annoying. But Natalie knew he was only worried about her. He kept her company and made her feel less miserable — especially after being in the spotlight in a not so positive way.

Her father David Avax hadn't objected to her move. He wouldn't even dare. And with the lockdown in place, Lunaris had become the safest place she could be, warded and sealed tight. Not that the lockdown would stop him from reaching her if he truly wanted to—but Natalie knew this was his way of giving her space.

"I didn't just do it for you," Dion said to her, "Nicole's been getting on my nerves for years. I merely took advantage of the moment to encourage her retirement."

"Well, look at you," Natalie teased him. "Micah would be so proud of you."

Dion sighed. "I don't know about that." He had been operating without orders and he didn't know how his boss, the original Oracle, would feel about that.

Natalie reached for her phone and tilted it between them. "Well, if it makes you happy, you should see the comments."

She cleared her throat dramatically and began to read.

"Nicole thought she was the Oracle but ended up being a background zombie."

Dion snorted in laughter.

"Oh, this one's good," Natalie continued, her voice warming with amusement. "'Forget the apocalypse, the real infection was bad journalism.'"

She laughed then, a real laugh, bright and rich laughter that filled the room. Dion watched her closely, satisfied by the happiness on her face.

"Zombie holiday seems to be a hit," she added, scrolling. "'Ten out of ten, would survive the lockdown again.'"

Natalie laughed so hard she had to set the phone aside, wiping at the corner of her eyes. "I shouldn't laugh this much. It probably hurts my ribs."

"After what you've been through, I think you have every right to happiness right now, Natalie." Dion breathed, tugging her hair away from her face.

Natalie was speechless. She stared at him for a long time, then whispered, "Thank you," she meant more than the article this time.

"You're welcome."

Silence settled between them, not awkward, just charged. For days now, Dion had been coming in and out of her room.

People had talked. Of course they had. Lunarix thrived on whispers after all. But Natalie didn't care.

She didn't know what they were yet. There was a small, nagging fear that she might be leaning on him too much, that the grief and shock had blurred lines. or that Dion might be drawn to her because of her name. But Natalie refused to let fear steal the one thing she'd found that felt real.

She leaned forward first, slowly, giving him time to pull away if he wanted.

He didn't.

Her lips brushed his in a light, careful kiss. Just enough to test the moment. Dion closed his eyes, breathing her in, and savoring it like something fragile.

But It wasn't enough.

Natalie moved closer, erasing the space between them. She fisted her hand in the fabric of his shirt as she kissed him again, this time, deeper. A soft sound escaped her, as her other fingers threaded into his hair, tugging him closer.

Dion responded, but carefully, hands steady, mindful of every breath she took.

When Natalie tried to shift over him, her body protesting, and she hissed in pain.

Dion pulled back instantly. "Hey—no. Don't do that."

She scowled. "This is stupid."

"No," he said softly, brushing her hair back. "You're healing and that is what matters. No need to rush things, Natalie. We've got time. All the time in the world."

She stared at him, annoyed, and then sighed, the fight draining out of her. "You're annoyingly reasonable."

"I've been told," he said with a small smile.

He shifted, carefully drawing her against him, one arm secure around her shoulders. Natalie settled in, her head resting against his chest as they cuddled.

They lay there in silence which didn't last because Dion's phone rang suddenly.

He groaned softly and reached for it, squinting at the screen as he read the message and his expression changed.

Natalie caught it. "What is it?" she asked, lifting her head from the pillow.

Dion exhaled. "Well. Speak of the devil." He looked at her. "It's Micah. He and Adele are coming back."

Natalie swallowed.

She'd known this moment would come, but that didn't make it easier. Micah had called her throughout everything and though his voice had been calm and reassuring, she also knew Micah was good at hiding his emotions.

"Well," Natalie said, trying to lighten the mood, "Lunaris won't be boring anytime soon."

Dion breathed. "That's one way to put it."

Much later that night, two figures stood before the towering gates of Lunaris Academy.

Layla tilted her head, eyes narrowing. "Do you feel that?"

Laura reached out instinctively, fingers brushing the air—

Zap.

"Ouch!" She yanked her hand back, scowling. "Since when does the school have a ward?"

"Since now," Layla replied calmly, stepping closer. The barrier shimmered faintly, a bluish glow rippling beneath the surface. She hummed, impressed. "Whoever cast this knew what they were doing. Clean work."

Laura rubbed her fingers. "But we can do better. Right?"

Layla's lips curved into a slow, dangerous smirk.

"Oh, hell," she said softly. "We absolutely can."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 770: Tear Through The Ward[1,179 words]

Chapter 770: Tear Through The Ward

Layla's plan was not to bring down the entire ward. No, not at all. Wards like this usually had alarm systems woven into them to alert the caster of an intrusion, paired with the neighbor-unfriendly zapping meant to deter anyone foolish enough to cross it.

They only needed to create a narrow opening to slip through without triggering the full alarm. The mission had to be swift and subtle. It would be best if no one even noticed that anything had been removed from Roman's room.

With that in mind, Layla drew out a strange dagger. Runes were etched along its blade, and a ruby was embedded in the hilt. The gem was a deep, liquid red, rippling as though something alive stirred inside it.

Gripping the dagger with both hands, Layla closed her eyes and began to murmur incantations under her breath. Her jaw moved steadily, the words barely audible. It didn't take long before the runes flared to life, glowing softly and then dimmed, as if sinking back into the metal.

When Layla opened her eyes, she was met with her sister's satisfied expression.

"Let's do this," Laura murmured.

Layla plunged the dagger into the ward and dragged it downward. The air split with a soft, unnatural sound as a tear appeared, peeling back the magic like fabric. Through it, the outer wall of the academy came into view.

Not stopping there, Layla muttered another spell and that corner of the wall dissolved as if it had never existed at all.

Layla stepped through first, Laura following close behind. The moment they crossed the threshold, the wall sealed itself again, leaving the ward intact save for the narrow tear they had carved.

Closing a torn ward they had enacted themselves would be far more difficult, and neither of them wanted to risk delaying their escape.

"We're in," Laura breathed. She lifted her hand and swept it over both of them. "And fully cloaked."

Layla glanced down just in time to see a veil of darkness slide over their forms, subtle and complete. Even if someone looked straight at them, they wouldn't be seen — unless the observer was a witch, or possessed exceptional power.

Some people, after all, had the rare gift of seeing through glamours.

Then they began to walk through the campus. While night was usually the best time to commit a crime like a break-in, this was Lunar Academy — a school for werewolves — and night was their playtime. The time when their beasts stepped out to roam.

Even with the silencing spell Laura had placed over them so their footsteps couldn't be heard, they still had to be careful.

"God, this school is so fucking large," Layla complained after they'd been walking for a while without getting anywhere close to the dormitories — or the houses, as they called them.

"Who even needs all this space when they're supposedly here to learn?" she added as they cut through the trees.

"They're wolves," Laura replied dryly. "I guess having a healthy amount of space and territory is part of their curriculum. Not to mention—" she leaned in conspiratorially, lowering her voice, "—it gives them enough privacy for the not-so-learning part."

Both of them burst into quiet laughter, instinctively clapping a hand over their mouths even though the silencing shield was still in place.

"I can't help but be curious though..." Laura said after a moment, her tone shifting as they walked.

Layla glanced at her. "Curious about what?"

"What our life would've looked like if we'd grown up like normal kids," Laura continued. "If we attended a place like this, do you think it would've been better than what we're living now?"

She kept talking, not realizing that Layla had stopped walking.

When Laura noticed the sudden absence of footsteps, she turned. "Layla?"

Layla stood still, a deep, thoughtful scowl etched onto her face.

Laura retraced her steps and stopped in front of her sister. "Hey," she whispered gently. "What's wrong?"

Layla spoke quietly, "I might not know what our life would have looked like, but I'm sure of one thing — we wouldn't be together."

Her eyes gleamed with emotion as she reached out and clasped Laura's cheeks, her grip firm. "This world despises what we are," she said with conviction. "And I would rather die than live in a world where you don't exist in it. So no, I'm not curious at all. Back at the village, we can be what we are."

She straightened, her expression hardening with resolve. "Besides, when our father takes his throne as Alpha King, Lunar Academy will become our playground. We can attend this school as much as we want, and no one will dare say a word to us then."

Laura's eyes lit up, the promise of such a world blooming in her mind and the thought that it might come true soon made her chest ache.

She leaned forward and clasped Layla's face in her hands as well. "I can't wait for that world with you," she whispered.

Their foreheads touched, breath mingling as they stayed like that for a moment, sharing a smile meant only for each other.

But the smile died instantly when a stick creaked nearby.

Layla and Laura froze.

They didn't see it at first. A brown wolf prowled the ground ahead of them, nose low, sniffing the earth as it moved. Laura and Layla froze instantly, not daring to breathe.

Instead of passing by, the wolf slowed, its head lifting as it sampled the air. It circled once, then again, clearly searching for something that wasn't supposed to be there.

When its gaze snapped directly toward them, Layla's heart nearly leapt out of her chest.

No one could see them — not with the cloak in place — but wolves were supernatural creatures and their senses went far beyond sight. And somehow, it could feel the disturbance in the air, the wrongness of magic where there should be none.

Layla couldn't read the wolf's expression the way she would a human's, but she felt its confusion and the growing certainty that something was off.

The wolf took a step closer.

Laura's voice trembled as she whispered, "Do you think it can see us?"

Layla didn't answer.

If the wolf kept coming, invisibility wouldn't matter because, one accidental collision, and they'd be exposed.

Without hesitation, Layla flicked her wrist and murmured a spell under her breath.

The magic slid out silently, a deterrence spell designed to confuse, twist perception, and nudge the mind away from whatever path it had been following.

The wolf stopped, ears twitching. It shook its head, then turned abruptly, padding off in the opposite direction as if whatever had caught its attention no longer existed.

Just like that, it forgot them.

Laura sagged in relief, finally exhaling. "That was way too close."

Layla didn't allow herself the same release. Her jaw was tight, her eyes already scanning the darkness ahead.

"No more delays," she commanded. "Let's get this over with."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 771: Final Destination[1,341 words]

Chapter 771: Final Destination

Things were getting too real around here.

Micah noted it the moment he saw the ward set up around the school. So they were involving witches now. All it had taken was one zombie virus for that line to finally be crossed.

Of course, with the virus on the rise, his uncle's and President Raymond's utmost concern was protecting the future leaders. Or, in kinder terms, the children of aristocrats.

That was the only reason there weren't parents crowding the gates, demanding their children be sent home. Not that anyone was foolish enough to wander the streets of Aster City in times like these without a ridiculous amount of protection.

Micah didn't exactly need protection, but that didn't mean he wasn't careful.

He avoided zones with the highest infection rates, kept to routes he trusted, and stayed alert. So far, there had been no reports of infected werewolves, but Micah wasn't stupid enough to lower his guard.

If a virus like this could appear out of nowhere, then it could just as easily mutate. And once it did, even they would not be safe.

He hoped sincerely that Elijah and Raymond knew what they were doing. Because if they didn't, it wouldn't just be the humans paying the price soon.

"Welcome! Welcome!"

Micah was surprised to see Jameson standing there with a few members of staff, waiting for them the moment they stepped out of the car.

He and Adele exchanged a confused look.

What the hell? Since when did this tradition begin?

If Jameson noticed the suspicious looks they were giving her, she didn't care. She swept forward and immediately pulled Adele into a suffocating hug.

"Urm... okay?" Adele froze for a second before awkwardly hugging her back, her expression downright hilarious in its confusion.

She looked up at Micah and gestured silently, *What the hell is going on right now?*

Micah shrugged in response.

Jameson, blissfully unaware of the silent exchange happening between the pair, lingered in the hug far longer than necessary before finally stepping back. She clasped Adele's shoulders, smiling brightly.

"I always knew there was an attraction between the two of you," she said cheerfully. "All that quibbling and sharp exchanges—who knew it was just the universe giving you a crash course in what would inevitably be your fate?" She laughed.

Adele laughed back nervously, the smile not quite reaching her eyes. She had never liked attention, and right now she was uncomfortable as hell.

"Your rune is so fine," one of the teachers exclaimed. "I'm so jealous!"

"Well, thank you," Adele replied politely, then immediately turned her face away, the smile vanishing as quickly as it appeared.

Her voice slid directly into Micah's mind. *Send them away, please.*

Had she known they would be ambushed the moment they returned, she would have worn long sleeves and covered the rune completely. The way they were staring at her made her feel like a circus animal on display.

Since it was already night, they had assumed they could slip back to their rooms unnoticed. Apparently, Jameson had other plans.

"That is enough," Micah said, his voice hard enough that no one dared refute the order. He pulled Adele out of Jameson's suspicious clutches and firmly to his side.

"Adele will be retreating to her room," he said coldly, "and I would appreciate it if none of you bothered my mate."

"Mate!" one of them squealed. "He called her mate!"

Adele pinched the bridge of her nose. She liked her place of work—as annoying as the children could be—but if the fangirling among the staff continued, she might actually have to leave.

At once, Jameson clapped her hands. "Alright, that's enough!" She shooed the teacher who clearly couldn't get herself under control. Then her sweet smile returned as she turned back to Micah. "Also, that won't be necessary. I already ordered Adele's things to be moved into your residence."

"What?!"

Both Adele and Micah shouted at the same time.

As a healer, Adele owned items that were volatile and sensitive, things that should not be moved carelessly—not to mention a few questionable tools she preferred no one poking through.

And Micah—well, he was the Oracle. Not that he kept incriminating items lying around, but the very thought of someone other than Adele rifling through his belongings was enough to set off a bomb in his head.

They were both intensely private people—perhaps the Goddess had paired them for that very reason—and this invasion made their skin crawl.

Micah was the first to step forward, fury tightening his jaw. "You had no right," he said.

Jameson blinked, instantly adopting the look of someone deeply wounded. "I thought that, as per werewolf custom, mated pairs were expected to move in together to strengthen the bond." She clasped her hands together. "I only meant to give you a helping hand, but it seems..." she sighed softly, "I may have overstepped my boundaries. I'm sorry."

She peered up at Micah with apologetic eyes.

He wasn't fooled.

Micah stepped closer, lowering his voice until it was meant for her ears alone. "I know what you're doing," he murmured. "You might fool everyone else, but not me. Enjoy this pandemic while it lasts, because the moment it's over, your ass is getting bundled out of this school."

He stepped back without waiting for a response, turned, and took Adele firmly by the arm.

"Let's go."

Adele didn't even bother waving at them as she followed Micah out of the death trap.

"Jameson's stalling," Adele pointed out.

"Obviously," Micah retorted. "But no matter how much she scuttles around like a cockroach on its last strength, she has been replaced."

"Really?" Adele's eyes widened. "By who?"

Micah's expression darkened at the question. "We'll find out soon."

Adele didn't press further. She knew Micah well enough to recognize that stubborn clench of his jaw. When he looked like that, there was no prying any information out of his mouth.

They walked in silence for a moment before he spoke again.

"I'm guessing you'll want to return to your room, in case they forgot anything."

"Exactly," Adele breathed. "There are some things I might have hidden..." She didn't finish the sentence. Not that she needed to.

Micah already understood.

He said nothing, squeezing her hand instead.

After a while, Micah said with a sigh,

"It isn't until recently that I wish I could simply teleport you wherever you want. Not drag you through a direct pass to hell."

Adele shot him an understanding look. "Maybe all you need is more practice. You can teleport, Micah. Hell shouldn't be your final destination."

"I've been practicing since the day my powers manifested," he said. "Nothing."

"Well..." Adele stopped walking, forcing him to stop too. She turned to face him. "Not until you had me."

Micah lifted a brow. "You're offering to train me?" He laughed.

"What?" Adele laughed too. "What's wrong?"

He shook his head, still smiling. "Nothing."

She nudged him lightly. "Alright, out with it."

Micah shrugged. "It just occurred to me. A healer and a half-demon prince. Maybe you'll heal the evil out of me."

He laughed, clearly joking, but it didn't quite land. The words lingered heavier than he'd intended.

No matter how much Micah tried to frame it lightly, he couldn't deny his demon side. And no matter how much he wished otherwise, it was something he had to live with.

Adele sensed the shift immediately.

Micah must have noticed it too, because the moment grew awkward, and neither of them spoke as they resumed walking.

They soon reached the teachers' dormitory. Adele retrieved the spare key from its usual hiding place and unlocked the door.

Thanks to the chaos surrounding the mate bond—and the drama she always seemed to get dragged into because of the cardinal alphas—Adele hadn't even been present when Mary was finally moved out of the academy.

She had no idea what to expect when she stepped inside. But it definitely wasn't this.

"You have got to be kidding me."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 772: Gallery Of Visions[1,126 words]

Chapter 772: Gallery Of Visions

The last Adele remembered, all she had given Mary were cartons of crayons, drawing pencils, and paper to sketch her visions. Certainly not paint. And definitely not the kind that now covered nearly eighty percent of her walls.

But it wasn't the shock of how Mary had turned her room into an art gallery that rooted Adele to the spot. It was what had been painted. Because someone would pay obscene amounts of money to witness this.

The paintings were thick and vivid, a chaotic, haunting plaster of color pressed directly into the walls. Layers upon layers—reds bleeding into blues, blacks clawing through gold. The strokes were frantic and deliberate all at once, as though the walls themselves had

been forced to absorb the visions rather than merely display them. It sent chills down the spine.

For over a minute, neither Adele nor Micah could look away.

The artwork was macabre in its chaos. It told different stories, yet all of them were tangled together, looping endlessly into one another. There was no clear beginning nor end. Just prophecy

Adele swallowed, her throat dry, wondering how many days it had taken Mary to do this.

Oh, who was she kidding. She knew exactly how it happened.

Whenever Mary had an episode, she drew like someone possessed. She didn't pause for a break or sleep. There was no thought of eating or drinking. Not until the drawing was done, exhaustion meant nothing to her.

All of her visions were like a spell, and once they took hold, there was no resisting them.

And from the way the colors had been gouged, layered, and smeared into the wall, Adele knew without a doubt Mary had painted without rest.

"Goddess above..." Micah finally breathed, stepping closer without even realizing he was moving. His eyes were wide, his mouth parted in raw disbelief. "These are visions," he muttered, stating the obvious, his voice hushed as though the walls themselves might hear him.

He stopped before one section of the wall that struck far too close to home.

It was a painting of a mob. Their forms were warped into grotesque mockeries of life, their bodies slumped and twisted in unnatural ways. Mary had rendered them in dark, suffocating colors, shadows layered so thick they seemed to rot into the wall itself. Sunken eye sockets stared back emptily, jaws stretched too wide, and saliva dripping in thick, obscene lines from their mouths.

The zombies.

Micah shivered. The girl had seen them coming.

She had captured the creatures perfectly. An endless, unsatisfying need burned in their eyes, a craving so raw it felt almost alive. The kind that could never be filled, no matter how much flesh it consumed.

Beside them, another mass of figures fled in blind panic. These ones were painted in brighter hues, strokes of golds and pale blues clashing against the darkness. Their limbs blurred as if in motion, faces twisted in terror, mouths open in silent screams.

The contrast was unmistakable.

The undead versus the living.

And then there was one image that eclipsed them all.

A blonde-haired woman stood at the center of the chaos, her arm outstretched, fingers straining toward a child just beyond her reach. Her face was contorted with desperation, and eyes wide with a terror so real it made Micah's breath hitch. Mary had painted her fear with brutal honesty and the raw emotion radiating from it sent a chill crawling down Micah's spine.

He had seen countless works of art in his lifetime, but nothing like this. This wasn't merely a painting but a warning.

Micah didn't even realize how immersed he had been in the painting until he nearly jumped when Adele tapped his shoulder.

"Hey," Adele said, studying him closely. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah," Micah breathed, dragging a hand down his face.

God. He was sweating.

Not that anyone could blame him. The longer he stared at the painting, the more it felt as though he'd been pulled straight into it, watching the horror unfold in real time.

"Where's Mary?" he asked.

"Alice took her," Adele replied. "The girl is a powerful seer, but she can't control the visions. I was at the hospital when I got the call. She's been taken to the East Pack to train how to use them."

Micah exhaled slowly. "If that's the case..." His gaze flicked back to the wall. "Then you can rest assured this was her final warning."

"Oh, I bet," Adele groaned, running a hand through her hair. "If only some of these prophecies made more sense, I'd start charging admission." She sighed. "To think Jameson and the others saw this and didn't even bother to inform me."

Micah continued scanning the paintings, his expression darkening. "Humans are still numb to spiritual signs," he said quietly. "They probably dismissed it as meaningless art—just the ramblings of a troubled girl..." His voice trailed off, eyes suddenly sharp.

Adele noticed the sudden shift in his demeanor and frowned. "What is it, Micah?"

But Micah didn't answer. He had already moved past her, walking deeper into the room until he reached the narrow corner where the space bled into her tiny kitchenette.

There, painted directly onto the wall, was another image.

This one was a painting of a room. And an exquisite one at that. Clean lines, dark wood, and expensive furnishings drawn carefully. But Micah stared at it as if it was something special.

Adele followed him, unease crawling up her spine. "What?" she asked, concerned. "What is it?"

He didn't look away. "Don't you recognize this room?"

She frowned at the painting. "Recognize what?"

Micah finally turned to her. "Roman Draven's bedroom."

"What?" Adele blurted, snapping her gaze back to the wall.

Then she froze.

"...You're right," she said slowly. "I'd recognize that bed anywhere."

The realization made her scalp prickle. She rubbed the back of her neck, confusion settling in. "But why would Mary draw Roman's room? That's weird. As far as I know, she and Roman were never romantically—"

She stopped mid-sentence.

"Wait."

Adele leaned closer, squinting at the lower edge of the painting. "Do you see that?"

Micah crouched slightly, following her gaze.

At the very edge of the image, half-swallowed by shadow and layered brushstrokes, were two figures. They were indistinct, cloaked in darkness, and positioned just beyond the doorway as if watching the room rather than occupying it.

A curtain of shadow seemed to veil them, blending them into the painting, but their presence was there.

Adele's frown deepened. "Are they in Roman's room or is this a different vision?"

Micah's eyes lingered on the figures for a long second before he turned to her, his jaw tightening.

"Where is Roman's beta?"

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 773: Get Out Safely[1,103 words]

Chapter 773: Get Out Safely

Laura and Layla could finally see why Lunar Academy was to die for. While the outside world was in chaos, the students of the academy were busy partying.

Partying.

Could you believe that?

On the bright side, it made things a whole lot easier for them. There was practically no one at the South Alpha House — only the house prefect, dozing off happily, and a few drunken students who had wandered off to the restroom downstairs to do goddess-knows-what, while others had retreated to their rooms. Not surprising. Early birds.

It wasn't difficult to break into Roman's quarters. The apartment on the fourth floor smelled of stale air, as though no one had set foot in it for a while.

Laura and Layla didn't remove the cloak until they were certain there was no one else inside, checking every room before relaxing even a fraction.

When they were sure everything was secure, Laura lifted the veil.

"Alright," she chuckled, flopping onto Roman's ridiculously soft bed and bouncing once. "That was way too easy."

She let out a low whistle. "Damn. These alphas are living in luxury way more than we do."

"Laura," Layla warned with a tight voice, "we came here for a reason. The sooner we finish this and get the hell out, the better. Now get off the bed."

Laura rolled her eyes but slid off anyway. "Oh, come on. You're usually the one jumping headfirst into stupid ideas. Why are you so wound up right now?"

Layla, already rifling through Roman's desk, whipped her head around. "Because anything can go wrong in the blink of an eye, and I won't relax until we're safely out of here. You get that."

"Fine," Laura said, then muttered under her breath, "and here I was thinking we could sneak into the party and have a little fun before leaving."

Layla rolled her eyes in exasperation. How Laura could act this careless at times was beyond her. Ignoring her completely, she turned and headed toward Roman's walk-in closet.

Laura followed after her, only for her eyes to widen at the sea of clothes Roman Draven possessed.

"I knew these guys lived a luxurious life, but seeing it with my eyes is still unbelievable," she muttered in disbelief as she came into the walk-in closet that looked more like a private boutique than a storage space.

Soft lighting glowed from recessed panels, casting a warm sheen over everything inside. Roman's clothes were arranged by type and occasion, each section flowing seamlessly into the next.

Nearest the entrance hung his uniforms and tailored suits each wrapped in thin protective covers. Then followed by his jackets and shirts — silks, satins, and finely tailored button-downs in rich colors. Deep burgundies, emerald greens, midnight blues, crisp whites. Some were boldly patterned, while others were cut just tight enough in a fashionable way most men wouldn't dare put on. But Roman Draven wasn't most men, and everything looked good on him.

His trousers were folded carefully and arranged by shade and style, while the shoes claimed an entire wall — polished leather, expensive loafers, and sleek boots, each pair designed to turn heads. Every one of them spotless, positioned like they were waiting to be worn.

Accessories were impossible to miss. Watches were displayed in open cases lined with velvet, each one gleaming with extravagance. Rings, chains, cufflinks, and signet pieces were all laid out in separate trays, with some engraved and the others simply ornamental.

Even with his absence, Roman's expensive cologne mixed with the clean fabric lingered in the space.

Laura scratched the side of her face. "There's so much of his stuff, we can't even tell which one is most personal to him. What if he only wears his clothes once and changes them every day?"

Layla snorted. "That's plain stupid, Laura. No matter how rich someone is, they wouldn't waste resources like that."

...Or would he?

The thought only made things more confusing.

In the end, Layla sighed. "I think we might as well grab as much as we can. Any item Ziva senses should do the work. If it works for her, then good." Her voice carried a note of frustration.

Initially, they had planned to take only the smallest, most minimal item from Roman Draven's quarters, careful not to leave behind any sign of a break-in. But at this point, the plan had changed.

Just like that, they pulled out the folded bag they'd come with and began stuffing it with whatever of Roman's belongings they could get their hands on — shirts, accessories, anything that might still carry his presence.

"Ooh, look at this," Laura said, sliding open one of the wide pull-out drawers fitted with glass fronts. Inside, Roman's underwear was arranged with the same indulgent care as the rest of the closet.

She plucked out a pair of sleek briefs, stretching the fabric lightly between her fingers as she inspected it.

"Okay," she said with a low whistle, "I see what Violet sees in these men. Our sister is a very lucky bitch."

"Show some respect, Laura," Layla muttered, snatching the brief from her hand and stuffing it into her bag. "Nice choice though." She winked at her.

Laura smirked. This was fun.

They didn't stop there. Laura slipped into the bathroom and grabbed his toothbrush, satisfaction curling through her at the thought. If anything carried Roman's DNA, it would be that.

It didn't take long after that. When they were finally done, both of their bags were heavy with Roman's belongings. By the time Roman — or anyone else who bothered to visit — noticed, they would assume it was a break-in. The idea that his DNA had been stolen for a ritual Ziva refused to explain would never even cross their minds.

"I wish we could do this again." Laura said excitedly as they stepped back into the living room.

No sooner had the words left her mouth than she froze.

Layla did too.

Someone was standing in the middle of the living room.

And it hit them both at once — they had taken off the cloak of invisibility.

It was Abel. Roman's Beta.

For a heartbeat, no one moved. Abel stared at them in stunned silence, his gaze dropping to the bulging bags slung over their shoulders. A low growl rumbled from his throat, his muscles bunching as his body coiled to strike.

Thieves.

Layla recognized the warning immediately. She lifted her hand and released a spell that struck Abel square in the chest, sending him crashing backward.

"Run!" Layla shouted.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 774: Too Late[1,042 words]

Chapter 774: Too Late

When Micah called him to check on Roman's room, Abel had no idea what to expect. Micah hadn't given him any details, and that alone had left him confused.

No one had been inside Roman Draven's quarters since the day he left, except the students assigned to housekeeping.

So naturally, Abel's first thought was that Roman had returned.

The idea sent a rush of excitement through him. Delighted at the possibility of seeing his Alpha again, Abel had practically run the entire way.

Which was why the shock hit even harder when he pushed open the door. Instead of Roman Draven, two unfamiliar faces stood inside the room.

Abel froze.

Thieves.

That was his immediate conclusion.

This wasn't the first time outsiders had tried to infiltrate Lunar Academy. Humans were always curious about life inside the school, always testing boundaries. But they never got far. Patrol wolves caught them long before they reached the inner grounds at night.

To make it this deep into the academy—into Roman's personal quarters—was both reckless and, in a twisted way, impressive.

Then the spell struck him like a bag of cement was hurled at him, knocking him back.

And that was when everything clicked.

Witches.

The realization woke the feral beast inside of him.

Abel dropped instantly into a crouch, a deep, terrifying growl ripping from his chest and echoing through the room. The sound vibrated with aggression and threat.

The shift came next. The sound of his bones cracking filling the room. His clothes shredded as fur burst through skin. Abel shifted into a gray wolf, power rolling off him.

Layla's spell hadn't weakened him, no, it had provoked him.

"Fuck," Layla breathed, staring at the damage she'd just caused.

Panic flashed across her face as the wolf fully emerged, massive and furious, eyes locked on them with lethal focus.

"Run, Laura!" she screamed.

Except there was no way out, not when Abel stood closest to the entrance. They were trapped at a crossroads, unable to escape, and yet unable to stay.

However, Abel didn't bother with intimidation. He was too impatient for that.

With a snarl that rattled the room, he charged at them.

Layla and Laura split instinctively, breaking apart in opposite directions. Layla veered left, hurling spell after spell at Abel in his wolf form. But none caught him, not when Abel dodged with terrifying accuracy.

In his wolf form, Abel was frighteningly fast and he was locked onto Layla.

Laura's heart slammed against her ribs when she saw what was going on. She could have made a run for it with the wolf focused on Layla but couldn't leave her sister behind. They were as good as dead if any of them was caught.

So Laura raised her hands and cast, desperate to draw Abel's attention away from Layla.

And that was where everything went wrong.

She panicked and the spell slammed into a metal fixture embedded in Roman's room, and perhaps it was the nature of the magic, but it ricocheted right back at her.

The force hit her like a cannon and she was flung backward. Except Laura smashed through the wide window right behind her.

Glass shattered outward in a scream of sound and shards, the cold night air rushing in as Laura's body went with it.

Four floors down.

Abel lunged, claws scraping against the floor as he tried to reach her but his jaws snapped shut on empty air, missing her by inches.

Layla saw it all happen in a heartbeat.

"No!" she screamed, her voice tearing raw from her throat.

Rage surged through Layla like wildfire, and she screamed a spell that ripped out of her with raw, unchecked force. It struck Abel squarely in the chest.

The wolf was flung backward like a rag doll, his body slamming into the farthest wall with a bone-rattling crack. The stone dented and dust rained down but Abel didn't move this time.

Her heart hammering so violently it hurt, Layla ran to the shattered window. Glass crunched under her shoe as she leaned forward, gripping the frame, her breath hitching in her throat.

Please. Please. Please.

She prayed to the goddess. Wished—no, begged—that Laura had somehow saved herself. That she had somehow used a spell or something to break her fall.

Then she saw her.

Laura lay on the ground below, blood pooling beneath her, staining the stone.

She lay still.

"No... no—!"

The sound that tore from Layla's chest was raw and broken. A sob that clawed its way out of her throat and left her gasping, dizzy with grief.

Her sister wasn't moving. No, it couldn't be. Laura can't be dead.

A scream cut through the night.

Layla's head snapped up just as a student stumbled into view below, frozen in horror at the sight. Another one followed, and then another. Before one knew it, Laura's body had been surrounded. Whispers erupted while panic bloomed like fire.

"Oh my god—"

"What happened?"

"Someone fell—!"

More students poured in, drawn by the commotion, their voices overlapping in frightened confusion.

Fingers began to point upwards and Layla ducked back from the window, pressing herself into the shadows just as heads tilted upward, gazes climbing to the fourth floor.

Her chest tightened painfully, tears streaming down her face, hot and unstoppable, blurring her vision. How did things come to this point? The mission had been simple: get Roman's things and go back.

Now everything had gone south.

Every part of Layla screamed to go back and get her sister. She could do something. Laura had to still be alive.

But she couldn't. This mission was supposed to be discreet. And now, it was only a matter of time before they came for her too.

With shaking hands, Layla snatched her bag from the floor.

Then she turned and ran like a coward.

Meanwhile...

Micah and Adele rushed toward the scene, his steps faltering when his eyes landed on the girl lying in a pool of blood. What in the world had Abel done?

He didn't need to say a word, Adele was already moving.

She dropped to her knees beside the girl, healing magic rushing to her hands. She could only hope she wasn't too late.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 775: Kill His Daughter[1,091 words]

Chapter 775: Kill His Daughter

Duskmoon Village

Ziva was in a meeting with her father and his beta, Jericho, explaining her plan.

"Once the spell is made, the moment Violet and her mates return to the human realm, I'll be alerted, and we'd pull—"

The door to the meeting room was abruptly thrown open. Three pairs of eyes snapped toward the entrance.

Layla rushed in, only to halt mid-step as their gazes pinned her to the spot.

"Well..." Ziva drawled, one hand settling on her waist. "Look who decided to show up early."

Her eyes swept over Layla slowly, settling on the bag slung over her shoulder. A slow smile curved her lips upon seeing how full it was.

"And it seems you had a fun time."

Then her gaze shifted to the empty space beside Layla.

"And where is your sister, Laura?"

At the mention of that name, Layla's lips trembled.

Before anyone could say Jack Robinson, her eyes brimmed with tears.

The shift in the room was immediate.

Angus straightened, his demeanor changing at once. But it was not concern that crossed his face. It was unease. A cold, crawling sensation slid down his spine instead.

"Where is your sister, Layla?" he asked this time. His voice was gravelly and dangerous, darkness bleeding into his eyes.

Layla tried to speak, but the words tangled in her throat. Tears spilled faster than she could blink them away, blurring her vision.

"W-we t-took the i-items and then—" she sucked in a sharp breath, her chest heaving, "there was a wolf... it came out of nowhere. It tried to attack—goddess—I fought it—I—"

"Layla!"

Angus's voice thundered through the room.

Layla flinched as if she was struck. The words died in her mouth, but the sob didn't. It ripped through her uncontrollably, her shoulders shaking as she folded inward.

Angus rose to his feet.

He could feel it now. Something had happened. The kids must have messed up — as usual. He should have known than to rely on his stupid daughters for something this important.

His face darkened like a gathering storm as he crossed the room in long strides. Angus stopped directly in front of Layla, towering over her, his presence crushing.

Slowly, he demanded, each word a hiss, "Where. Is. Your. Sister."

Layla whimpered, the sound small and broken.

"Talk!" Angus roared.

The force of it made the room seem to recoil. Even Ziva stiffened where she stood, startled despite herself. Layla shrank, curling in on herself, trembling like a wounded animal.

There was no escaping him.

Layla lifted her head at last, her face soaked in tears, eyes red. Her voice came out raw, barely more than a whisper.

"She's... she's dead." A sob tore out of her. "Or—at least I think she is."

"We ran into one of the wolves," she rushed on, the confession spilling out now, unstoppable. "I tried to fight it—I did. Laura was supposed to escape first, but she... she didn't. She tried to help me...."

Her breath hitched violently.

"But then her spell misfired. It hit an iron surface and bounced back—" Layla choked, clutching at her chest. "It hit her. She was thrown through the window.... She fell—four stories down."

And then, as if fully realizing the severity of what she had done, Layla rushed to explain, her words tumbling over themselves.

"I swear I didn't mean to leave her behind," she cried. "The students had started to gather. There was no way I could have gone back for her without being caught. I— I'm so sorry."

The guilt wasn't just in her eyes. It trembled in her voice, thick and choking, as though each word scraped her throat on the way out.

For a moment, there was nothing but heavy, suffocating silence, as if everyone in the room was trying to digest what they had just heard.

"So let me get this straight..." Angus finally spoke, his voice alarmingly calm. "Not only was Laura caught, but you don't even know whether she's dead or alive?"

Layla didn't need to answer, the small, broken sound that slipped from her throat was enough.

The next thing Layla felt was pain as Angus struck her across the face.

The sound cracked through the room.

Layla barely registered the blow. She had seen it coming, and in that moment, she welcomed it. Craved the pain. It was the punishment she deserved.

How could she have left her sister like that?

The force of the punch sent her crashing to the floor. She didn't even try to rise. Laura lay there, accepting it, waiting for more.

"Fuck!" Angus roared, yanking harshly at his hair. He stared down at Layla's crumpled form, but didn't strike her again. What was the point? The damage was already done.

Suddenly, it hit him.

"Hannah..." he muttered bitterly. "She wouldn't have messed this up if she were here."

Ziva stiffened.

Her father's gaze snapped to her, accusing.

She swallowed. "Surely, there is something we can—"

She didn't finish because Angus was on her in a blink.

His hands wrapped around her throat, fingers digging in as he slammed her back against the wall.

"This is all your fault," he hissed. "If you hadn't gone behind my back and ruined everything, Hannah would have carried this out with ease."

"I—I can still do something," Ziva choked out, her breath tearing painfully from her lungs.

"Yes," Angus spat, releasing her abruptly. "You can."

Ziva staggered, coughing violently, clutching her throat. Slowly, she straightened, her expression austere.

"You will find that girl, Laura," Angus said. "And if she's still breathing... end her."

"What?" Layla whispered from the floor, her

heart slamming painfully against her ribs. Surely she hadn't heard right.

Angus didn't even look at her.

"If my brother even gets a whiff of my plans from that stupid girl's mouth," he continued, "you can rest assured your head will roll this time."

A chill ran down Ziva's spine. She nodded once. She could see it in her father's eyes. He wasn't bluffing.

Angus muttered something that sounded like a curse and stormed toward the exit. As he passed, Layla grabbed his leg desperately.

"Father—please," she sobbed. "You don't mean that. She's your daughter."

Angus looked down at her with nothing but contempt. Then he kicked her away.

Layla hit the floor hard.

Once Angus was gone, Layla turned to Ziva, tears streaming down her face. "You're not going to do it... right?"

Ziva didn't answer.

The cold, emotionless look she gave her was response enough.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 776: Take Her To His Domain[1,344 words]

Chapter 776: Take Her To His Domain

"Hey," Micah breathed as soon as Adele stepped out of the ward. She looked as pale as hell, enough that he reached out quickly and steadied her when she stumbled.

"What's going on? Are you alright?" There was nothing but worry in his eyes.

Adele nodded, then let out a deep breath. "She simply took a lot from me."

Micah didn't need further explanation. Adele's power was more on the giving side. In the past, he hadn't thought much about it—he never gave much thought to others—but now they were mated, her wellbeing was his utmost concern, and it pissed him off how she had to suffer just to make someone else feel better.

So he guided her to the bench right outside the room and helped her sit. Micah sat beside her, his discerning eyes studying her. "How is she?"

"Barely alive," Adele breathed. "While I was treating her, I found other injuries, and I can't tell if they further complicated things, but the girl is lucky to be alive. If I had been even a minute late, we would have lost her."

Micah grimaced as the events of the night replayed in his mind. No matter how he looked at it, he had fucked up.

He should have given Abel more warning than simply telling him to check on Roman's room.

How was he supposed to know the vision would align so perfectly with their timing?

How was anyone supposed to predict that?

Moreover, he had been on his way as backup in case things weren't what they seemed.

Not to mention, he hadn't expected Abel to go alone. Even then, couldn't he have alerted the others through the packlink when he noticed the situation? But no—he had to fight witches and prove he was a capable Beta.

Excuses. Excuses. Micah knew. No wonder he felt shitty as hell.

Thankfully, aside from a few broken bones that would heal with time, Abel was good to go.

The same just couldn't be said for the little witchy.

Adele continued, "The girl is in a coma. We'll have to wait for her to wake up to tell us what the hell she was doing here. But can you imagine? A witch at Lunaris?"

She threw her hands up, giving Micah an incredulous look. "I get returning to the academy and finding it warded. But zombies? And now witches breaking into Lunaris?" She shook her head in disbelief. "I can assure you, the world is going crazy right now."

She leaned back against the wall, still reeling.

Then she looked at Micah and caught that look on his face—the one that told her he knew more than he was letting on.

Adele's demeanor shifted instantly. Her eyes narrowed. "What are you not telling me, Micah?"

She watched his body tense, the way he pressed his lips together, eyes pleading in that innocent way she was getting used to.

"Hell no," Adele said flatly. "Out with it, the great Oracle."

And yes, discovering that her mate was the great gossip diva was a reality no one had ever prepared her for. Not that Adele judged him—but if anyone had told her beforehand, she would have laughed in their face.

The irony was almost impressive.

All this time, the entire school had been led to believe the Oracle was some mysterious, gossip-hungry female student lurking in the shadows.

Meanwhile, it was the charming, playboy counselor who had been quietly setting the school on fire with his articles—collecting secrets, exposing scandals, and watching the chaos unfold from behind his desk with a polite smile.

If anything, Micah had played them all beautifully.

Thankfully—mercifully—he had never turned his pen on her. Because if he had, she would have made sure his next article was written somewhere very quiet—preferably the underworld—with only his ancestors and the gods as his audience. Surely someone down there would appreciate his humor.

Micah worked his jaw as soon as he saw the determination in her eyes. He told her, "It's a very dangerous secret, Adele."

"And I haven't been dragged into dangerous situations since the last month?" she challenged him, her arms folded across her chest.

Micah sighed.

And that was how Micah spent the next minute narrating to her about Angus and the fact that he was still alive, and about the many, many children he had—his siblings. Especially the one in critical condition right now.

"Fuck!" Adele cursed as soon as Micah was done, her head reeling from the huge confession.

She pushed to her feet abruptly, the room suddenly feeling too small. Adele was unable to process it any longer while sitting down. Micah sat up as well, eyes fixed on her, watching carefully, hoping the truth hadn't crushed her outright.

"How could—" Adele who had been pacing

stopped short, spinning back to face him. Shock, frustration, and disbelief warred openly across her face.

She threw her hands up. "This is crazy. The wolves are going to flip if they find out about this!"

"Thankfully, they won't be learning about that from your lips," Micah said, matter-of-factly.

Adele scowled. "This is not a secret we can sit on, Micah. The packs deserve to know, especially if Angus is sending his witch daughters to break into Lunaris Academy."

"You will do no such thing," Micah said firmly, stepping closer and towering over her as if to drive his authority home. "What do you think Elijah would do once he finds out that someone knows the secret he and a few stupid elder wolves concealed years back? You don't know my uncle, Adele, and I don't plan on risking you."

Before Adele could respond, he added, "Also, I'm moving the girl. I'm sure news has already reached Elijah and soon, he'd put one or two things together and figure out the truth. He'll come for her. And Angus doesn't strike me as someone who leaves loose ends. He'll return to clean up his mess."

"We'll hide her then," Adele said quickly. "I have a few contacts who can help us—"

"This is witches we're dealing with," Micah cut in. "They will always find her with a location spell. And Elijah? You know he has the resources to track us down anywhere."

"Then what do we do?" Adele demanded. "Is there a place where none of them can—"

She trailed off as realization struck her.

The look on Micah's face told her everything.

"No," Adele shook her head.

"You know it's the only place they can't come after her."

"Hell?" Adele scoffed. "The place where I was held hostage and your demon father wants our child?"

"I wasn't a hostage," Micah replied calmly. "And it's technically my domain."

Adele let out an exasperated breath. Even her mate had lost his mind.

"Adele..." Micah called her name more gently. He reached for her hand, and when she tried to pull back, he held on tightly.

"I need to figure out why Angus sent them to Lunaris Academy," he said. "And of all rooms, Roman's quarters. My instincts tell me something is wrong, and I won't rest until I get to the bottom of it."

"Yep," Adele muttered. "The Oracle in you won't let it go."

Micah didn't take offense. Instead, he sighed softly. "Please," he said, almost pleading. "If I don't do this, I'll go crazy."

For a moment, it looked like Adele would stand her ground. Her jaw was tight, and her eyes hard. Then she exhaled slowly and gave in.

"Fine," she said. "But you're not doing this alone. You're taking me through every step of this plan. Is that acceptable, or should we continue this argument and go absolutely nowhere?"

Micah's expression lit up instantly. "One hundred percent."

The way he beamed at her made Adele's anger melt despite herself, but she kept her face stern, unwilling to let him see how easily he'd won.

Then reality hit her.

She frowned suddenly and asked, "How the fuck is the girl supposed to survive in Hell anyway?"

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 777: The Queen Is ill[1,033 words]

Chapter 777: The Queen Is ill

The Fae Realm

Even though Violet appeared mostly healed, Queen Seraphira still insisted she be taken to the royal infirmary, where Zuru personally examined her.

The healer assessed the princess's core and

In the end, she declared her magic stable. Exhausted, but no longer volatile. All she needed now was rest.

Only then did the cardinal alphas take their mate back to their chambers, where Violet finally drifted into a deep, peaceful sleep.

But while she slept, her mates did not.

They gathered in the adjoining living room, seated around the low table, voices hushed and careful not to carry through the walls.

"You know," Griffin said, breaking the silence, "for once, I'm glad this happened in the Fae realm. Imagine Violet losing control in the human realm. She'd never forgive herself for the lives she might've taken."

"I highly doubt that," Alaric countered at once.

Griffin frowned. "Excuse me?"

Alaric had his arms crossed as he explained, "Back at the North Pack, when Violet used that power, as terrifying as it looked, she didn't hurt us. Not even once. It was as if her powers knew who not to harm."

He gestured vaguely toward the doorway, meaning the outside world. "But today wasn't like that. The dome was designed to draw magic to the surface. Unfortunately, the damn device pulled on more than it and Violet could handle."

Roman grinned. "On the bright side, the Fae will think twice before messing with our mate in the future."

Griffin snorted softly. "That's one way to put it. I mean, who in their right mind would challenge someone who can erase them from existence?"

"Well," Alaric added more soberly, "let's not celebrate too soon. It's a struggle for the throne and some Fae have a death sentence."

He turned his gaze toward Asher, who had been silent the entire time, standing near the window with his arms folded, eyes distant.

"You've been awfully quiet," Alaric said. "What's going on in that scheming mind of yours?"

Asher didn't look at them when he spoke.

"The Queen is sick."

There was no dramatic pause or softening, just the truth, dropped clean and heavy.

Alaric, Griffin, and Roman looked at one another, their eyes communicating all the things their mouths didn't say.

Then Alaric cleared his throat. "You heard it too."

Asher turned to them. "I'm sure all of you heard it," he said, his gaze trained on their faces. "And saw it too. The queen was struggling with her powers."

Roman shrugged. "Werewolves fall sick sometimes. It might not be anything serious."

" 'Remember your health,' " Asher quoted Lila's words. "That doesn't exactly sound like, 'Remember, you're sick.' The queen is hiding something else, which, at this point, isn't surprising."

Over and over again, the Fae had proven they were masters of secret.

Griffin frowned. "Are you trying to say the queen is dying or something? That doesn't make sense. Fae live long lives, even longer than wolves."

Alaric agreed. "Griffin's right. And Seraphira is the Queen of the Fae. There's no way they wouldn't have a solution to whatever is ailing her."

"Serious or not, the fact that the queen was so incapacitated that she couldn't fully help her daughter already unsettles me," Asher said, his intense gaze boring into each and every one of them. "Violet is about to go through an important trial. I need to know the queen is in perfect health to see her through. And if the queen is dying," he added coldly, "we need to understand how that will affect Violet."

Alaric nodded slowly. "You do make sense. If the queen is severely sick—or worse—we can't just sit on it."

"And how exactly do we do that?" Griffin asked. "It's not like the queen will come out and announce she's ill. Just like in the human realm, it's politics. No monarch wants news of weakness spreading. It destabilizes the kingdom. And she doesn't trust us enough to confide in us." He paused. "Not to mention her crazy husband. Goddess knows what he'd do with that information."

Roman snapped his fingers. "Or we lure Lila in here and Asher compels her to tell the truth—" He stopped abruptly. "Oh. Right. She's immune." He groaned, dragging a hand down his face. "Forgot about that annoying detail."

"No," Asher said firmly. "I'll meet with the queen myself. She'll tell me the truth."

Griffin, Alaric, and Roman stared at him blankly, like someone watching a child announce he was about to build a house with no tools, no money, and no plan.

Asher saw the look they were giving him and ignored it. He went on, saying, "If the queen's health is truly that serious, then sooner or later the truth will come out—no matter how much she tries to hide it. It's better she tells me now, so we can be prepared to deal with the fallout of whatever caused it, than keeping it a secret and making life even more difficult for Violet than it already is."

Listening to Asher's words, the cardinal alphas began to see the wisdom in them.

"You're right," Griffin concurred. "So when do we intend to see the queen?"

"Not we. I am," Asher corrected calmly. "She might not appreciate a crowd. And someone needs to stay behind and look after Violet." He was already preparing to leave.

"I'm coming with you," Alaric said. "If the queen really is sick, my expertise might come in handy."

Roman and Griffin exchanged a look. That left the two of them behind.

Instead of feeling sidelined, Roman grinned. "Don't worry. We'll take very good care of our mate."

Asher's expression shifted instantly. "Don't do anything I wouldn't do, Roman Draven," he warned.

Roman lifted both hands in mock surrender. "Why do you guys always assume the worst of me?"

Griffin cut in smoothly. "Relax. I'm here."

Roman rolled his eyes. These people were always so dramatic. What exactly did they think he was going to do to Violet? Aside from a little cuddling—she probably needed someone to hold onto while she slept. Maybe a kiss or two on the forehead.

Hehe. Perfectly reasonable things.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 778: It's About You[1,556 words]

Chapter 778: It's About You

Queen Seraphira stood by the tall arched window of her quarters, her hands folded behind her back, listening in silence to the High Treasurer.

The High Treasurer adjusted the stack of parchment in his hands. "Your Majesty, if this continues, the royal coffers will run dry long before recovery is possible."

He laid the reports on the marble table between them. Then broke down the situation to the queen. "The western wing of the palace, the closest to the scene, collapsed. The shock wave cracked the supporting arches and ripped through the foundation. Three levels are unsalvageable."

"Great," Seraphira sighed, scratching the side of her temple. She could already feel a headache brewing.

The treasurer paused on purpose as if giving her respite, then continued, "And that is only the palace."

He turned a page.

"The surrounding regions suffered significant damage and entire groves were uprooted. Several of the elder Fae who dwell within living trees lost their homes when the roots tore free from the earth. It is worth noting that some of them had been bound to those trees for generations."

The headache pulsed harder now, drilling behind her eyes.

The fifth help her. She wasn't about to go through this ordeal again.

Most Fae did not simply live in their homes, they grew with them. They bonded. To lose a dwelling was not an inconvenience, it was a severing.

"The hollow-homes near the riverbanks collapsed when the ground split," the treasurer went on. "Those who dwell beneath the earth were forced out when the tunnels caved in. Many escaped with nothing but what they were wearing."

"And the injured?" Seraphira asked.

"Zero fatalities," he replied quickly. "Thanks to the early wards and Queen Annequin's intervention. But hundreds are displaced. They will need shelter."

Silence fell again just as Seraphira turned from the window at last, her expression composed. She moved to the table, resting one hand beside the reports.

"All of this," she said, still quite not believing it, "...as a result of my daughter's power. No fae has ever been recorded with such astounding ability."

"Indeed, Your Majesty," the treasurer agreed, only for his tone to turn acerbic.

"No other heir has nearly torn our kingdom in two."

Queen Seraphira tilted her head, fixing him with a look that clearly said, Really?

The treasurer cleared his throat, adjusting his coat as if to soften the blow. "Even areas untouched physically were drained magically. Several enchantments failed entirely."

"The enchantments will be restored immediately. However, the people..." Seraphira hesitated. "What are they saying about her?"

"There is fear," the treasurer admitted.

Seraphira's face fell.

Then he added, carefully, "But there is admiration as well. A great deal of it. The Fae are saying the Fifth One has returned. That she lives within the princess and has come to redeem us. Even now, Your Majesty, the princess is being hailed as the next messiah."

At once, the Queen's once crestfallen expression brightened.

It seemed that some disasters were, indeed, blessings in disguise after all.

She straightened, every inch the queen once more as she instructed him, "Begin relocation efforts for the displaced immediately," she ordered. "Open the eastern sanctuaries and the halls. Divert funds from ceremonial reserves if you must."

The treasurer's eyes widened at once. "Your Majesty, that will—"

"I know exactly what it will do, unfortunately, this is not my daughter's but my fault for poorly preparing her. Hence the burden is mine and the people will not suffer for it."

The treasurer had no room for more arguments. "As you command." He bowed deeply and then left.

As soon as the door closed behind him, Lila came in, the timing almost seamless.

Queen Seraphira lifted her gaze at once, expectation written plainly on her face.

"Well?" she asked.

Lila inclined her head. "The enchantments have been fully restored, Your Majesty. Stronger than before. I personally oversaw the wards and made rounds around the palace perimeter. No unwanted parties slipped in while the protections were down."

"Good."

The tension eased slightly from Seraphira's shoulders as she moved toward the round table in the center of her quarters. Four elegant chairs surrounded it, carved from pale

fae-wood. She took her seat slowly, fingers drumming against the surface, obviously thinking.

Lila remained standing. "There's something else," she said.

Seraphira glanced up. "Go on."

"Reports coming in indicate that nearly seventy percent of the contestants registered for the Princess's Trial have withdrawn."

For a heartbeat, the Queen did not react, and then she laughed.

It was sudden and unrestrained, the sound spilling out of her like relief mixed with vindication. She leaned back in her chair, delighted. If not relived.

Lila blinked, momentarily caught off guard by the Queen's outburst.

It wasn't surprising when one considered it.

When the Trial of Ascension had first been announced, nearly every young Fae of age had rushed to put their name forward. Everyone wanted to be the next ruler of the Free Fae. Few had taken the princess seriously then. What could a half-blood heir, born outside the realm, possibly accomplish?

But Violet's display of power today had changed everything. Fear had scattered them like startled birds.

Seraphira wiped at the corner of her eye, amusement still dancing in her gaze. "I'm honestly more surprised there are still fools willing to compete with her."

"They're likely banking on her lack of formal training," Lila replied. "And on the belief that the Trial conditions may favor experience over raw power."

Seraphira lips curved into a smirk. "We'll make sure that hope is crushed thoroughly."

She then asked, "What of Queen Annequin?"

Lila told her. "Zuru examined her personally. She's unharmed and sound on her feet."

Seraphira nodded in understanding, relieved. "Good. Thanks to her intervention, what could have been utterly devastating was... contained." She exhaled slowly. "As much as I don't fully trust her, I need her."

Lila lifted a brow but said nothing.

Seraphira continued. "Annequin is the only one capable of taming Violet's unmaking ability. That makes her the perfect mentor for this particular power."

Her gaze connected with Lila's, "We need to get on her good side."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Prepare a gift," Seraphira instructed. "If necessary, draw from my personal collection. The young queen enjoys attention, and what better way to ensure her cooperation than making her feel indispensable."

"I'll have it arranged."

"Thank you."

The Queen leaned back once more, relaxed. Everything was working out better than she thought.

"Now that all is in control, you should lay your head down, Your Majesty," Lila said gently. "I'll have Zuru come see you."

Seraphira shook her head at once. "No."

"Your Majesty—"

"There are too many eyes in these halls. If Zuru continues coming in and out of my chambers, people will begin to ask questions."

Lila frowned. "With Violet's outburst, they'll assume we're only making sure you weren't harmed. No one would question that."

"I am fine," Seraphira replied, her tone clipped now.

"But—"

Seraphira's gaze snapped to her. They were cold and absolute, the room seeming to still beneath it.

Lila straightened immediately, schooling her expression. She had overstepped. No matter how much she cared, the Queen's word was final.

For a moment, neither of them spoke.

Then Seraphira's expression eased a little, replaced by something almost maternal.

"I appreciate everything you've been doing, Lila," she said quietly. "Truly."

Lila swallowed.

"But every session with Zuru," Seraphira continued, "only reminds me of how weak I have become. How useless." Her fingers tightened briefly before relaxing again. "If I am going to die, then let me do so with dignity. Not as a sickly queen constantly tended to by a healer."

She met Lila's eyes. "I want my dignity. And like I told you—I am fine."

Lila said nothing.

The sadness in her eyes was unmistakable. She had served Seraphira for years, had watched her rule with grace, and now the helplessness of standing by—unable to protect her—was eating her alive.

The silence stretched, heavy and awkward.

Then the doors opened.

A young fae maiden stepped inside, bowing deeply. "Your Majesty. The cardinal alphas request an audience."

Seraphira and Lila exchanged a look.

"Did something happen?" the Queen asked.

Lila shook her head. "Not that I'm aware of."

"Send them in."

Moments later, Asher and Alaric entered the Queen's quarters. Both bowed respectfully upon greeting her.

"Sit," Seraphira said.

They obeyed at once, the atmosphere awkward. This was the first time only Asher and Alaric had come to see her—they were usually a team of four. If not five.

The queen could already sense something was off, but she didn't push it.

A fae servant entered, served them tea, and then left.

Asher and Alaric both drank, not because they were thirsty, but as a way to ease themselves in before breaking the ice.

As soon as the queen lowered her cup, she asked with a polite smile, "To what do I owe this visit, Alpha Asher? Alpha Alaric?"

She addressed them both, her gaze sharp despite the warmth in her tone.

She inquired, "Is this about my daughter? Is there something I don't know going on?"

Asher set his cup down.

"No, Your Majesty," he said evenly. "We're not here about Violet."

A brief pause followed.

"It's about you."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 779: Its Too Late[1,047 words]

Chapter 779: Its Too Late

Seraphira schooled her expression into an unreadable mask, completing the visage of a queen fully down to business.

"About me?" She sounded intrigued. "I would say that is surprising."

Out of Violet's mates, Asher Nightshade was the one who had drawn her attention from the start. The boy was ever vigilant. Ever attentive—even though his aura was heavy like someone bearing the weight of the world on his shoulders.

"Tell me then, what is it about me you wish to discuss?" She chuckled, deliberately taking the situation lightly. Or rather, that was her own way of coping with the unexpected tension.

Seraphira lifted the cup to her lips and was about to take another sip when Asher announced, "We know you're sick."

The words landed like a blade.

The announcement came so suddenly and unexpectedly that her hand trembled, the hot tea sloshing over and burning across her palm.

"Your Majesty—" Lila rushed forward with a tablecloth, about to tend to her hand, but the Queen lifted her palm sharply, halting her. Her gaze remained fixed on the cardinal alphas.

"Where did you hear such news?" she asked.

Her voice was calm, but the temperature in the room dropped so abruptly it was a wonder the air itself didn't freeze.

Asher did not flinch.

He took his time, lifting his cup, sipping once more before setting the porcelain down with care. "It wasn't difficult to guess," he said evenly. "You were unable to use your magic earlier today to heal your daughter. Then Lila slipped, asking about your health. It didn't take much effort to put two and two together."

Lila froze, mortification and fury warring across her face. This was her fault. She should have been more careful.

Queen Seraphira sat ramrod straight now.

"What do you want?" she asked coldly.

Asher's eyes narrowed. "What do you think I want? The mother of my mate is sick. I need to know whether that sickness is life-threatening."

"That is none of your business," Lila snapped.

"Exactly," the Queen concurred, voice composed even as her body betrayed her tension. "Everyone gets sick once in a while. Even the immortal Fae aren't spared from such things."

"Well," Asher said, "are you dying? Yes or no. It's quite a simple question, Your Majesty."

The Queen rose abruptly to her feet.

"I believe you have overstayed your welcome, Alpha Asher," she said, each word clipped, forced through clenched teeth. "Lila will escort you out." Her temper, for once, was unmistakably frayed.

But even under the intensity of her attention, Asher remained unmoved.

"With the way you're unable to answer my question without resorting to aggression, I'd say I'm right. You're dying."

The queen turned fully toward him now, her face drained of color, pale as parchment.

Asher continued, relentless. "And this is where you're wrong, Your Majesty. If I was able to figure it out, do you truly believe it's only a matter of time before your enemies do as well?" His gaze hardened. "Or should I be more precise—your husband?"

Their eyes clashed, tension crackling between them.

For a heartbeat, it seemed the queen might stand her ground. Then she exhaled slowly, the fight bleeding out of her, and lowered herself back into her seat.

At her side, Lila was so tightly wound she looked ready to lunge and attack Asher herself if that was what it took to protect the secret.

Alaric deliberately stayed silent.

In moments like this, Asher was unmatched. Where Alaric might have pushed—or even begged—for answers and earned himself an unceremonious dismissal, Asher applied pressure with surgical precision. He cornered, challenged, and closed every escape route until compliance was no longer a choice but an inevitability.

He negotiated the way predators hunted.

Patient. Precise. Inevitable.

"What do you want?" she asked. Again.

Asher winced, as if the very idea that she believed he intended to blackmail her physically offended him.

He lifted his gaze, those slitted gray eyes boring into hers. "How much time do you have left?" he asked. "Because I'm certain Violet is not ready to rule the Free Fae yet."

"I think what he's trying to say is—" Alaric cut in quickly, sensing the sharp edge Asher was already pressing against the queen. He offered a polite smile, warm and disarming, knowing full well that Asher was about as useful as a wet stick when it came to handling emotions that weren't Violet's. "—what is wrong with you, Your Majesty?"

Asher shook his head. Left to him, this would be handled swiftly and cleanly.

That was Asher—efficient, relentless, and utterly indifferent to bruised feelings so long as the result was achieved.

Queen Seraphira and Lila exchanged a look, the kind that weighed risk against necessity.

Then the queen looked back at him. "If I am to share this with you," she said carefully, "you must promise this conversation will not leave this room."

"Unfortunately," Asher replied without hesitation, "that is a promise I cannot make." His tone was unapologetic. "Griffin and Roman already know. And I will not keep a secret from Violet that will shape her life forever. She has only just gotten her mother back, I doubt she would appreciate learning you're dying when it's too late."

Alaric immediately stepped in, shooting Asher a sharp look. "What he means," he said smoothly, "is that we trust you to tell Violet when the time is right. For now, we want to help."

Asher ignored him entirely. Subtlety had never been his strength, and he had no intention of pretending otherwise.

Queen Seraphira released a deep, resigned breath.

"They call it Thal'voryn Shai," she said quietly. "Disease of the bone, in your language. Simply put, my body is dying and can no longer hold my power. The more I use my magic, the shorter my lifespan becomes."

"And how short is that lifespan?" Asher asked, his eyes narrowing. Then more urgently, "No. Is this condition hereditary?"

The question was for Violet.

"No. Thankfully," the queen answered immediately. "I would never wish such a fate on my daughter."

Asher merely exhaled, relief slipping out before he could stop it.

"As for how much time I have..." Seraphira said, her gaze distant, "you shouldn't hold on to hope too tightly."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 780: Switch Bodies[1,235 words]

Chapter 780: Switch Bodies

"So let me get this straight..." Alaric said slowly, trying to process it. "Your magic is killing you."

"Exactly," Queen Seraphira answered.

"My body and my power are no longer balanced, one is overshadowing the other. This flesh is only a vessel, and when the vessel is damaged, not even the most powerful—"

"—can survive," Alaric finished, finally grasping the gravity of it.

Lila added, stepping in with restrained urgency, "Her Majesty would not be in this condition if Baron had not sabotaged her. She already shares a life force with him, and when he siphoned her power the last time, he placed unbearable strain on her body. That was what triggered all of this."

"And yet," Asher said flatly, "he still walks freely."

"Baron and I share a life force," the Queen snapped. "You cannot suggest I kill him."

"There are many ways to deal with a bastard like that," Asher replied coolly. "If you want, I could offer a few pages from my playbook, though I doubt you'd take them. The Free Fae aren't killers, after all."

His gaze flicked to her. "Or is that just you, Queen Seraphira?"

"Asher," Alaric warned, his eyes cutting toward him.

Lila was about to intervene, but the Queen stopped her with a raised hand.

Seraphira's gaze turned glacial. She clicked her tongue, her smile sickly sweet as she said, "Perfect. Sweet, ever-knowing Asher, with his impeccable wisdom."

She tilted her head. "Perhaps you should enter the Trial of Ascension yourself and rule the Free Fae with all your brilliant plans." Her eyes hardened. "Let's see how that turns out for you."

Asher was tempted to lash back—but he restrained himself, reminding himself that this was the mother of his mate, and that this was neither the time nor the place for blame.

The words looked like they pained him to say.

"You should have handled it better, that's all."

He turned away, forcing the rest of what he wanted to say back down his throat.

Alaric cleared his throat. "So the problem is the magic..." He scratched the back of his head. "Since Baron was able to siphon her power, the obvious solution would be to let him

take it away. But she can't rule the Fae without her abilities—and Goddess knows what Baron would do with that kind of power."

"It isn't that simple," Lila told him. "A Fae's magic is not something separate from them. It is them. What Baron did—siphoning her power—was an unnatural act. In most cases, it would have killed her outright. The only reason she survived is because of the life bond they share."

She let that sink in before continuing.

"The point is, removing the Queen's magic now would likely finish what the disease has started. And even if—somehow—her power could be stripped away without killing her immediately, all that would do is buy time. Her body is already failing. Thal'voryn Shai is a decay. Once it begins, there is no stopping it."

The Queen said nothing, her expression calm and serene even as they discussed her fate as though she were not sitting right there.

Alaric wore a deep scowl, the look of someone who had just collided with an impossible problem. If this were a human illness, there would be cures. . To think even the great Fae—the stuff of legends—were not exempt from decay.

The thought unsettled him.

Then, suddenly, something clicked.

His eyes widened, as if a light had gone on in his head.

"Then she switches bodies."

"What?!"

Alaric rushed on before anyone could interrupt him. "I read a book once. A work of fiction, yes—but it was centered on the Fae. I can't remember all the details; it's been years. But one thing stuck with me." His words tumbled over each other now. "When the Fae queen died, they revived her by transferring her soul into another body. She had a different face, a different form, but it was still her. Her mind. Her magic."

Silence followed and the room seemed to hold its breath.

It did not go unnoticed, the wide-eyed look the Queen and Lila exchanged.

Alaric finally stopped talking, realizing he had been rambling. Heat crept up his neck as he looked between them, grimacing slightly.

"That's possible, right?"

None of them answered him. But Seraphira and Lila's eyes met, a brief exchange that seemed to carry an entire conversation, before they both looked away. The Queen swallowed.

"Oh," Asher drawled, a slow, grim smile curving his lips. "From the way they're staring at each other like perpetrators caught at the crime scene, I'd say it's absolutely possible."

"You don't understand what you're asking for," Lila raised her voice, horror flashing across her face. "You're practically asking for a Fae to die so Her Majesty can occupy her body."

Asher shrugged. "Why not? One sacrifice for the betterment of the crown and the Free Fae doesn't seem like too much to ask. There are monarchs who wouldn't even bother asking. They'd simply take."

"Well, I am not that monarch," the Queen snapped.

"I've also seen monarchs whose people were willing to lay down their lives for them," Asher countered confidently. "Your people love you, don't they? Then surely one would be willing to give everything."

For once, the Queen was tongue-tied. She opened her mouth, then closed it again, finding no immediate rebuttal.

After a moment, she said to Asher, her expression tight. "You don't understand what's truly at stake here. Yes, such a process is possible, but it is not that simple. The body must be compatible with mine. And even if the transfer succeeds, there is always the risk that it may reject me over time."

"Just like in an organ transplant when it begins to fail," Alaric offered.

Asher scowled at his cardinal brother, wondering whose side he's on.

"Yes," the Queen agreed.

"And even then," Asher said, "rejection doesn't happen nearly as often as people fear. Not to mention, even if you do nothing, you'll still die in the end when the disease claims your body. So isn't it better to fight for your life than give up so easily—" *like some coward.*

He stopped himself from saying it out loud.

However people who knew Asher already understood there was no version of that thought that didn't end with something caustic.

The queen already had a sour expression.

Asher went on anyway. "So I suggest you start looking for compatible bodies. Because there is no way in hell I'm going to sit here and let my Violet suffer the pain of losing you. That's a promise." His tone was gravelly, expression practically carved from stone.

This wasn't posturing, or even a threat. He was merely stating a fact.

The queen lifted her chin, refusing to be cowed by a boy—no matter how sharp his fangs were.

"I'll look into it," she said stiffly.

"Better," Asher replied.

Then he stood abruptly, leaving Alaric no choice but to rise as well.

"I think this is where I'll call it a day."

"Thank you for your time, Alpha Asher," the queen said, rubbing her temple. She looked exhausted now, and couldn't wait to be alone.

Asher inclined his head in acknowledgment and turned to leave.

Then he stopped and turned.

"You're right," Asher said with a gleam in his eyes. "I do want something in return."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 781: Taryn's Truth[1,565 words]

Chapter 781: Taryn's Truth

Hannah had been lucky.

It turned out that the moment she had left her quarters and wandered into the kitchens to grab something to eat and drown out her heartbreak, the palace had shuddered with a deafening roar. The sound had ripped through the halls like thunder, shaking stone and glass and sending Fae scrambling in terror.

By the time the dust settled, she was homeless.

Only later did the rumors spread, that the devastation had been caused by Violet. The princess had lost control during her training and nearly tore the kingdom apart.

And so Hannah found herself displaced, standing in the eastern hall among dozens of other Fae. The place buzzed with restless chatter, voices overlapping, and emotions running high. Fear. Awe. Anger. Wonder. The hall was loud as hell, and no one seemed able to stop talking.

The wing that had collapsed, it turned out, was one that housed the servants' quarters—both high-born attendants and low-born workers—along with several eco-bound Fae who lived close to the palace to tend its inner workings.

Groundskeepers, ward-keepers, archivists, caretakers of the Tree of life and enchanted roots that ran through the palace foundations. Some minor nobles lived there too—not powerful enough to demand private estates, but close enough to court to serve, advise, or simply remain visible in the queen's favor.

With so many Fae gathered in one place, it was the perfect opportunity for Hannah to socialize and carry out Operation: Get a Fae Husband.

However, it was safe to say that after Taryn had ripped her pretty little heart straight out of her chest, she had no desire for such foolishness anymore.

She hadn't even realized it until now, but none of the Fae males around her held the slightest fascination. Every single one of them failed in comparison to him.

Hannah sighed. Perhaps it was for the best.

Happiness was never meant for her.

Once the Fifth One decided she was to die, she would go peacefully. They would probably grant her a death so swift she wouldn't even feel it. And honestly, that was far better than meeting a slow, horrible end at the hands of that bitch, Ziva.

She let out a long, tired breath.

The romances written in books were lies. Big, fat lies.

Yep.

Hannah was depressed.

She might as well have been a ghost in the middle of that din. The noise, the laughter, the endless chatter of the Fae washed over her without touching her at all.

Then it happened.

A sudden pull tugged at her and Hannah turned.

And there he was.

Lord Taryn.

He was moving toward her with that same infuriating confidence, his strides unhurried, while the crowd parted for him without being asked. For a split second, it felt absurdly like one of those overdone romance scenes, where the dashing male lead advanced in slow motion, the world blurring around him, every other presence fading into irrelevance.

Except this wasn't scripted.

And her heart was hammering far too hard for it to be pretend.

It was almost laughable how long it had taken her to realize the truth. All that irritation and heat beneath her skin whenever he was near. The constant urge to snap at him, to shove him, to do something just to piss him off.

It hadn't been hatred, or even attraction the way she'd understood it.

It had been the bond that was pulling, provoking and twisting them toward each other while she stubbornly mistook it for fury.

Hannah couldn't tear her eyes away now. Her gaze clung to him like a magnet, her breath shallow as he closed the distance between them. Each step he took felt echoed in her bones, until he stopped right in front of her.

He was close enough that the noise of the hall finally vanished completely.

And all that remained was him.

Taryn was incredibly handsome. No—he was impossible. A picture of perfection that had no business existing outside of myth. His hair was braided today, though not entirely. It was a Fae style with some strands woven neatly into braids, and the rest left loose to spill over his shoulders.

Her eyes traced him helplessly. That perfectly straight, pointed nose and high brows that always seemed carved in judgment. The sharp, chiseled jaw that looked capable of drawing blood if one got too close. And then his lips—

The same lips she vividly remembered kissing the night before.

Heat rushed to her cheeks before she could stop it. Hannah frowned, mortified, as the memory rose uninvited. She immediately dropped her gaze, suddenly recalling the way he humiliated her last night.

She focused on the pain, as if it could undo the way her body reacted to him.

But before Hannah could retreat any further into herself, Taryn thrust his hand toward her. "Come with me," he said.

Her brows knitted into a frown at once.

"Why?" she asked.

His throat bobbed as he swallowed, clearly working up the courage. "You don't deserve to stay here," he said carefully. "Come. I have a space we can set up for you to rest while the earth wielders work on restoring the fallen wing."

Hannah let out a short, humorless laugh.

"Don't worry," she said coolly. "I'm nothing but a foolish prisoner..." She deliberately used the same words Taryn had thrown at her the day before.

He swallowed hard, and for a brief moment, the light in his eyes dimmed.

"I'm not Fae," she went on. "I don't deserve preferential treatment. If I have to stay in this hall until whatever day it takes to restore my room, then so be it." Her lips curved in a bitter smile. "I'm sure you'll agree your people need the space more than I, the outsider, do."

The self-mockery in her voice cut deeper than anger ever could.

A low, irritated growl slipped from Taryn's throat. For a second, it looked like he might grab her and drag her off that seat whether she liked it or not. Hannah met his gaze without flinching, her eyes daring him to try.

Then he let out a controlled breath.

"Please," he begged. "I just want to talk to you."

That made her pause.

Around them, the Fae had begun to stare openly now, whispers rippling through the hall.

'What is Lord Taryn doing with the girl?'

'They've been awfully close...'

Hannah lifted a brow, eyes glittering with challenge. "You're really sure you want to do this?" she asked lightly. "Isn't your reputation important?"

"Hannah," Taryn said through clenched teeth, a warning threaded through her name.

She smirked, clearly enjoying how easily she got under his skin. Rising to her feet, she brushed imaginary dust from her clothes.

"Fine," she said. "Let's go."

She turned and walked away without waiting, leaving him no choice but to follow.

Hannah noticed the flurry of activities as soon as she stepped into the corridor. Fae were at work while orders were being barked here and there, the air buzzing with urgency.

Hannah didn't mind them, walking straight through it all as if she already knew where she was going. Then warm fingers slid into hers.

She startled, her breath hitching before she could stop it. Her heart skipped a beat but she masked it quickly, schooling her expression into indifference.

"T-this way," Taryn said lowly, already guiding her to the right.

She tried to pull her hand free on instinct but he wouldn't let go.

"Taryn—" she warned, tugging again.

"So you don't get lost," he said firmly, not even looking at her.

It was a pathetic excuse. They both knew it.

Hannah scoffed under her breath, but she stopped resisting. As much as it annoyed her the way her pulse quickened, and the warmth spreading up her arm, some treacherous part of her craved the strength of his grip. The reassurance she hated herself for needing.

They walked in silence, weaving through the palace until Taryn pushed open a door and ushered her inside.

The room was quiet, far removed from the chaos on the outside.

Hannah glanced around, then back at him. "Where is this?"

"My quarters," he answered simply.

She blinked once. Then laughed.

"Oh," she said dryly. "So you bring me to your room to talk. No ulterior motives at all."

Her tone was taunting, but there was unmistakable mirth beneath it.

"Hannah—" he started, frustration edging his voice.

She turned away before he could finish, wandering deeper into the room.

It was spacious. Everything about it screamed him. Dark stone walls etched with runes. So typical Fae. A wide bed pushed against the far wall, its linens neat and untouched. Weapons arranged carefully along one side, and his scent filled the space.

Yep, definitely his room.

She folded her arms, and faced him. "If you didn't bring me here to seduce me, then what is it? Because you certainly didn't seem guilty last night."

The words landed the way she wanted it.

For a moment, Taryn looked like he wanted to speak only to swallow back down. His jaw was clenched so hard while his hands curled into fists.

Hannah waited for him but nothing came.

Her patience snapped.

"You know what?" she muttered. "I don't have time for this."

She turned toward the door.

"Hannah."

She didn't stop.

"Your father killed my wife."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 782: People In Love[1,027 words]

Chapter 782: People In Love

Hannah halted on the spot, the breath whooshing out of her lungs as if she'd been physically struck. For a moment, she genuinely thought she had heard him wrong.

Slowly, she turned to face Taryn, horror bleeding into her expression, her face draining until she looked pale as a sheet.

"What did you just say?"

But Taryn didn't answer.

He didn't need to.

Not with the raw, pained look in his eyes that made it hard for her to breathe. The walls he always kept so firmly in place were gone.

Right now, her usually tough as nut bargain-bin Mufasa looked vulnerable as hell.

That realization unsettled her more than the words themselves.

Hannah didn't speak. She simply crossed the room and sat back down on the edge of the bed, her movements slow, as if any sudden motion might shatter this fragile moment between them. Her hands clasped together in her lap, fingers twisting unconsciously.

The room fell into a silence that was thick, awkward, and suffocating.

Taryn still had his back to her, frozen in the same position he'd been in when he dropped the truth like a bomb.

Hannah shifted on the bed, discomfort crawling under her skin.

"So..." she cleared her throat, the sound too loud in the quiet. "She was your first mate?"

The question lingered between them, and for a moment, Hannah thought he wouldn't answer at all.

Then he finally spoke, his voice low, grave with emotion.

"No. We were not mated," Taryn said. "But she was my wife. And I loved her. Until—"

"My father took her from you," Hannah finished, the words tasting bitter in her mouth.

Hannah had always known her father was not a good man. She'd grown up with that awareness tucked neatly away in the back of her mind. Angus was simply Angus. Ruthless. Ambitious. Dangerous. But he was her father.

And like any child raised under a man like that, she had learned to justify him.

He was building a new world.

A world where supernaturals ruled.

A world that demanded sacrifices.

At least, that was what they told her each time she had to hurt someone upon his instruction.

But standing here, in front of the Fae who had lost someone important because of her father, it dawned on her then, slowly, and painfully, just how deeply he — they, her family — had hurt people.

For the first time, the destruction was no longer distant or theoretical. It had a face, and it was her mate.

The guilt crawled up her throat, choking her. Hannah had never felt so ashamed and disgusted of the blood running through her veins.

She swallowed hard, her voice barely above a whisper.

"How did it happen?"

She needed to know not out of curiosity or morbid interest, but because the truth mattered now. Her life depended on it.

Finally, Taryn turned, pinning her in place with blue orbs burning with grief so raw it made her chest ache. His loss was laid bare for her to see and suddenly, everything made sense.

The bond aside, there were times it felt like Taryn specially hated her. The moments where his jaw had clenched, and his eyes darkened as if he wanted to wrap his hands around her throat —and yet never did.

It had never been about her being human, but who she was.

Angus's daughter.

The daughter of the man who murdered his wife.

The realization crashed into her like a tidal wave. Goddess, how was she ever supposed to make up for something like that?

Her chest tightened painfully. Hannah lowered her gaze to the floor, suddenly unable to look him in the eye. Shame washed over her.

Hannah didn't even notice him moving until the mattress dipped beside her. Startled, she lifted her head.

Taryn was sitting on the edge of the bed now. He looked calmer but grief was not something that could be hidden. It lingered in the set of his shoulders, and in the heaviness of his gaze. This pain had sat with him for far too long.

Taryn said to her, "Most people believe the goddess could never be wrong when it comes to creating matebonds. But for once, I think she was."

Hannah's face fell instantly. For a heartbeat, she thought he was talking about them.

But Taryn went on.

"Angus should never have been given one," he said angrily. "If he hadn't, Queen Seraphira would never have fallen for him. And my wife, Poppy, would still be alive."

Oh. It was about Angus. That strangely sent relief through her.

"I don't understand," she finally found her voice, rough and unsteady. "How did it happen?"

How did my father kill your wife?

She had never heard of this. And Angus was not the type to hide his victories. He boasted about them.

"My wife was Queen Seraphira's closest friend," Taryn said. "Before she became queen, Seraphira was different. She was fascinated by the outside world. Curious. Restless."

His lips curved without humor. "The Fae saw her as strange. Even Queen Elawon, her mother, made no effort to hide her displeasure."

Taryn's gaze drifted, memories stirring.

"When Seraphira sneaked into the human realm, the Queen sent Lila to retrieve her. Poppy volunteered to go as well. She knew how stubborn and naïve Seraphira could be. If Lila failed, Poppy believed she could reach her, after all, Seraphira would never turn away a friend."

Hannah listened in silence, dread pooling in her chest. She already knew where this headed.

Taryn's eyes darkened. "But none of them expected what they found."

He looked at Hannah then, his gaze sharp and unforgiving. "Seraphira was already mated to Angus. And while a mate bond is meant to be a blessing, in this case, it was a curse."

"And unfortunately," Taryn drew a breath, "while it's hard enough to advise someone who is in love—when it comes to a mate bond?" His lips twisted bitterly. "They are better left alone."

He closed his eyes, pain flickering openly across his face before he forced them open again.

"But my wife didn't."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 783: Romance Does Happen After all[1,201 words]

Chapter 783: Romance Does Happen After all

"Perhaps," Taryn said slowly, "she simply couldn't accept the fact that her best friend had found a life outside of what she knew—the Free Fae. A mate at that."

He exhaled. "Bonds between interspecies, especially involving the Free Fae, had never been heard of. I assume poppy felt something was off. So she convinced Lila to investigate, and together they uncovered the darker side of Angus."

Hannah said nothing, completely drawn into the story. All Angus had ever told them was that his mate had run from him and returned to the Fae realm. No one had ever given her details like this.

"But even with the evidence they brought that Angus was not the hero he claimed to be, Seraphira refused to believe them." Taryn's voice hardened slightly. "And no one could truly blame her. A mate bond goes beyond affection. It binds, blinds and makes one fiercely loyal to their partner, even to their own destruction."

"She and Seraphira had a terrible fight and Poppy was ordered to return to the Free Fae. Seraphira had no intention of leaving. She believed she had found a new life with Angus, and with their daughter, Violet."

Taryn's jaw tightened. "But Poppy had always been stubborn. She refused to give up and kept persuading her best friend. When Seraphira finally learned that Angus planned to

exploit Violet's powers, she agreed to leave with her child. But by then, it was already too late."

Hannah wasn't surprised. Her father's greed for power knew no limits.

"Angus wasn't foolish," Taryn continued. "He discovered their plan. And while mates cannot harm one another, that didn't stop the rest of it from becoming brutal. Seraphira foolishly ordered Lila and Poppy not to kill her mate, only incapacitate him long enough for them to escape. Except Angus didn't share the same sentiment as her."

Hannah's eyes widened. What had Seraphira been thinking? How could she have been stupid enough to believe Angus would let her go without a fight?

The man had killed her sister, Rose, for the crime of falling in love and trying to escape the life he had chosen for her. For his mate? He would kill anyone who stood in his way.

Yes. Hannah could see it clearly now, how everything fell apart.

"They were outnumbered by Angus's men. Poppy fought the hardest, trying to buy Seraphira time, refusing to retreat." His voice broke just slightly as he said, "She took the worst of it."

"It wasn't until the fatal strike to poppy that Seraphira finally broke the bond between herself and Angus. That was the only way she could escape. So my wife left the Fae realm alive, and returned to me dead." he finished.

Though Taryn's face remained composed, Hannah could see the pain etched beneath it. Without thinking, she reached out and squeezed his hand.

After a moment, he squeezed back.

Hannah tried to speak, but her throat clogged with emotion, and before she could stop it, tears spilled down her cheeks.

"I'm so sorry," she said hastily, wiping at her face.

She couldn't help but remember the prison where she introduced herself to Violet, the pride in her voice as she claimed she was Angus's daughter, therefore related to Violet. She had said it so easily. So boldly.

All of it right in front of Taryn.

Goddess, how must that have felt for him?

"I'm so sorry," she whispered again, the tears coming faster now, frustrating her. "And to think you ended up mated to the daughter of the man who killed your wife."

She let out a shaky, humorless breath.

"Seriously. What kind of enemies-to-lovers nonsense is this? I didn't ask for it to be this complicated."

The words tumbled out of her lips, mirroring exactly how her life felt right now.

Hannah groaned, dragging a hand down her face. "You must hate me right now."

Taryn frowned. "No, it's not—"

She cut him off immediately. "Don't. Don't suddenly sugarcoat it because there's a bond between us." Her voice cracked despite her effort to sound firm. "How am I supposed to look you in the eye knowing what my father did to you? What he took from you?"

She inhaled shakily. "That's why I'm going to make this easy for both of us."

Taryn stiffened. "What?"

She sniffed, wiping her face with the back of her hand. "I'm going to beg the Queen to send me back."

"What?!" Taryn shot to his feet.

But Hannah pressed on, the words spilling faster now, as if stopping would break her. "Once I'm back in the human realm, I'll find my father. I'll look him in the eye and remind him of Poppy, your wife. The woman he murdered." Her voice dropped to a whisper. "And then I'll end my life in front of him."

Silence slammed into the room.

"Are you out of your fucking mind?!" Taryn roared, fury blazing as he towered over her. "Have you lost all sense?"

Hannah stood as well, shaking but stubborn. "You don't understand. Angus isn't some hollow monster. He feels too but

he just buries his emotions. And it matters to him hence losing me will hurt." Her eyes burned. "If he won't regret killing Poppy, then he'll regret losing me. At least then—"

She didn't finish because Taryn grabbed her, hauling her against him so suddenly her breath hitched. Their bodies collided, his grip firm, and unyielding.

Hannah swallowed hard. "W-what are you doing...?"

"Have you gone mad?!" Taryn snarled, his voice raw, and eyes red with barely restrained rage. "Who told you that your life was payment for his sins?"

"I thought you didn't want me—" she started, but the words died in her throat under the intensity of his stare.

"That is my problem to deal with!" Taryn hissed. "I was wrong to have taken it out on you. Pathetic, actually, considering Violet is his daughter too—"

"But I'm the one he raised to be a killer," Hannah finished for him.

For a long moment, neither of them moved. They just stared at each other, the gravity of that truth hanging heavy in the air.

Then, without warning, Taryn reached out, cupped her face, and kissed her.

It was brief. Barely more than a brush of his lips against hers, but it left Hannah utterly stunned.

He pulled back first, his forehead resting against hers. "Forgive me for the way I spoke to you the other day, it won't happen again."

He inhaled, as if bracing himself. "We—no. I will figure myself out. I'll deal with my past. You don't have to pay for it."

His thumb brushed her cheek, tentative. "Just stay. Let me do this right. I'll court you properly and when you turn eighteen..." He didn't finish the sentence, it was obvious what he was insinuating.

Hannah stared at him, her heart racing. For a moment, she wondered if this was some cruel trick of the bond or her own foolish hope.

Taryn looked nervous. "What do you say?" he asked.

Hannah's lips curved into a wide, genuine smile.

Maybe there was still room for a little book romance after all.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 784: Dancing Princess[1,536 words]

Chapter 784: Dancing Princess

Violet woke up to a very distinct voice humming a melody, familiar fingers gently running through her hair.

Roman Draven.

"Hello, darling." Roman was all smiles, his eyes lighting up like Christmas had come early.

"Goddess," Violet groaned, stretching. Her body hurt like hell, almost as if a train had crashed into her and ran her over again and again. The last thing she remembered was—

"Oh shit." She shot upright as memories of the training ground came flooding back.

Roman sat up with her at the same time. "I know what you're thinking, but it's not what it looks like—"

But Violet wasn't listening.

She swung her legs over the side of the bed and nearly collapsed, barely managing to brace herself against the wall. Her legs had gone weak, like overcooked spaghetti.

She lost control.

How many people did she hurt?

Violet swallowed.

How many did she kill?

Roman sensed the panic immediately. "No one died," he said quickly. "Annequin handled it. Just some... err... structural damage. Nothing the Fae can't fix."

Relief hit Violet so hard her knees almost gave out again.

A huge weight left her chest. She would never have forgiven herself if innocent lives had been lost because of her.

"Wait." Her brow furrowed. "Did you say Annequin—"

Before Roman could answer, Griffin walked in carrying a tray. His eyes softened the moment he saw her awake.

"Perfect timing," he said, approaching the bed.

That was when Violet saw the bowl sitting on the tray.

Tonic.

She made a face instantly.

"Come on, love. It's for strength," Griffin coaxed, lifting the bowl toward her.

Violet sighed and took it reluctantly.

One would think that with how advanced the Fae were, their medicine would be better. Unfortunately, that was not the case. Like most tonics, it looked like a murky poultice—and tasted just as bad. Acrid, thick, and burning down her throat.

Might as well have been cow poop.

Violet downed the rest of the tonic in one go and immediately grimaced, sticking her tongue out like a wronged child.

"Ugh. That's disgusting."

Roman, who had been watching her with far too much interest, came closer, his smile turning wicked. "Want something sweet?" he winked. "I could kiss the bitterness away."

Violet rolled her eyes, already used to Roman's antics.

Griffin shook his head in disbelief. "She's just waking up and you're already like this."

"Someone always have to be ready for action, if you know what I mean." Roman said without shame.

Then it dawned on her, something, or rather, someone was missing.

She glanced around the room, frowning. "Wait. Where are Asher and Alaric?"

Roman's grin stalled. He and Griffin shared a look—the quick and silent kind that instantly put Violet on edge.

"They stepped out," Griffin said after a beat. "Shouldn't be long."

Violet opened her mouth to bombard them with more questions when Asher and Alaric walked in almost together, their presence filling the room.

Violet barely had time to register Asher's dark, assessing gaze before Alaric spotted her fully awake.

Relief flashed across his face.

"Hey," he breathed.

Then he covered the room space in three long strides, cupped her face, and kissed her. It was not rushed nor gentle. It was just the kind of kiss that said thank the heavens you're safe, and please, don't ever scare me like that again.

Violet melted into it before she could stop herself. When he finally pulled back, Alaric smacked his lips thoughtfully.

"You taste..." he paused.

Violet raised a brow, waiting.

"...medicinal?"

Roman burst out laughing, unapologetic and absolutely scornful. "Oh, that's tragic."

Alaric shot him a glare.

Then, clearly unwilling to lose, he leaned in again and kissed Violet once more—longer this time—before pulling back and made a smug face at Roman, trying to prove it was nothing.

Violet almost laughed. She was exhausted, sore – and smelly – and yet, still the center of some ridiculous unspoken competition she never agreed to enter. However, she wouldn't have it any other way.

When it was Asher's turn, he didn't kiss her.

Instead, he stepped into her space and wrapped his arms around her, pulling her against him as if this was where he belonged, and there was nowhere else in the world he would ever return to but her.

Violet relished every moment of it.

Asher held her tightly, one hand resting at the small of her back, while the other threaded slowly through her hair, his touch relaxing. His thumb then traced small, soothing circles against her spine, massaging away the tension she hadn't even realized she was carrying.

The hug lasted far longer than necessary. And it felt like home.

When he finally pulled back, Asher didn't let go completely. His hands stayed on her arms, anchoring her. His unique stunning eyes searched her face like he was cataloging every breath she took, every flicker of emotion.

"Don't worry about anything," he said. "It's been handled."

Violet swallowed and nodded. That was all she could manage.

She and Asher might not have a mate bond yet, not in the way the others did—but sometimes it felt like he lived inside her head. Like he knew what haunted her before she could even name it. Asher brought her safety none of her mates could ever give her.

Not that the others wouldn't protect her when there was danger, but Asher was simply Asher.

Violet lowered her gaze, suddenly conscious of her body. "I need to bathe, I feel err... uncomfortable."

Asher nodded immediately. "Of course. Go ahead." His expression went from tender to serious. "You don't have any more training today. And later, we have something to talk about."

That made her heart thud. What happened this time? Asher hardly talked about something if it wasn't serious.

So Violet stood quickly and crossed to the wardrobe, grabbing a fresh set of clothes, anticipation buzzing under her skin.

Just as she turned toward the door, Roman's voice cut in lazily.

"Want me to give you a hand?"

Violet didn't even look back. She simply lifted her middle finger in his direction and kept walking.

Roman's laughter echoed behind her.

This was it. The life she wanted. One where she could fight with the boys, love them fiercely, and still laugh at the end of the day.

The bath was quick as she scrubbed away the lingering ache, her thoughts circling back to Asher's words. What in the world happened this time? Was it related to the havoc she caused today? What secret were they hiding from her?

When Violet was done, she slipped into a long, floral dress. She hardly ever went for styles like this and barely recognized the girl staring back at her in the mirror. She looked cute. Innocent.

She wasn't cute. At least not in that girlish, princessy—no offense to her title—kind of way. She was a gorgeous rebel, the kind of girl most mothers warned their sons to stay away from. And not even being a princess would change that.

Nonetheless, she kept the dress on. It wouldn't hurt to switch personas once in a while. Maybe stir things up a little.

Now that she thought about it, since the Queen's order, she and the cardinal alphas hadn't done anything "too" extreme.

But now they'd be alone, and after that conversation, they could do one or two things. They'd just make sure Alaric didn't go overboard and get them into trouble. There was already enough damage for one day.

There was no one in the bedroom when Violet stepped out from the bathroom and surmised they'd moved to the sitting room for the conversation.

So with her damp hair running down her shoulders, Violet walked into the parlor with a dramatic twirl, hoping she'd draw attention to her with that move.

Except when Violet spun to a halt, she didn't get the attention she was expecting.

Someone else was there.

"All that twirling just for me, Princess Violet? I'm so honored." Annequin drawled, grinning up at her knowingly.

Violet's smile vanished instantly.

What the hell was this bitch doing here?

Annequin sat alone on one side of the room, posture composed, elegant, and utterly at ease, as if this space belonged to her. On the opposite side, Violet's mates were clustered together in one corner, wary as hell, their body language screaming distance, as though proximity alone might invite disaster.

Annequin caught the shift in Violet's expression and feigned innocence. She lifted a hand to her mouth, eyes wide. "Oops. Sorry. Am I interrupting something?"

Her gaze fell over Violet, bright with amusement. "Is that one of those mating dances animals do before they pounce?" she added lightly. "I didn't take you for the twirling type, Violet."

Violet's face darkened.

She had never fought the urge to kill someone as hard as she was fighting it now.

Roman was the first to break the tension. He said quickly, "I didn't invite her, I swear."

Violet inhaled slowly, forcing her temper down before it could explode. Then she looked straight at Annequin and asked, her voice tight with barely restrained fury,

"What the fuck are you doing here?"

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 785: Call Back Home[1,086 words]

Chapter 785: Call Back Home

Annequin pouted dramatically. "Oww, is that really how you welcome your savior?"

Great. Violet groaned inwardly. This was officially the worst day of her life. Now this bitch would hold that little act of rescue over her head for as long as Violet lived.

Annequin continued, entirely unbothered. "I mean, I did stop you from tearing your kingdom apart." She tilted her head, eyes glinting with mischief. "You should be thanking me. On your knees, preferably."

Before Violet could unleash the string of creative violence forming on her tongue, Asher stepped in at once.

"Let's not make a spectacle of this," he commanded. "You claimed you had something to discuss with my mate, so say it and be done."

He emphasized mate deliberately.

Asher wasn't stupid. He saw the game Annequin was playing. She was provoking Violet on purpose, testing boundaries, and enjoying the reaction.

"You're right," Annequin said cheerfully, clapping her hands once. "I was merely checking in on our little princess before sharing the good news."

"Good news?" Griffin straightened immediately.

He wasn't the only one. The other cardinal alphas subtly tensed, curiosity sharp and cautious. None of them trusted Annequin, not even a little.

"Yes!" Annequin said brightly. "From today onward, I'll be Violet's teacher."

"Excuse me?" Violet's expression changed instantly. "What did you just say?"

Annequin didn't flinch at the danger suddenly radiating off her. She delivered the announcement like it was a gift being unwrapped on a christmas morning.

"After today's incident, the Queen decided I'm the best suited to help you master your unmaking powers." She shrugged. "Your mother is simply being proactive."

For the first time since arriving in the Fae realm, Violet cursed—in fluent Fae, no less, courtesy of lessons she'd been taken.

Was her mother serious?

This had to be a joke.

Asher, Alaric, Griffin, and Roman exchanged looks. This was news they hadn't seen coming. None of them spoke. Not when their mate looked one breath away from detonating the room.

Annequin hopped to her feet and approached Violet so suddenly that Violet shifted back, instinctively uncomfortable.

The queen didn't seem to mind at all. She burst into giggles, eyes alight. "You know, I can't wait for us to get started..." There was a voracious gleam in her gaze now. "I'll make a queen out of you, and a weapon powerful enough to destroy your opponents during the competition."

The simmering anger on Violet's face shifted into confusion.

Why did it almost sound as if Annequin wanted her to win? At least to some extent. Even if it was in a deeply unsettling way.

Before Violet could sort through the thought, Annequin leaned in until there was absolutely no space between them. The cardinal alphas went taut at once, bodies tense and ready to react should the Fae Queen try anything reckless.

"Don't arrive late tomorrow," Annequin murmured, her voice low, and edged with something that sounded dangerously close to a threat. "I take my lessons very seriously."

Then, just as abruptly, her lips curved into a bright, friendly smile as if moments ago she hadn't been radiating menace. The sudden shift in mood was unsettling as hell.

"That will be all," she said.

She turned to leave, then stopped directly in front of Asher.

Violet caught the way Annequin's gaze lingered on him, and a snarl slipped past Violet's lips before she could stop it. For half a second, she'd almost believed Annequin had changed.

Clearly not.

Annequin ignored Violet entirely, instead gesturing toward the alphas. "Bring them along," she added cheerfully. "They'll make excellent practice."

And with that, the Queen of Astaria sauntered out, the door closing behind her on its own.

Silence settled over the room.

Then Alaric broke it. "What in the world just happened?"

Roman shuddered. "And I thought Asher was the crazy one."

Violet finally snapped. "What the hell was my mother thinking? Seriously—Annequin training me?"

"Yes," Roman agreed, already moving toward her. "What was she thinking?"

He gently took her by the shoulders. "Maybe sit down, princess. We should probably talk about this."

Violet didn't resist. Roman guided her to the same seat Annequin had occupied moments earlier.

She scrunched her nose. Annequin's perfume still lingered, clinging to the air like an annoying stench.

"Who does she even think she is?" Violet continued, ranting. "She parades around like some untouchable, powerful queen, when really she's just a rich, spoiled brat desperate for attention."

"Mmm-hmm," Alaric and Griffin nodded in unison. No one was about to argue with her.

Roman appeared with a glass of water. "Here. Drink this. It'll help you calm down."

"I am calm," Violet snapped. "I'm just pointing out the fact that she—"

"Drink," Roman said firmly, pressing the rim to her lips.

Violet had no choice but to swallow it down. By the time she finished, the heat of her anger had dulled, her temper settling.

That was when she noticed Asher.

"You're quiet," she said slowly, studying him. Then it hit her.

Her face fell.

"You support her."

Asher didn't dodge it. "It makes sense," he told her. "She's the only one capable of helping you control that aspect of your power. And she can contain you if something goes wrong."

"Really?" Violet sneered. "Is that the only reason—"

"I love you."

The words came out so fast Violet nearly stumbled over them.

"Huh?"

Asher met her gaze, unflinching. "I love you, Violet. Not her. I'll die for you, not her. I'll fight for you, bleed for you, spend eternity with you. Not some pointed eared female from some kingdom. Should I keep going, or have I made it clear that you are the one who matters?"

"Oh."

Heat rushed to Violet's face, her heart hammering wildly. She fanned herself. Why was it suddenly so hot in here?

Being unmated to Asher had been weighing on her more than she liked to admit. The thought of losing him—

No. She couldn't go there.

Behind her, Roman—whose hands she now realized were kneading her shoulders—snickered. Alaric and Griffin didn't even try to hide their amusement.

Violet groaned softly, embarrassed. If anyone had told her months ago she'd be fighting for a man, well four men to be precise, she'd have laughed them into oblivion.

Asher's voice cut through her thoughts. "Since you're here," he said, "I'll assume you're ready for the conversation I mentioned earlier."

Her muscles tightened instantly.

He continued, "Your mother gave permission. We can make contact back home."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 786: Move Up The Competition[1,045 words]

Chapter 786: Move Up The Competition

Although Baron had outrightly stated he would not be making any moves during the competition, it did not mean his mistress shared the same restraint.

Celeste had never been a woman to wait patiently.

A dark shawl was pulled low around her face as she slipped into a secret location. It looked like an ordinary inn, but Celeste bypassed the front entrance, veering instead toward the stables at the back.

The scent of hay and animal sweat clung thickly to the air, and the moment she stepped inside, a stable boy glanced up, and his face lit up in recognition.

He did not bow, and moved quickly to her side without question. He led her toward one of the horses tethered near the far wall.

The creature was large and dark-coated, its eyes intelligent. Celeste ran her fingers through its mane, murmuring something affectionate, giving the picture of a woman visiting her favorite animal.

But all of this was a performance because while she stroked the horse, the boy slipped away, scanning the stable entrance, the alley beyond, and the shadows where someone might be lurking.

He then returned, announcing in a low voice.

"The coast is clear."

Celeste nodded, then pulled out a pouch full of coins. The boy accepted it with both hands, happiness written all over his face.

As soon as he pocketed the coins, the stable boy took her hand and guided her toward a concealed door behind a stack of feed barrels.

It opened to a narrow stairway descending underground, the air growing cooler as they moved down, torchlight flickering against the stone walls.

Four fae were already seated around a crude table in the basement below, and their heads snapped up the moment Celeste stepped into view.

A tense silence fell on the cramped space.

Councilor Enock was the first to react.

"What the hell is this?" He rose to his feet, craning his neck, checking the entrance and half expecting Baron to finally show his face.

He didn't.

His face darkened instantly. "Didn't Baron call this meeting? Why is he not here, and why are you?"

The others shifted uneasily in their seats, discomfort written plainly across their faces. This gathering alone was an act of rebellion against the Queen. Every one of them knew the risk they were taking by sitting at this table.

And now, Baron hadn't even bothered to show his face. Instead, he had sent his mistress.

Every single one of them felt insulted.

Celeste wasn't even affected.

She ignored the hostility entirely and walked over with the authority of one who had summoned them. Celeste pulled out a chair and sat without a care.

Enock's glare followed her every move, hard enough to bore a hole straight through her forehead. If looks could kill, she would have been ashes on the stone floor.

Unfortunately for him, Celeste had long mastered the art of ignoring pompous fools.

Although Celeste and Enock belonged to the same house, their standings were worlds apart. Enock was blood and directly related to Baron. He was groomed within the inner circles and was raised believing he would always stand closest to Baron.

Celeste, on the other hand, was two generations removed. Her mother had married into the family, hence she was tolerated — and replaceable.

Or so Enock had thought.

He should have been the one Baron trusted most. If anyone deserved to be the Queen consort's closest adviser and master strategist, it should have been him.

And yet Baron had chosen her. Not just that he chose, he elevated her and the insult of it festered.

The others in the room felt the shift in hierarchy too and wisely remained silent. None of them wanted to become collateral damage in whatever war was brewing between the two family members.

"I can assure you," Celeste said calmly to the other councilors, pointedly ignoring Enock, "Baron is very much aware of this meeting."

She spoke as though Enock's outrage was irrelevant and the meeting could proceed perfectly well without his approval.

That deliberate lack of acknowledgment pushed Enock further. His hands balled into fists at his sides, knuckles whitening.

Only then did Celeste lift her head and look at him.

"Are you going to remain standing for the duration of the meeting, Councilor Enock?"

His jaw tightened. The muscles in his face flexed with restrained fury, but after a long, tense second, he reluctantly took his seat.

The smile Celeste gave him was utterly condescending.

Good boy.

"Anyway," Celeste said, ignoring his silent seething, "I'm sure you've all heard the news."

"You mean the fact that the princess is powerful?" Councilor Zion pointed out, his lips pressed together grimly.

The other two councilors exchanged a look, clearing their throats as they shifted uneasily in their seats.

Celeste wasn't fazed by their discomfort. "Exactly. Which is why the Trial of Ascension needs to be moved up. Possibly in two days."

The room erupted at once, low murmurs breaking into overlapping protests.

"Are you out of your mind?" Enock barked at her. "You might as well announce to the Queen that we're conspiring against her."

"Queen Seraphira already knows we're working against her," Celeste stated boldly. "Ever since her daughter returned, she's grown a spine."

Enock let out a harsh laugh. "So your solution is to hasten our execution?"

Celeste didn't rise to the bait. Instead, she addressed the others.

"Queen Seraphira requested time for Violet to train, to give her a fair chance at the Trial. But after today's events, we cannot allow that."

Her serious gaze swept across the table.

"Unfortunately, we also cannot afford to make her suspicious of us. Which is why the Council will push a different narrative. You will make the Queen believe that we are eager for the princess to win. That we believe she is already capable enough and want her to take her rightful place as the recognized heir immediately."

"And the Queen would believe that?" asked the second Councilor, his brows drawn in suspicion.

"Well, that's not my role now, is it?" Celeste said, lifting a brow. "You're a Councilor. That is your job. Or should I return to Baron with the news that you are incapable?"

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 787: Queen Seraphira's Death[1,069 words]

Chapter 787: Queen Seraphira's Death

It was safe to say Celeste had everything handled. By the time she finished laying out her cards, every single councilor had played right into her hands without even realizing it.

"I suppose this is where we call it a day," Celeste said, her tone final, leaving no room for argument.

All of the Councilors, except Enock, rose to their feet. He remained seated, his gaze fixed on her with an intensity that bordered on hostile.

The others cleared their throats awkwardly, suddenly eager to be anywhere but between the two of them. One after the other, they slipped out of the basement, leaving behind the thick tension hanging in the air.

For a moment, there was nothing but silence.

Then Celeste began tapping her finger repeatedly against the table, the sound intentionally slicing through the tension.

"I thought we were supposed to be on the same side?" she questioned.

"Really?" Enock sneered. "On the same side? With whom? A lowlife Fae like you?"

Celeste showed no visible emotion, but the slight curl of her fingers betrayed her. The words hit where it hurt.

She rose to her feet. "If that is all, I'll be taking my leave."

"You do know Baron is using you," Enock said suddenly and her steps halted mid-stride.

Celeste stiffened. Then she turned slowly to face him, her hands clasped neatly in front of her, a picture of perfect composure.

Seeing that he had her attention, Enock let his hatred spill freely.

"You might think you're important because he shows you attention," he spat. "But you're wrong. He values you because you're useful. Resourceful. And once he gets what he wants, he'll toss you back into the gutter where you belong."

He scoffed, his expression twisting with raw envy and disgust. "A queen? You? You really do know how to dream."

For a second, an unfamiliar emotion flashed in Celeste's eyes and then vanished.

Then she smirked.

"At least, unlike you, I'm close to mine."

The smile vanished as quickly as it came, leaving only cold animosity in its wake. Without another word, she turned and strode out of the room, her spine straight, her steps unshaken.

Behind her, Enock glared at her retreating figure.

That fucking bitch.

Although Celeste had practically won the exchange, Enock's words still found their mark in her mind, no matter how much she tried to deny it.

For a fleeting second, doubt threatened to creep in, but Celeste crushed it.

No one knew Baron the way she did. He needed her. They couldn't do without one another, and they had been through too much for him to toss her aside now — she wouldn't allow that.

Enock had better watch himself.

Whether he liked it or not, she would sit beside Baron as the next Queen of Astaria.

And when she did, he would remember this day.

It was late by the time Celeste returned home and, as expected, he was waiting for her.

"You've certainly been busy," Baron said, standing at the top of the balustrade overlooking the foyer.

Celeste halted for just a moment before lifting her eyes toward him. The look in his eyes was unreadable, but she didn't let that deter her. She began to climb the stairs, one step after the other, until she stood before him.

When she had told the councilors that Baron was aware of the meeting, it wasn't because she had informed him. It was because she knew he had his eyes on her. Baron was aware of everything that happened under his roof.

"How long have you been waiting for me?" Celeste asked casually, ignoring the storm brewing in his gaze.

"I told you not to do anything," Baron said, his voice clipped, his eyes dark with anger.

But Celeste quietly unwrapped the shawl from around her neck, replying, "You told me not to do anything, yes. But I know you, Baron. You might not have said it aloud, but you were waiting for me to act. Otherwise, why didn't you stop me?"

She stepped closer, reaching up to clasp his face. For a second, it looked like Baron would pull away but he didn't, instead, melted into her touch.

Celeste whispered, "I know what you want without you even spelling it out. What you need. That's why the two of us work perfectly. It's quite a pity Seraphira doesn't know what she has."

At the mention of Seraphira, Baron's eyes, which had been shut, snapped open, and whatever vulnerability he had shown vanished.

"That was reckless," he hissed. "Seraphira, she's changed. She's hunting for evidence to use against me and when she finds it, she won't hesitate to do whatever she has planned."

"That is why I was careful!" Celeste retorted, her voice rising in pitch. "I have everything planned, and everyone involved swore a binding oath. They won't say a thing, even if they're caught."

She took his hand and kissed the top of it. "I won't let anything happen to you, my love."

Baron stared at her with an indescribable emotion in his eyes, letting her do as she pleased. He muttered, "Seraphira is not stupid."

"Yes, she's not. And that is exactly why we have to make our move," Celeste said, her eyes sharpening. She let go of his hand. "Violet won't survive the Trial of Death."

Baron's eyes narrowed. "What have you done?"

Celeste smiled. "What should have been done." She revealed, "Even if by some chance Violet manages to receive a blessing from an ancestor, she won't survive the trial because she won't return."

Baron looked at her now with intrigue. "How?"

Celeste lifted her chin proudly. "I learned from the best teacher. With the barriers up, I found it easy to reach certain allies. The Fae I secured will trap Violet's spirit until the allotted time for the death trial runs out. And when the time runs out, she dies."

She continued calmly, "Seraphira will be distraught. Of course she will come for you. But that's the window we need. The last time you siphoned her powers, she nearly died. Except this time, she needs to die."

"And when the Fae start asking questions?" Baron asked.

Celeste's smile turned cold. "Queen Seraphira dies of heartbreak after her daughter's death. A tragic collapse. We'll spin whatever narrative we need. We have the council in our hands, don't we?"

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 788: Seminar For The West pack[1,737 words]

Chapter 788: Seminar For The West pack

West Pack Territory...

Nancy knew being Ezra's mate came with responsibilities. But overseeing the West Pack in the absence of her husband? That was a whole lot of chaos on its own.

Ezra had been away for a few days now, all thanks to the emerging zombie virus in Aster City. It was crazy out there.

And crazy in here.

"Here, Luna," her lady-in-waiting, Olivia, or as Nancy preferred to call her, her assistant, led her toward the ward.

At first, Nancy had objected to the idea of having an assistant. It felt excessive and dramatic. But when the responsibilities of being Luna to an Alpha King came calling, she had embraced it with both hands.

To think she once assumed these wolves had nothing to do except live, hunt, and howl at the moon while their Alphas tried to keep them in line.

But now she stood in the position of leadership, Nancy realized something very quickly. Governing living beings, not to mention an entire territory full of them, might just be the toughest job in existence.

There was a situation.

Last night, they had a case of domestic violence.

The woman had been brutalized by her husband all because the soup she made for him "didn't taste right." It was the intervention of the neighbors that brought the incident to light.

The husband had been locked up and the

woman brought to West Pack General Hospital. Hence Nancy's visit.

The doctor was still examining the woman when Nancy stepped into the private room, and the atmosphere shifted immediately.

"Luna Nancy!" The victim practically lunged from the bed, intending to prostrate before her.

"No, don't, please!" Nancy rushed forward, mortified, trying to stop her.

She didn't deserve that. She wasn't even truly the West Pack Luna. Once Asher returned, she and Ezra would go back to their small pack in the city, and things would settle into normal again.

Moreover, how could she, a mere human, be bowed to by a wolf? It was still overwhelming, even months after she had been acknowledged as Ezra's mate.

Olivia quickly helped the woman back onto the bed while the doctor straightened and dipped her head respectfully.

"Luna Nancy."

Nancy inclined her head in return. "How is her condition, doctor?"

The doctor, a female wolf with sharp, assessing eyes, adjusted the stethoscope around her neck before replying, "For a wolf, I'd say it's a quick recovery. She had two broken ribs likely from repeated kicks to the torso. One of them grazed close to the sternum. Her split lips have already sealed, and the swelling from the blow to her face is going down. Wolves heal fast after all."

Nancy's gaze shifted to the woman's face. The bruises along the side of her cheek had turned a sickly yellow, fading at the edges.

Had she been human, it would still be a glaring bluish-purple mess, swollen and raw.

The doctor continued clinically, "However, I ran a full body scan and this wasn't the first incident."

At that statement, Nancy's stomach tightened. Of course, this wasn't the first time. Violence over something so trivial didn't begin in a single day.

"There are older fractures. A hairline crack along the forearm that shows signs of prior trauma and her left femur..." the doctor exhaled deeply as if this was too much even for her. "It healed at a slight angle and probably why she has a limp."

An ominous silence descended in the room like a guillotine as Nancy's eyes dropped to the woman's legs. She hadn't noticed it until now.

"And there are missing teeth," the doctor added. "Blunt force and certainly not recent."

Nancy felt something cold slide down her spine and didn't even realize when her hands balled into fists at her sides.

Back in her old trade, violence was something constant but this was someone's husband. Someone who had made a sacred promise to love and protect his other half for as long as he breathed. So how did he become the monster who brought her nothing but pain and misery?

Nancy saw nothing but red.

So when the frail-looking woman whispered, "It's not what you're thinking. Fred can be gentle at times. Yesterday was my fault..."

It was safe to say that Nancy was a hair's breadth away from slapping some sense into her.

Not that she could blame the poor woman. Most victims of abuse were brutalized and gaslighted to the point that they believed their abusers were right and they were the ones in the wrong. They were broken down until submission became second nature and they had no self-esteem left. It didn't help that this wasn't the first case.

Women in the West Pack, especially the married ones, were treated like objects. Like property belonging to their husbands. And unlike Patricia, Nancy definitely had plans to change that.

For starters, she could deal with the asshole. Perhaps she would cut off his hands so he'd never raise them against his wife again.

No.

Nancy immediately objected to the thought. The poor woman would only suffer more seeing her husband in that condition.

She would think of something more creative.

The asshole would learn never to raise a hand again in his life.

That much, Nancy decided.

She smiled sweetly, making no effort to disclose her plans for dealing with the woman's useless husband.

"Recover first," she told her gently. "We'll deal with this matter later. I've made arrangements for the best meals to be served to you. If you feel uncomfortable in any way or need anything, don't hesitate to bring it to my attention."

"Thank you for your care, Luna." She bowed her head in respect.

Then she ruined it.

"But Luna... what about my husband—"

Perhaps it was the sudden tightening of Nancy's lips, or the glacial look in her eyes — or both — but the woman didn't dare finish the sentence. The words died in her throat.

"Thank you, Luna," she mumbled quickly, lowering her gaze.

Nancy's deadly stare lingered on her far longer than necessary before she finally turned away.

"Let's go," she said to Olivia.

The both of them left the ward with Nancy practically striding ahead. She was so pissed her head was already throbbing with a headache.

To think that even in that situation, the woman's first concern was still her husband.

Ugh.

How could some women be so blind?

That was it. There were going to be seminars. Retreats. Camps. Whatever it took to change the mindset of the women here else she was going to lose her mind.

They drove back to the packhouse with Nancy stewing in frustration, mentally drafting wildly ambitious plans to educate the women of the West Pack.

She was so absorbed in her thoughts that she didn't even realize they had reached the foyer. So when arms suddenly wrapped around her, she screamed and reacted.

It was seconds too late for her to recognize the scent. Nancy headbutted the stranger on instinct only to spin around and find her husband groaning in pain, clasp his nose.

"Ezra?" Her eyes widened to the size of saucers.

"Yep..." Ezra grimaced, his voice muffled as he held his face. "I forgot surprises aren't your strong suit."

"Goddess above," Nancy was mortified as she tried to help him.

"Don't worry," Ezra told her. "It's just a small wound. It'll heal." He wiped the smear of blood with the back of his hand.

Nancy scowled. "You didn't tell me you were returning."

"Yes, I wanted it to be a surprise. But now? I'm never trying that again." He said it with a toothy grin.

Nancy rolled her eyes before placing her hands on his arms. "Come on, babe. Let's get you cleaned up."

Just like that, Nancy led him to their private suites where Ezra cleaned up.

Just because Ezra had temporarily taken over the Pack didn't make him Alpha, and he made sure to avoid the Alpha's quarters.

That was Asher's right, as far as he was concerned. Nor did he plan on developing an appetite for the position.

Nancy waited at the foot of the bed.

Not long after, Ezra stepped out of the bathroom shirtless and all the blood in her body rushed straight to her head.

Okay, maybe she understood why some women lost their minds over their husbands.

Oh, shut up. That is not the same.

She mentally smacked herself for even thinking it.

She rose to her feet as Ezra approached, his gaze smoldering as he stared at her like she was the most beautiful thing in his life and she forgot how to breathe.

Ezra stopped right in front of her. "How are you, my love?" he asked softly.

"F-fine." Nancy cursed herself for the tremble in her voice.

One would think that months spent with her mate would diminish the crazy attraction between them. But that wasn't the case. If anything, the more time she spent with Ezra, the more she couldn't get enough of him.

Ezra smirked.

That knowing lift of his lips that told her he was fully aware of the effect he had on her.

Then he reached out and grabbed her waist, pulling her flush against him until their bodies aligned.

Nancy blushed.

"I missed you as hell." Those were the only words Ezra muttered before he crashed his lips hard against hers.

And then Nancy was falling.

Her mate had pulled the rug from under her feet and right now, she was tumbling straight into the abyss of him.

Nancy whimpered softly, tilting her head to give him better access as she opened for him, his tongue sliding in without hesitation.

For a moment, nothing else existed. Not the pack or the responsibilities waiting outside that door. Just them.

Until Nancy stiffened and pulled back.

"Did you hear that?"

"What?" Ezra rasped, eyes dark with hunger.

Nancy frowned slightly. "I thought I heard voices."

"It's probably nothing..." Ezra muttered urgently before capturing her lips again, this time kissing her harder and more possessive. Almost as if he was determined to erase any distraction.

And then, Ezra heard it clearly.

"Violet, love, does this stuff have a shield or something where we can wait out your mother and her mate trying to have sex before us?"

Ezra froze.

Slowly, he turned.

And there they were.

"What the—"

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 789: Her Biological Mother[1,043 words]

Chapter 789: Her Biological Mother

Nancy screamed, nearly jumping out of her skin when she caught the reflection in the floor-length mirror. It was the faces of the Cardinal Alphas awkwardly crammed together as if trying to fit into the frame at the same time.

"Oh, we don't need any filter," Roman replied to Griffin. "I wouldn't mind receiving a tip or two from our very experienced mother-in-law." He grinned shamelessly.

"God, you're so gross." Alaric grimaced, staring at Roman in open disgust.

While the chitchat continued, Nancy and Ezra stood frozen on the spot, staring at the scene with identical looks of bewilderment.

Then Violet's voice floated in before her face appeared in the mirror, scolding one very obvious Alpha.

"There are some imaginations I do not need in my head, Roman Draven."

Roman pouted. "Don't worry. I can learn it alone and demonstrate later if you know what I mean."

"I don't necessarily need you all talking to them," Asher started, his tone laced with threat.

Roman rolled his eyes.

Then he turned and finally noticed Ezra and Nancy still staring at them like they'd just witnessed a supernatural glitch in reality.

He waved casually. "Hello, Nancy. Ezra."

"Goddess above..." Nancy whispered, shell-shocked.

She tried to step forward, but Ezra immediately grabbed her and shifted her behind him protectively, as if this could somehow be a trap.

Ezra was the one who finally moved. He walked toward the mirror, his face creased with cautious thought. Reaching out carefully, he tapped the surface, half-expecting something dramatic to happen.

Nothing did aside from a faint ripple, like disturbing the surface of water, but the mirror remained solid and still.

He stepped back slowly and stared at the serious face of Asher Nightshade, who seemed to occupy the entire reflection now, patiently waiting for Ezra to recover from his shock.

"Alpha Asher?" Ezra asked carefully. "Is that really you?"

Asher lifted his chin slightly. "It's really me. And we don't have time for this. There are many things to discuss."

Nancy gasped at that.

She didn't care about whatever serious conversation Asher was already planning — that boy was always straight to business. She brushed past Ezra.

"Violet, baby?" she called.

"I'm here, Mom!" Violet shouted, stepping forward until she filled the mirror entirely.

"Goddess, Violet..." Nancy lifted her hand, tracing her daughter's features even though all she could touch was the cold, hard surface of the glass.

"What is going on? Where did you all go? Do you know how worried I was? I thought—" Her voice broke. She shut her eyes briefly, taking a steadying breath before opening them again. "I thought something had happened to you."

Nancy breathed shakily. "The only comfort I had was knowing you were with the alphas. But even then, what if that wasn't enough? I've been anxious ever since."

"I'm so sorry, Nancy. I honestly didn't mean to scare you like that. Everything happened so quickly, and then there was so much going on here, there wasn't—"

"Here?" Nancy cut her off immediately.

Her eyes narrowed. "Where is 'here'? Where are you, Violet?"

Violet hesitated, glancing to the side as if silently consulting the others about how much she should reveal.

Nancy's frown deepened.

"Don't you dare lie to me, Violet Purple," she warned, her voice turning firm. "Micah told me you were hiding a secret, and I intend to hear it from your mouth right now."

Violet bit down on her lip nervously. "I really didn't mean to hide it from you. I just... didn't know how."

"Out with it, Violet." Nancy wasn't having any of it. Though there was a nagging feeling in the pit of her stomach telling her she wasn't going to like whatever came next.

Violet took a deep breath. "I'm in the Fae realm."

"The Fae realm?" Nancy blinked, confused. This was the first time she had ever heard of such a place. "What are you doing in the—" she waved a hand vaguely, "—in there?"

Violet gulped. "The Queen of the Free Fae brought me here because I'm the rightful princess."

The look on Nancy's face was priceless, except this wasn't funny.

"I don't understand," she said slowly. "How are you the princess of the Fae... or whatever they call themselves? That doesn't make sense." Her mind was racing now, trying to piece together something that refused to fit.

Violet could already tell this was going to wreck her. But she had no choice.

She laid it out.

"That's because the Queen of the Free Fae is my mother. My biological mother."

Violet saw the exact moment it dawned on Nancy.

"Oh."

Her face fell.

And it felt like a thousand needles pierced Violet's chest all at once.

"Nancy—"

But Nancy forced a bright smile onto her face.

"That's a good thing, right?" she said quickly. "You finally found your real mother. Spending time with her is important." She nodded to herself as if convincing her own heart.

She kept talking. "And you're a princess. Dear Lord, I raised a princess of some Fae kingdom in the ghetto. Your mother must want my head." She let out a short laugh and lifted a hand to her mouth.

"Nancy, no — Mom, listen to me..." Violet tried again, but Nancy was already spiraling in her own thoughts.

"I think I need some air," Nancy said, drawing in a slow, steady breath.

She gave Violet a smile but it didn't reach her eyes.

"Perhaps Ezra and Asher can have that talk now. And later... I don't know how this mirror thing works, but we'll talk later."

"Nancy, no — don't go— fuck!" Violet swore when Nancy suddenly turned and rushed out of the room as if something was chasing her.

Ezra stood there, visibly torn. He wanted to go after his mate, but at the same time, there was something important happening here.

He ran a hand through his hair with a frustrated sigh. "I'm sorry, but you guys might have to do this again. I need to go after my mate."

His gaze shifted to Violet. She looked shattered.

"Don't worry," he told her gently. "Everything will work out."

Then Ezra turned and strode out, following the path Nancy had taken.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 790: The Truth About Her Birth[1,511 words]

Chapter 790: The Truth About Her Birth

It wasn't hard for Ezra to find Nancy. Not when even a mere human could track her down by the sound of her uneven sniffing.

She was in the garden, seated on one of the wrought-iron chairs beneath an old oak tree, crying as quietly as she could.

The instant Nancy spotted her mate, her hand flew to her face. She hastily wiped at her cheeks, attempting to compose herself before he reached her.

"What are you doing here?" she asked, trying to steady her voice. "Shouldn't you be talking to Asher? If they finally reached out after all this time, then it must be important."

Ezra sat beside her without hesitation. "I would have stayed," he said, "except my pregnant mate is upset. That's non-negotiable. What kind of man would I be? They called once. They'll call again."

"Fuck." Nancy let out a shaky breath, realizing she was making this about herself. "I don't know why the tears just keep falling. I'm usually better at getting my emotions under control." She wiped at her face again, more frustrated than before.

Ezra caught her hand, stopping her.

"You're pregnant with my child. A werewolf child," he reminded her gently. "That's not an ordinary pregnancy. It would be more concerning if your emotions weren't all over the place."

"Right." Nancy nodded stiffly, her lips pressed thin.

Her gaze lingered on Ezra. Then her lips trembled again, and the tears came back harder.

"I always knew," she whispered, "somewhere at the back of my mind, that a day like this would come. And yet, it feels like my heart is breaking into pieces." Her voice cracked. "I wasn't even the best mother to her, Ezra."

Ezra cupped her face. He admitted. "You weren't a perfect mother, but you were there for eighteen years of Violet's life. Something her birth mother couldn't be."

He brushed his thumb over her cheek. "We don't know the full story yet. But from where I stand, Nancy, you are the best mother Violet has ever had."

"Now come here."

He pulled her into his chest, and Nancy didn't resist. She leaned into him, sobbing freely this time.

After a moment, she sniffed and muttered, "I'm angry too, you know."

Ezra looked down at her.

"She hid the news of her birth mother from me," Nancy continued, her voice thick. "I would never have stopped her if she wanted to visit the Fae realm. I wouldn't have chained her down. I just... I can't believe she kept something this big from me."

Ezra huffed. "Violet's a teenager, Nancy. Independence. Secrets. Drama. That's practically their brand. On the bright side, she's confessing now."

"Yeah," Nancy shot back, wiping at her eyes. "Only because she has no choice."

She sighed deeply and went quiet.

After a while, Nancy pulled back and looked Ezra straight in the eyes. "Do you think she'll be ashamed of me now? Her mother is a Fae Queen and I'm well..." She glanced down at herself and gave a weak shrug. "Nancy."

"I can't say I know Violet thoroughly," Ezra answered. "You probably know her better than I do. But from the time I've spent around your daughter, she doesn't strike me as the type who looks down on people. Otherwise, the Cardinal Alphas wouldn't be so enamored with her, mate bond aside."

He paused, his voice turning serious.

"And moreover..." he emphasized with conviction, "you're not just Nancy. You're my mate. My wife. The mother of my children. My Luna. You are more precious to me than any gemstone in existence. So forget whatever life you had before. You are extraordinary, Nancy King."

For a moment, Nancy just stared at him, and then, her lips curved slowly to the side.

"Damn," she breathed. "That was sexy as hell."

Ezra's gaze darkened playfully. "That was nothing. I could sing your praises all day if you'd like."

"Careful," Nancy murmured, leaning closer. "If you keep going, I might combust."

Ezra chuckled. "So while other women fall for dirty talk, you prefer a hymn in your honor?" He grinned. "What a strange woman you are, Nancy."

She smirked. "And yet you choose me."

"And I'd do it again."

It was amazing the way words could lift one's spirit. Nancy didn't say anything else and simply kissed him. It was a slow kiss full of gratitude, a smile tugging at her lips even as they moved against his.

Nancy had already given up on being loved like this and now she had him. She would fight for both of them.

They kissed for a while until she finally remembered.

"Wait —" she said, pulling back so abruptly Ezra blinked in confusion.

"What?" he murmured, slightly breathless. Thankfully, there was no talking mirror this time.

Nancy squinted toward the house. "Do you think that mirror thing... or whatever it is... is still on? We could continue the conversation."

"Oh." Ezra scratched the back of his head. "I don't know. I told them we'd talk later, so I doubt they're still there. But if they are..." He paused, eyes narrowing thoughtfully. "We better hope that thing isn't like a cell phone."

Nancy frowned. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," he gestured vaguely, "what if it's been running this whole time? What if it's racking up credits or something?"

Nancy stared at him for a second before realizing he was joking.

She played along.

"You mean magical credits?"

"Yeah. Magical credits. Mirror minutes. Interdimensional roaming charges. I have no idea how Fae technology works."

Nancy burst out laughing.

"You idiot."

"I'm serious," Ezra insisted dramatically. "Imagine Asher just standing there, arms crossed like—"

He straightened his posture and deepened his voice. "We really do not have time for this."

Nancy snorted.

"Or Griffin not wanting to see old people's smut."

Ezra widened his eyes theatrically. "Oh, he needs a filter!"

Nancy smacked his chest lightly. "Shut up!"

They both paused.

"We should probably go check," she said.

Ezra grimaced. "Yeah. And walk back into Roman Draven asking us for sex tips."

He winced. "That boy is a menace."

"A lovable menace with no filter," Nancy corrected with a laugh.

"You don't say."

He stood and extended his hand to her. Nancy smiled and placed her hand in his. He gently pulled her to her feet.

"Let's go," he said.

Together, they made their way back to their quarters. And just as Nancy had guessed, the mirror thing was still on.

Only this time, Violet was the one reflected in it.

She didn't even notice them at first. Her head was bowed with her shoulders slightly slumped like a child who knew she had done something wrong.

Nancy stepped closer to the mirror.

"Violet?"

Violet's head snapped up, her eyes wide.

"Mom?" she breathed.

Then she twisted around and shouted over her shoulder, "Guys, they're back!"

Violet's eyes shone almost immediately, glassy with unshed tears.

"I swear I didn't mean to keep it from you on purpose," she rushed out. "It wasn't just some random secret. It was dangerous and I needed to be sure first. I needed to know what I was dealing with before I dragged you into it. And then before I even had the chance to tell you the truth, we were taken to the Fae realm and everything just—"

"Violet."

Nancy's voice was oddly calm.

"It's alright."

Violet blinked, stunned. "You understand?"

Nancy nodded. "I do."

Relief washed over Violet's face so fast it was almost painful to witness. Her shoulders dropped, the tension draining from her body.

"But I'm still sorry," Violet insisted, tears finally spilling over. "You deserved to know. I should have trusted you more."

Nancy's expression gentled.

"It's okay, my dear. You said it yourself, you were trying to protect us in your own way."

Violet felt relief wash through her. But that was until she remembered.

"Oh shit."

Nancy frowned immediately. "What is it, Violet?"

Violet hesitated. "I don't think you'd say that again if you knew who my father is."

That caught both of them.

Ezra straightened beside Nancy. They shared a quick look full of confusion, then concern.

"Darling," Nancy began carefully, trying to be calm, "who is your father?"

Violet swallowed. "I'll tell you. But you have to promise me you won't freak out."

Nancy let out a short, uneasy laugh. "Why would I freak out? It's not like your father is some serial killer or something."

Violet grimaced.

"Well... close."

Nancy's smile vanished.

"Okay. Now you're scaring me."

There was movement behind Violet as the Cardinal Alphas stepped into view. But Violet didn't look back, her eyes stayed fixed on Nancy and Ezra.

She drew in a breath.

"Angus is my father."

For a moment, it felt like nothing happened. Or rather, Nancy simply didn't understand.

"Who is Angus?"

It was Asher who answered this time.

"The former Alpha King. He's Violet's father."

And Ezra's eyes widened like saucers.

"That is not possible," he said at once.

"Oh," Asher replied, "it is very possible."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 791: Come Back Home[1,515 words]

Chapter 791: Come Back Home

"No, you don't understand." Ezra argued, shaking his head in denial, "Angus couldn't possibly be Violet's father. He died several years before she was even born."

"Or so you were led to believe by the Council of Elders, and Elijah himself, who benefited greatly from having his brother removed." Asher said it easily, like he was reading from a history textbook.

Ezra stumbled back a step, shell-shocked.

He wanted to reject it outright. After all, they were just kids. What did they know about politics that old? But this was Asher and he didn't speak unless he had facts.

Ezra slowly lifted his eyes toward Violet and now that he truly looked at her, he saw it.

Those eyes.

Angus' were a shade darker, colder perhaps but the structure, the intensity, and the sharpness behind them were his.

Quite alright.

"So," Nancy began slowly, her voice tight with confusion, "I don't know werewolf history very well but isn't Micah's father the former Alpha King?"

Her brows were drawn together, as if she was piecing together a puzzle she didn't like the outcome of.

"Yes, Mother," Violet answered. "Micah is my brother. My half-brother."

"Goddess above," Nancy breathed, swallowing hard.

"And he's not the only one," Violet added.

Ezra's head snapped up. "What do you mean by that?"

"While the wolves thought he was dead," Roman cut in casually, "Papa Angus was busy distributing his seed like some twisted cat distribution system. He has eight other children scattered out there."

"What?!" Ezra and Nancy shouted at the same time.

"Is this some sort of joke?" Ezra demanded, looking genuinely traumatized.

"Seven actually," Alaric corrected flatly. "He killed one of his daughters."

Nancy pressed a hand to her mouth. "I think I'm going to be sick."

Violet spoke, her eyes fixed on Ezra.

"I know this is too much to take in. And we've barely even scratched the surface of the truth. But we're telling you now because there's no more time. Angus is making his next move even as we speak."

It dawned on Ezra.

"You want me to tell the others," he realized.

"Unlike Elijah's intentions, the truth cannot be buried forever," Asher said evenly. "And speaking of truth, what has happened since our disappearance?"

Ezra straightened, drawing in a deep breath.

"A lot," he said grimly. "Your alphas revolted."

"My father's alphas," Asher corrected wryly. "Not mine. Though I can't say I'm surprised."

His eyes moved to Ezra with quiet pride.

"Since you're standing here alive, I assume you handled it."

"Barely," Ezra admitted. "I don't know what to do with the surviving alphas. Or the tension in the pack. They believe you're dead."

His gaze lifted to the mirror.

"All of you."

Griffin said. "Well, now that you've seen us, you can tell my mother I'm fine." He turned to the others. "All of our parents."

Nancy shook her head. "And what exactly do we tell them? That Angus, the former Alpha King, is alive and Violet's father?" She let out a hollow breath. "I don't see them swallowing that with everything else going on."

Ezra rubbed his hand down his face. "We already have a zombie epidemic in Aster City. Surely they can believe their sons spoke to us through a mirror."

The Cardinal Alphas went still.

Asher's eyes narrowed instantly. "What do you mean by zombie epidemic?"

Alaric frowned. "What zombie epidemic?"

Roman blinked. "Wait. Are we approaching the apocalypse now? Because I'd like some notice before the end of the world."

"Yeah, I think I'll sit this one out," Nancy muttered, moving to the edge of the bed. Her knees felt weak. She couldn't stand anymore.

Ezra shot her a concerned look but didn't push. Instead, he turned back to the mirror and, over the next few minutes, carefully narrated the events that led to the emergence of the zombie outbreak — how the first case came about, the rapid spread, the containment zones, the emergency meetings, and contingency plans.

The room grew quieter with every detail.

"At least they can't turn werewolves into zombies," Griffin said at last, a faint relief in his voice. "That would be devastating."

"Not yet," Asher said ominously. "We would be idiots to rule out the possibility of the virus mutating. Nothing about its emergence feels natural in the first place."

"Wait a minute," Roman said slowly. "You're trying to say this is supernatural?"

His expression shifted as a dangerous thought crept in.

"...That the goddess—"

He shook his head quickly, as if physically rejecting the idea.

"No. No way."

He looked at Asher like he'd just committed blasphemy. "Why would you even think that?"

Asher's gaze didn't waver.

"Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that humans have been ingesting Ignis for a while with no effect. And then suddenly one human rips out a werewolf's heart and consumes it on the night of a full moon. Doesn't that sound like the kind of act that invites a curse?"

"Or perhaps it ties back to the prophecy Violet told me about. The one Mary gave her about Night coming. A war." He lifted a brow. "And the goddess placing her final bet."

"Tell me then, what better way to force humans and werewolves to coexist," Asher continued, "than to give them a common enemy? Something neither side can defeat alone. That say they band together. Survive. Then peace."

Silence followed after Asher's speech and

the frightening part was that it made sense.

Alaric finally broke it. "Supernatural event or not, Asher's right about one thing. Viruses mutate. They strain over time."

He faced Ezra directly.

"Are we certain there are no infected werewolves? Or has it simply not shown up yet?"

Ezra rubbed the back of his neck. "I honestly don't know. Our focus has been containment and eliminating infected humans before spread increases. Your father, Caspian is handling the experimental research. He and Patrick."

"Patrick?" all five of them said at once.

"Oh yeah, I forgot to mention we captured him. Elijah ordered him to come up with a cure for the mess he created. Or his death won't be an easy one."

"As if," Asher scoffed. "I know Patrick. And something tells me he genuinely doesn't know where things went wrong this time."

His eyes darkened.

"And if this is supernatural—"

"He won't be able to figure it out," Alaric finished flatly.

"At least he won't be able to spread more Ignis. That is a good thing, right?" Violet said, like she was grasping for something good in all of this.

"Mhmm." Griffin was the only one who answered.

Then there was silence.

"You guys need to come home." Ezra finally said it.

That broke the stillness.

The Cardinal Alphas exchanged a look.

None of them spoke.

Ezra frowned at the silence. "Is there something I'm missing?"

"There's a lot going on here, Ezra" Roman said, his usual teasing tone absent for once. "We can't leave yet."

Ezra frowned at the mirror. "Like what?"

Violet hesitated before she confessed.

"I told you, I'm a princess," she began carefully. "And I have to go through certain trials to claim my crown. It's not just a title. There's a trial and a whole political mess attached to it." She swallowed. "And my birth mother is trying to help me control my powers properly. Safely."

She held his gaze.

"Trust me, the human realm doesn't need me right now."

Ezra absorbed that, then shifted his attention.

"And what about you, Asher?"

His tone was heavier now.

"You need to come back and settle things in the West Pack. I've gotten most of it under control, yes. But this zombie virus means I'm not always present. And to be honest I'm not comfortable with the idea that one of your father's blood thirsty alphas might get ideas."

Asher's expression didn't shift.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But I can't come home either."

Ezra's gaze flicked back to Violet.

"You want to protect her."

"The others can do that," Ezra pressed. "The West Pack needs you at a time like this."

Asher exhaled. "It's not just that."

But Ezra wouldn't have it until Alaric stepped in.

"Asher is next."

Ezra blinked. "Next?"

"To be bonded," Griffin clarified. "We believe it could trigger at any time now."

Roman said, "Which means he can't be separated from her."

Understanding slowly dawned on Ezra's face. No wonder, he should have known.

His shoulders eased slightly.

"I get it," Ezra said after a moment. His eyes softened as they settled on Asher. "I wish you the best, son."

He straightened.

"I'll hold things down here. Try to keep everything from burning to the ground."

Roman smirked. "Much appreciated, papa Ezra."

But Ezra's eyes were still on Asher.

"Just don't take too long."

"Yeah, we can only hope the goddess doesn't punish me any further." Asher said sarcastically.

"She won't." Violet suddenly said. She looked at Asher with great conviction. "I can feel it in my bones. It's going to happen soon."

"I sure hope so."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 792: Two To Return[1,575 words]

Chapter 792: Two To Return

"Ezra's right, you know," Griffin said. "If that zombie virus is wreaking havoc in Aster City, then we're needed back in the human realm."

They were all seated around a long table in the empty hall after reaching out to Ezra, discussing affairs.

Violet leaned forward, resting her hands on the table.

"Lila brought you four here initially as proof that the Fae meant me no harm. That I wasn't being held hostage or manipulated," she reminded them, her gaze moving from one face to another. "And your presence steadies me. It assures me that I'm not alone."

However, Roman read meaning into those words.

"So you want us to go back?" he asked, disappointment evident in his tone.

Asher countered immediately, his tone caustic. "Were you planning on staying in the Fae realm forever?"

"Yeah," Roman shot back. "The unbonded one gets to stay behind."

"Guys," Violet pleaded with her eyes. She didn't want them fighting.

Roman looked away, his jaw flexing, while Asher remained cool as usual.

Griffin said to them. "It's not about who's leaving who or who stays, but we can't pretend the human realm doesn't exist just because we're here. If that virus spreads beyond control—"

"It won't just be humans at risk," Alaric cut in. "And if it mutates..." His expression darkened. "I need to combine brains with my father. If Caspian is leading the experimental side of things, then he probably needs me."

"And what about the Queen...?" Asher said, deliberately letting the words hang, his eyes settling on Alaric.

"What about the Queen?" Violet picked up on the shift immediately.

Her eyes narrowed with suspicion.

"What is going on here?"

Asher answered smoothly, "If there's anyone who communicates on an understanding level with Queen Seraphira, it's Alaric Storm. If he returns to the human realm, who takes over that role?"

Neither Griffin nor Roman protested. Not when they knew the truth. Queen Seraphira was sick, and if there was anyone with a chance of figuring out her situation, it was Alaric.

Although Asher's words made sense, there was a nagging feeling inside Violet that something wasn't right.

"Is there anything you're not telling me?" she pressed.

"Like what?" Asher held her gaze steadily.

Violet stared at him for a long moment. When she realized she wouldn't break him, she turned to the others and settled on Roman pointedly.

Roman simply shrugged. "What?"

Violet tilted her head, uncertain. Maybe she was overreacting.

When Violet wasn't looking, all four Cardinal Alphas shared a look.

Yep.

Queen Seraphira better let the cat out of the bag soon before Violet ripped the truth out of them herself.

"So..." Roman broke the tension. "Who's leaving? Because I'm not."

"Yeah," Asher drawled. "Selfish Roman. Always thinking of himself first and what he stands to gain. Nice choice anyway. I don't trust you not to get yourself into trouble the moment you return to the human realm."

At that, Roman gave Asher a cold look that clearly said, *Really*, asshole?

"Fine, I'll go," Griffin offered. "If it's about killing zombies, my powers are perfect for that. I'll have fun smashing and pounding them." He grinned, making light of the situation.

Alaric scratched his head. "Just try not to get bitten. Especially knowing there's no cure for that at the moment." He glanced at Violet. "I don't think any of us are ready to attend your funeral."

Although he meant it as a joke, it didn't sit well with Violet.

"I don't like this," she said. "I don't like us being separated in the face of danger. We're supposed to do this together."

Griffin reached out and grabbed her hand, squeezing it gently. "I understand. But you're not in a position to leave. Not with your training. Moreover, if I go, it will reassure the West Pack that Asher is alive. Maybe things will settle."

"But anything could still happen," Violet pressed, worry lacing her voice.

"Nothing will happen."

"Yeah. If only there were two of you," Asher said casually. "Then perhaps you'd have each other's backs."

He said it like he wasn't talking about Roman.

But he absolutely was.

Roman glared at him. "Fine. I'll go too then. Satisfied?"

Asher remained perfectly unbothered.

"I didn't say that."

"Fuck you," Roman hissed.

"In your dreams," Asher smirked.

Roman rolled his eyes. The bastard was insufferable.

"So..." Alaric started, "Griffin and Roman return to the human realm. All in agreement?"

Alaric, Griffin, and Asher raised their hands.

Roman didn't.

Well, not at first.

After a moment, he reluctantly lifted his hand.

Then all eyes turned to Violet.

"Violet?" Alaric prompted.

Violet sighed. "I don't know. I feel like I'm about to sign your death certificates."

Griffin grimaced. "Let's not get ahead of ourselves. Nothing will happen to us."

"We've always been in danger, even before we met you, love," Asher said calmly. "This isn't any different. We're Cardinal Alphas. This is our destiny."

"Fine," Violet finally breathed. "I guess I'll talk to my mother tomorrow and she'll make arrangements."

Griffin smiled at her proudly.

Violet pushed back her chair and stood. "I think I'm going to bed."

After everything that had happened — and the thought of her mates leaving soon — she needed the comfort of her mattress.

"Ooh, bed," Roman said, his eyes twinkling.

A series of groans left Griffin and Alaric.

Violet stopped and turned. "What?"

"Nothing at all, love," Asher replied, though there was a slight twist to his lips.

Violet studied them. Why did it feel like she was being kept in the dark again?

Then Roman sauntered over and threw an arm over her shoulder casually.

"What do you think about a massage, honey? Something to ease you right into sleep?" He winked.

Violet looked at him suspiciously. "Yeah, I think I'll pass."

Roman let out an exaggerated sigh. "And there goes your chance, Griffin."

Before Violet could ask what he meant, Roman had already swept her off her feet and into his arms.

"Straight to bed," he declared. "It's cuddle time."

Meanwhile.....

Lunaris Academy

"The gap in the ward has been repaired, but I'll have to warn you, one more stunt like that and I won't promise the whole thing won't come down," Samantha, the witch who had put it up in the first place, warned them.

And by *them*, it wasn't just Principal Jameson. Micah and Adele were seated in the office as well.

"Thank you so much for your help, Samantha. You have secured the lives of the students here once more," Jameson said enthusiastically, reaching out and shaking her hand vigorously, almost like a congressman putting on a show for live television.

Except it was just Micah and Adele in the office.

And they were not fooled by her theatrics.

Even Samantha seemed weirded out by the overzealous gratitude. She raised a brow.

"That's because it's my job. And you're paying me handsomely for it."

"Still. Thank you," Jameson insisted. "Not many witches would agree to affiliate with us werewolves."

"You're not a werewolf, Jameson," Micah said unapologetically.

"At heart," Jameson replied without missing a beat.

Samantha simply nodded, unimpressed.

Then she shifted the air in the room by saying, "Although, I have to ask about the girls who broke into the school."

At that statement, Micah went rigid.

"What about the girls?" he asked, voice taut.

"The hole in the ward was made deliberately," Samantha said calmly. "So the entire barrier wouldn't collapse. And we both know, Mr. Micah Raymond..." Her gaze locked onto his. "...That kind of damage can only be done by a witch."

A thick silence fell over the office. Micah and Samantha stared at each other, neither willing to look away.

The witch was waiting.

Micah announced, "I think it's time you left, Samantha. You've done what you were paid for. You may go."

From the way Samantha stared at her mate, Adele thought for a moment she wouldn't back down.

But after a beat, she relented.

"Alright then," she said, smiling politely. "I'll take my leave."

Micah lifted his head at once, satisfaction flickering across his face. He was glad she knew her place.

Samantha turned to leave, only to pause at the door.

"You should know, Micah," she said lightly, "where there is one witch, there is always another."

Then she left with that knowing smugness.

The door shut behind her.

Jameson immediately turned to Micah. "Really? It was a witch that infiltrated the school? How could you keep that piece of information a secret?!"

And yes, Micah had handled the incident. Covered it so efficiently that the only rumor circulating around Lunaris was that some human had slipped through a weak point in the ward.

No one knew it wasn't just one witch. But two. No one except Abel who knew better than to run his mouth.

Jameson continued, "If that's the case, then Alpha King Elijah has to know about—"

She didn't finish because Micah was suddenly in front of her, growling low.

"You will not say a word."

"But—"

"We both know," he cut her off coldly, "that the only reason you haven't been removed from this position yet is because I haven't accepted Elijah's offer."

Jameson stiffened instantly.

Micah saw it and pressed further, his tone unkind.

"So I advise you to keep your mouth shut and enjoy that seat for as long as I allow you to sit in it."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 793: The Ward Is Down[1,610 words]

Chapter 793: The Ward Is Down

"So Elijah offered you the esteemed position of Jameson's seat, and you never bothered to bring it up with me?" Adele raised the issue the moment they stepped out of Jameson's office.

Micah replied, "I didn't think it was a big deal. Not when I had no intention of accepting it."

"Not a big deal, eh?" Adele stopped abruptly in the hallway, forcing Micah to halt a few steps ahead when he realized she wasn't following him.

He turned with a grimace. "What are you doing, Adele?"

"I'm just standing in the middle of the hallway," Adele replied sarcastically. "I don't think it's a big deal."

Micah walked back toward her and lowered his voice. "This is the freaking hallway, Adele. I don't think it's the right place to have an argument when there's a chance a student might walk in on us."

But Adele wasn't done.

"And why is that, Micah?" she demanded, crossing her arms over her chest. "Why? Is it because us arguing here would draw attention? Because it would be quite unfortunate if juicy gossip like that found its way onto the Oracle's gossip blog." She emphasized the last three words .

Then she looked at him, her jaw tight.

"I thought we agreed, no more secrets, Micah."

"Like I said," Micah replied in an equally controlled tone, "I wasn't going to accept the offer. I only had to make it seem that way so Jameson wouldn't suspect otherwise and would behave under my threat."

But Adele wasn't moved. She glared at him, silently waiting for him to own up. They held each other's gaze until Micah finally broke with a sigh.

"I'm sorry, Adele," he said sincerely. "I really didn't think it would be a big deal. I don't intend to be chained to this school forever."

Adele took a step closer and said in a hiss, "While I appreciated your enigmatic nature, Micah, that is in the past. Now we've established that whatever affects you affects me as well, seeing as we're bonded and all. So once more, no matter how great or small, no secrets between us. Are we clear?" she said firmly, staring straight into his eyes.

"Clear as day," Micah said.

"Good." Adele stalked off.

"Adele, wait—" Micah was about to reach for her when a deafening boom split through the air.

The sound was heavy and violent, like that of an explosion. For a second, both of them froze, stunned.

Then the noise of confusion began.

Students poked their heads out first, before stepping fully into the corridor. Staff members appeared as well, voices rising all at once.

"What was that?"

"Has someone bombed our school?"

"Where did it come from?"

The entire hallway buzzed with alarm.

"Come on," Micah said quickly, grabbing Adele's hand. Together they pushed through the growing crowd and rushed toward the exit.

Except outside was worse.

Since it was break time, it meant students were everywhere across the school grounds, and the sudden noise had thrown the entire campus into chaos. Clusters of students were pointing in different directions, shouting over one another while others simply stood frozen in fear.

Micah scanned the sky, expecting to see a plume of smoke or debris marking the source of the explosion, but there was nothing. Not even a fire or a sign of what had caused the sound.

Confusion settled over him.

"What the hell was that?" Adele muttered under her breath.

Before Micah could answer, a student came sprinting across the courtyard, panic written all over his face.

His voice cracked as he shouted.

"It's down!"

Several students turned toward him.

"The ward is down!" he screamed again, nearly tripping as he ran. "The ward is down! The zombies are going to eat us all! All of us are dead."

The words seemed to suck the air out of the world.

Adele's breath caught in her throat.

For a single moment she and Micah stared at each other, the meaning of those words sinking in. Then they moved.

They broke into a run, heading straight for the ward even as the students' screams rose behind them like a spreading wave of panic.

Micah and Adele moved fast and when

they reached the front gate, they found the two entrance guards already there.

Both men were crouched near the stone archway where the magical ward had once shone invisibly in the air. One of them bent low, examining something on the ground.

The other straightened as Micah approached.

"I just sent word to Jameson," the guard said grimly. "The ward is down."

To prove his point, he lifted something from the ground and held it a shard. A jagged piece of crystallized glass.

Micah's brows drew together.

Then the man casually extended his hand beyond the gate and nothing happened.

There was no zap of electricity or an invisible barrier forcing him back. The guard stepped fully outside the boundary of the school and then stepped back in again without resistance.

Micah cursed under his breath.

"How did this happen?" he demanded.

The second guard stood up from where he had been inspecting the ground.

"We were inside..." he explained, pointing toward the security booth beside the entrance gate. "when we heard the sound."

He gestured vaguely toward the shattered fragments scattered along the ground.

"Just like that, it broke."

Micah's brows pulled together. "Broke?"

"Yes. The ward broke like glass," the man said. Then he bent down and picked up another piece of the shattered ward.

"A stunning one too," he muttered.

He lifted the shard toward the sunlight. The fractured surface caught the light immediately, scattering it in tiny rainbows across the ground.

The first guard frowned thoughtfully.

"Wasn't this thing fixed just moments ago?" he asked. "Maybe that witch didn't do the job properly."

Micah said, "Whether she did it properly or not doesn't matter, the point is that we're screwed. The school has no protection right now, and if a zombie manages to get inside..." He didn't finish the sentence.

He didn't need to, now when the looks on everyone's faces said enough.

"We need to get the students into one place," Adele said, already thinking ahead. "Somewhere secure. Somewhere we can keep them together."

Micah nodded once.

"Raise the alarm," he ordered. "Gather every student in the ballroom. No one moves alone. No one leaves the building."

There was urgency in his voice.

"You too stay with them while I get help."

Adele wanted to protest but he had already pressed the phone to his ear.

"Go." He ordered.

With a groan, Adele ran back to the campus, heart pounding like the grooves of horses. Students were still shouting, some bawling their eyes out like children, while the others froze in place as rumors spread faster than anyone could control.

"Are the zombies coming to eat us?"

"What do we do?!"

Adele pushed through the chaos, her voice cutting through the noise as best as it could.

"Head to the ballroom!" she shouted, waving her arms. "Everyone head to the ballroom now!"

But fear had a way of swallowing instructions and the students did the opposite. At that moment a group of teachers rushed toward her, their faces tight with concern.

"What's going on?" one of them asked breathlessly.

"The ward is down," Adele said quickly. "We don't know how long we have before something gets in. Gather the students and take them to the ballroom."

"The ballroom?" another teacher repeated.

"Yes," Adele insisted. "It's the largest enclosed space in the school. Get them there and keep them together."

The teachers nodded and scattered, calling to the students nearby.

But even with them helping, there was a lot of panic. Too many voices and too many frightened teenagers moving in all directions.

Adele clenched her jaw, scanning the grounds for something—anything—that would let her reach everyone at once.

Then she saw it.

Near the edge of the courtyard, the cheerleading team's practice setup was still lying on the grass. Pom-poms were scattered nearby, and resting against a portable speaker was a handheld microphone.

Thank the goddess.

Adele grabbed it without hesitation. She turned it on, the sharp screech of feedback cutting through the courtyard.

Heads turned towards her.

Adele lifted the microphone.

"This is an emergency!" her amplified voice boomed across the grounds. "All students are to report to the ballroom immediately!"

"Do not leave the school grounds!" she continued. "Do not wander off on your own. Do not hide in classrooms! Head to the ballroom now. Stay together. Stay calm. Stay there until this crisis is over!"

This time they listened.

Students began moving in the same direction, teachers guiding them along the pathways toward the ballroom.

Relief filled Adele as the crowd slowly began to organize itself.

Then a sharp voice cut through the moment.

"Who ordered you to make that announcement?"

Adele turned.

Principal Jameson was marching toward her, fury blazing in her eyes.

"The students should go to their hostels and lock their doors," Jameson snapped. "Not gather in one place like sardines waiting for their deaths!"

"They're safer together. Students don't always follow instructions when they're in panic mode. But if they're in one place, there's accountability and we can protect them better."

Jameson opened her mouth to counter her.

"If you disagree," Adele cut her off coolly, "you're welcome to lock yourself in your office. Then we'll see who comes running to save your ass when a zombie gets to you."

Without waiting for a response, Adele turned away and raised the microphone again.

"All students proceed to the ballroom immediately!"

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 794: Hello Brother[1,534 words]

Chapter 794: Hello Brother

Everything was going just as planned. However, knowing teenagers, there was always the possibility that some would do the exact opposite of what they were told.

Hence, while the others were safely packed into the ballroom, Adele was out checking every nook and cranny where those kids might possibly be hiding.

And just as expected, she found more than one.

One girl had locked herself inside a restroom stall, as if a zombie wouldn't be able to scent human flesh and bang the door down. Nonetheless, Adele forced the trembling girl out and escorted her straight to the ballroom.

Another student had tried hiding in a storage room.

It was worth noting that every student she found hiding was human.

Unlike them, most of the werewolves in the school were calm. If anything, they seemed excited for a fight. They were predators, and their beasts prowled just beneath their skin, itching for a chance to hunt.

Which meant keeping them all in one place wasn't necessarily the brightest idea.

However, the students were young and reckless. If a zombie did manage to break through, Micah and the older teachers would handle it first. Unless help was needed, the students would remain where they were.

It was moments like this Adele wished the Cardinal Alphas were around. Not only would they keep the pack in line, but they were devastatingly efficient on the battlefield.

Adele grabbed the latest human student she had found hiding in the hostel and handed the girl over to one of the teachers guarding the ballroom entrance.

"How's it going?" she asked Professor Alwen, the history teacher, tilting her head toward the ballroom behind him.

"If you mean the smell of fear and anxiety, it's overwhelming and triggers the wolves. Your kind are predators, and the humans are proving what they are, prey."

He added dryly, "Thankfully, Jameson is boring everyone with a speech, so I'd say it's working."

Adele sighed. "For once, she's been useful."

"That is, if they don't strangle her first."

"That would be a dream come true," Adele admitted.

Alwen chuckled softly.

Then Adele said, "If things get worse, we may have to move the humans somewhere else. The witch has been called back to repair the ward, and hopefully she can restore it today. Micah and the others are standing by in case a zombie appears."

"And you?" he asked.

"I'm sweeping the classrooms," Adele replied. "Just in case there are still foolish students hiding somewhere."

Alwen nodded.

"Be careful out there."

Adele smiled briefly and headed off again with a determined stride. Everyone should be in the ballroom now, but she trusted these teenagers about as far as she could throw them. Someone was always hiding somewhere they shouldn't be.

So she checked one classroom at a time.

Adele pushed open the first door, scanning the room quickly but thoroughly. Desks were empty, chairs placed hazardously, backpacks abandoned in corners where students had fled in a hurry.

The area was clear.

She stepped back out and shut the door behind her.

Barely two steps later—

Creeaaak.

The door slowly opened again.

Adele frowned.

She turned around and walked back, pushing the door firmly shut. This time she made sure it clicked properly into the frame.

Then she moved away.

The door stayed closed.

Satisfied, Adele continued down the hallway.

She entered the next classroom and repeated the process. Same silent room. Nothing unusual.

She stepped outside and closed the door behind her.

Two steps later.

Creeaaak.

The door opened again.

Adele halted. Her brows now knitted together in suspicion as she turned slowly.

That shouldn't be happening.

She walked back and shut the door again, this time pressing it firmly with her palm.

Then she tested it once. Twice. It held.

Adele stepped away and exactly two steps later.

Creaaaaak.

The door opened again.

This time Adele stiffened.

Either someone was messing with her or something wasn't right. Adele chose the latter.

She turned slowly and walked back, pushing the door closed again. This time she stood there, staring at it, waiting for the door to open.

The hallway was silent except for the faint hum of electricity running through the building. Over a minute passed and the

door didn't move.

Adele exhaled slowly and turned away. Perhaps she was thinking too much. She had barely taken a step when —

Creaaak.

The door opened again.

Adele froze.

Every instinct inside her screamed at once.

Something was wrong.

The fine hairs along her arms rose. Her body tensed as her instincts shifted instantly into predator mode. Her nails lengthened into sharp claws.

But instead of walking back to the door, Adele turned and continued down the hallway faster this time.

She needed to get back to the ballroom. Now.

Her strides grew longer as unease crawled along her spine. Whatever was happening behind her, she wasn't interested in confronting it alone.

She rounded a corner and nearly slammed into someone.

"Shit," Adele muttered automatically. "I'm so sorry. Are you okay?"

The girl standing in front of her looked young. A student, perhaps, but Adele didn't recognize her.

The girl straightened, brushing invisible dust from her clothes.

Then she smiled.

"Hello, Adele," she said pleasantly. "Nice to meet you."

Adele's expression changed instantly.

Her instincts roared, and without hesitation she lunged at her. But the moment she lifted her hand, pain exploded inside her skull.

A sharp, splitting pressure tore through her head like something was crushing her mind from the inside. Adele groaned and grabbed her temples.

Her claws retracted instantly as the pressure intensified. It felt like her head was being ripped apart. Flashes of white burst behind her eyes. The hallway spun violently around her as the pain pulsed harder and harder.

She staggered, as the world tilted. Finally, Adele collapsed to the floor in a limp heap.

Ziva looked down at the unconscious werewolf with quiet satisfaction.

"This is going to be fun." She murmured.

Meanwhile....

Micah paced near the entrance ward, waiting impatiently for Samantha's arrival. The security guards stood nearby, eyes scanning the empty road beyond the gates, hands hovering close to their weapons.

Every few seconds one of them would glance nervously at the broken barrier knowing without the ward, the school was exposed.

The city wasn't completely overrun with zombies yet, but the reports were bad enough. Creatures were appearing inside homes and attacking civilians without warning. Entire families were infected before anyone could respond.

Each attack meant more of those monsters walking the streets. So when the distant rumble of a car engine approached, every guard tensed instantly, reaching for their weapons.

Then the vehicle rolled into view and they exhaled. Zombies couldn't drive.

The car screeched to a stop near the gate and Samantha stepped out before the engine even finished dying. Her face was red with anger.

"What do you mean the ward collapsed?" she demanded, striding toward them furiously.

Micah didn't bother hiding his irritation.

"Well you tell me!" he snapped, gesturing at the glittering debris littering the ground. "You were supposed to fix the hole, not bring the whole damn thing down!"

"I didn't bring down the ward!" Samantha shouted back.

"Then what is this?!" Micah barked, pointing again at the shards.

Instead of answering, Samantha crouched down, ignoring his anger completely. She picked up one of the fragments and held it between her fingers, studying the surface carefully.

Her expression darkened. She stood.

"I didn't do this."

Micah's patience snapped.

"If you didn't do it, then who did?"

"You don't understand," she said. "The ward is invisible. Even if it were supposed to come down, it wouldn't shatter like this. Just like I created the ward, only Jameson has the tool that can lower it or remove it entirely."

Cold dread slid down Micah's spine.

"Are you saying Jameson did this?" he asked, voice dropping.

"No," Samantha replied firmly. "This is magic."

Micah frowned.

"What are you talking about?"

"Someone froze the ward," Samantha explained. "Turned the barrier into something physical. Fragile. And then shattered it."

Micah stared at her, confused.

"A witch did this."

He froze.

"Why would a witch—"

He stopped mid-sentence as realization slammed into him like a punch.

"Oh shit."

Micah took off running before Samantha could react.

"Mr. Raymond!" she called after him.

But he was already gone.

Micah sprinted across the courtyard toward the ballroom, nearly colliding with Professor Alwen at the entrance.

"Whoa! Slow down!" Alwen said, startled.

Micah ignored him.

"Where is Adele?" he demanded. "Tell me she's inside."

Alwen blinked.

"She left a few minutes ago. Said she was checking the classrooms for students who might be hiding."

"Fuck," Micah muttered.

He grabbed Alwen's shoulder.

"Make sure everyone stays inside the ballroom. No one leaves."

Alarm flashed across Alwen's face.

"What's going on?"

But Micah was already running again. He tore down the corridors, flinging open classroom doors one after another.

Empty.

Empty.

Empty.

Frustration clawed at him.

Then he pushed open one more door, and froze.

There she was.

Ziva was standing calmly in the room and beside her was his mate Adele tied to a chair.

"Hello, brother."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 795: Kill Adele[1,189 words]

Chapter 795: Kill Adele

"You fucking bitch!" Micah snarled, ready to lunge at Ziva.

"Ah, ah, not so fast, brother."

What followed was a scream of pain from Adele and the sickening sound of flesh sizzling as the healer cried out in agony.

Micah's attention dropped instantly and that was when he saw it.

A thin garrote wrapped around Adele's neck, pulled tight from behind. The wire bit into her skin as Ziva tugged on it intentionally.

"Wolfbane," Adele whispered hoarsely to Micah.

Micah's eyes flashed with murderous rage.

Wolfbane.

The bane of every werewolf's existence.

"You animal," Micah spat, though he forced himself to stay still even while every instinct inside him screamed to rip Ziva apart and free his mate.

"Oh please," Ziva scoffed. "Enough with the name-calling. We both know you expected me."

"Yeah," Micah shot back coldly. "I thought you'd come for me. Not my mate. And certainly not bring down the entire ward and risk the lives of every student in this school."

Ziva laughed lightly, brushing the accusation aside.

"Not my fault I don't share the same sentiment as you." Her eyes gleamed with cruel amusement. "And let's be honest, you probably underestimated me."

She shrugged casually.

"After all, what could a kid like me possibly do? Throw a few spells here and there?" Her smile widened. "Quite unfortunate I don't give a damn if every soul in this school turns into zombie dinner."

Her fingers slid slowly down Adele's cheek.

"Or if your lovely mate dies."

A low, feral growl rumbled from Micah's chest.

"Hand me my mate, Ziva," he said darkly, "and maybe I'll be generous enough to let you walk out of here alive."

Ziva rolled her eyes.

"I'll say the same thing. Where is my sister?"

Her gaze sharpened.

"I can't seem to track her. And from what I've gathered, you and your lovely mate here—" she tightened the garrote slightly, forcing a strained gasp from Adele "—were the last ones seen with her body."

"Your sister is alive," Micah replied. "She's recovering."

"Good," Ziva said immediately. "Then hand her over."

Micah tilted his head.

"You know I can't do that. Not until I find out what one of you was doing in Roman's room."

Ziva sighed dramatically.

"Well, I guess we'll do this the hard way."

This time she didn't pull the garrote herself.

The wire began tightening on its own.

Magic.

Adele screamed in pain as the wolfbane bit deeper into her skin.

"Adele!"

Micah moved with supernatural speed, but Ziva was ready. She flicked her wrist and a violent blast of force slammed into Micah's chest and hurled him across the room. He crashed into a row of desks and chairs, the furniture splintering under the impact.

Micah groaned, clutching his chest.

Ziva smirked.

"When it comes to long-range attacks, brother, you'll never beat a witch."

"Meow."

The sound was so sudden Ziva spun around.

A small cat stood in the doorway, staring at her calmly.

Ziva frowned.

Where the hell had that thing come from?

"Get lost," she muttered, kicking toward it to scare it off.

But the cat did the opposite.

Instead of running away, it calmly walked toward her.

"I said get lost."

Ziva had no patience for distractions, especially not a stupid furball. Micah would recover any second now and the last thing she needed was to be dealing with an animal.

She needed Laura.

It was quite unfortunate she couldn't kill Micah. He was Father's beloved son after all. But killing his mate? That would be satisfying as hell. Watching him drown in grief and heartbreak would almost make up for everything.

The next moment happened so fast it barely registered.

One second she was trying to kick the cat away and the next, the cat launched at her face.

Claws exploded across her skin as the creature attacked viciously.

"Ahh!" Ziva screamed.

She staggered back, grabbing at the animal as it clung to her head like a demon. Rivere in his cat form, hissed and clawed wildly, digging into her cheeks and scalp.

"Get off me!" she shrieked, trying to tear it away.

But the cat held on stubbornly, ripping at her skin with its claws. Across the room Micah saw his chance and moved instantly.

The moment Ziva finally managed to rip the cat off and hurl it across the classroom, Micah was already in front of her.

He was so fast she didn't see it coming until his claws slashed across her stomach and blood sprayed across the floor.

Ziva screamed, stumbling backward as pain ripped through her abdomen. Her eyes widened in shock.

What an unfortunate turn of events.

The murderous look in Micah's eyes told her everything.

He was going to kill her.

When his hand lunged forward toward her chest, aiming straight for her heart, Ziva reacted instantly and grabbed his wrist.

The two locked into a brutal struggle but Micah was far stronger. His claws edged closer to her chest inch by inch.

Ziva's breath grew ragged as panic crept into her chest. If he reached her heart, he would rip it out. So with the last strength she had left, Ziva forced a quick spell out through bloodied lips.

It was a desperate move but it worked.

Instantly, a brutal headache slammed into Micah's skull. It felt like his head was splitting open from the inside. Micah groaned, his grip weakening as pain shot through his brain. Black dots flooded his vision.

His strength vanished and then his knees buckled. Micah collapsed.

Ziva didn't waste a second. Clutching her bleeding stomach, she turned and ran knowing her life depended on it.

The pounding inside Micah's skull vanished with Ziva's departure, the magic spell losing its grip over him. He pressed a hand to his temple, grimacing as he forced himself upright.

Adele was still tied to the chair, and he moved immediately.

"Adele," he said as he dropped to one knee beside her. "Are you okay?"

Her head lifted weakly.

"Get me out of this," she croaked.

Micah's jaw tightened.

He grabbed the thin wire biting into her throat and tore it away in one swift motion. The wolfbane garrote snapped free with a sharp metallic twang.

Adele sucked in a painful breath as the pressure vanished.

Micah didn't stop there. He reached for the ropes binding her arms. The ropes had been woven with Wolfbanes, its poisonous effect designed to weaken any werewolf who touched it.

Micah ripped the bindings loose anyway, unaffected by the burn as he tore the ropes apart and pulled them away from Adele's wrists.

Finally free, Adele slumped forward but Micah caught her before she could collapse to the floor.

Her neck was glaringly red where the garrote had cut into her skin. Angry marks circled her wrists as well where the Wolfbane-laced rope had rubbed them raw.

Micah's chest tightened at the sight.

He carefully slid an arm beneath her legs and lifted her into his arms.

"We're going to the heal... " he stopped mid-step as it dawned on him.

She was the healer.

Damn it.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 796: Run As Fast As You Can[1,189 words]

Chapter 796: Run As Fast As You Can

Duskmoon Village

Panic drove Layla forward.

It couldn't be.

Ziva couldn't have killed her sister. Laura couldn't be dead.

She pushed the door open and froze.

The room smelled thickly of blood and her eyes widened in shock.

Ziva lay sprawled across the bed, her body slick with crimson. The floor beneath her was stained with dark blood. Her shirt had been torn away and her abdomen and her intestines were practically spilling out.

It was a miracle she was still breathing.

Sweat coated Ziva's pale forehead, her teeth clenched as waves of pain wracked her body. Despite the severity of the wound, fury still burned in her eyes.

Around the bed stood Lilian and two other witches in attendance.

"Do the goddamn spell already!" Ziva snarled.

Lilian nearly jumped out of her skin.

"Yes—yes, of course."

She grabbed the hands of the other witches. The three of them formed a small circle beside the bed, fingers interlocked.

Then they began to chant.

Low words filled the air, as magic hummed through the room like a rising current. The moment the spell took hold, Ziva screamed.

Her back arched violently as the wound began to move. The torn flesh knit itself together inch by inch. Her muscles fused while the blood retreated. And just like that, her skin sealed slowly like a zipper being drawn shut by invisible hands.

Ziva stopped screaming and finally, there was silence. The wound was gone.

Collapsing back onto the mattress, Ziva panted heavily. She lifted her head weakly and stared down at her stomach. It was smooth like nothing happened.

"Clean this place up," she ordered hoarsely.

Lilian immediately bent down, gathering the blood-soaked shirt from the floor and the stained towel. Ziva lay there wearing nothing but her underwear, her skin still ghostly pale from blood loss.

Layla stepped closer, her shock slowly morphing into irritation.

"You know," she said coldly, "the least you could do is show some respect. Our sister just saved your life."

Ziva glared up at her.

"She merely did her job," she snapped. "And I'm not in the best mood, so I suggest you take your concerns elsewhere."

Lilian quickly intervened, sensing the tension.

"I'll get you a strength brew," she said softly. "And some clothes."

Alongside the other witches, she hurried out of the room, closing the door behind her.

Silence fell between the sisters.

Layla moved closer to the bed, staring down at Ziva. Though the wound had healed, her breathing was shallow. Whatever had happened had nearly killed her.

"What happened?" Layla asked.

Ziva's lip curled.

"Get lost."

Layla studied her carefully.

"You failed."

Relief washed through her chest. Laura was still alive.

"Temporary," Ziva hissed. "Next time I go back, I'll snap her little neck myself. Then let's see how much you enjoy gloating."

Layla's eyes flashed with anger.

"Are you kidding me? You think I'm gloating because you failed to kill our sister? Our sister, Ziva!"

Ziva laughed bitterly.

"You should have thought about that when you screwed up the mission and left her behind," she said coldly. "Now she's nothing but collateral damage."

Her voice dropped to something darker.

"But don't worry. I'll bring her body back so it can remind you to do your job properly next time."

Whatever pity Layla had felt evaporated instantly. Her face hardened. Ziva didn't deserve sympathy, not in this life. Or the next.

"Does Father know you failed this mission?" Layla asked coolly. "Or did you quietly drag the witches in here to fix your mistake?"

Ziva's expression changed instantly. Danger flashed in her eyes.

"You do know that you're playing with fire."

Layla didn't flinch under Ziva's glare.

"So I fail my mission and you're the first one running to Father to report it. And yet when it's your turn to fail, suddenly everyone must keep quiet about it."

Ziva's eyes darkened.

"It wouldn't have been a failure if Micah hadn't interfered." Her lips twisted bitterly. "And we both know Father wants his precious son alive."

She shifted on the bed, the earlier weakness in her body disappearing quickly now that the magic had healed her.

"But don't worry," Ziva continued, her voice suddenly lighter. "I think I just found a way to rid Laura without the stress. All thanks to you."

Layla kept her expression carefully neutral, but a cold feeling of unease slid through her chest.

"What do you mean by that?"

Ziva's eyes lit up. They gleamed with the wild brightness of someone who had just discovered something delightful.

"Imagine that," she murmured. "All this time I've been tearing the world apart trying to track Laura down when the solution was right in front of me."

She swung her legs over the bed and stood up. The movement was confident. There was no trace of the young girl who had nearly died moments earlier.

"You and Laura are twins," Ziva said casually, pacing slowly toward Layla. "Same blood. Same DNA. All I have to do is link your lives together."

Layla felt the blood drain from her face.

"And once I kill you..." Ziva finished sweetly, "...Laura dies too."

She clapped her hands lightly.

"Piece of cake."

"You would not," Layla said hoarsely.

Ziva smirked.

"Oh, Layla. Of all people, you should know what I'm capable of."

Her eyes glittered with cruel amusement.

"Maybe I'll hand you over to Bree instead. Let her have some fun finishing the job."

Ziva tilted her head, almost dreamily.

"It would be entertaining watching you fight for your life."

She burst into manic laughter. That was when Layla realized she meant every word.

Something inside Layla snapped and she lifted her hand. The air around Ziva tightened instantly.

Ziva's laughter was cut off abruptly, her

eyes widening as the invisible grip crushed around her throat. She gasped for air but none came.

Her hands clawed at her neck as she choked.

Layla stepped forward, fury burning in her eyes.

"All this time," she said through clenched teeth, "I stood by and watched your abuse. Your cruelty. Your madness." Her voice hardened. "But no more."

The pressure around Ziva's throat tightened.

"I'm done." Her eyes blazed. "I don't care about Father anymore. I'll kill you myself."

Ziva's face was turning red but her hand twitched and across the room, a heavy vase suddenly lifted off the table.

It shot forward like a bullet and the vase slammed into Layla's head. Pain exploded behind her eyes and her concentration shattered instantly.

The invisible grip around Ziva's throat vanished and she collapsed to her knees, coughing violently as air rushed back into her lungs.

By the time Layla recovered, Ziva was already on her feet. This time around, Layla didn't attack again. She knew better.

Ziva was stronger than her.

Without another word, Layla turned and ran.

Ziva watched her go and slowly began to laugh.

"Run," she called after her, voice dripping with delight.

"Run as fast as you can, Layla." Her eyes gleamed with murderous promise. "Because I'm coming for you. And when I do, it's the end for you."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 797: Go Back To Hell[1,186 words]

Chapter 797: Go Back To Hell

Rivere the cat sat calmly near the wall, grooming his paw like nothing had happened. He dragged his tongue across his fur with absolute indifference, as if viciously attacking a witch moments earlier had been nothing more than a routine part of his day.

Well, his day now, since he had been turned into a cat bound to protect Adele.

Micah carried Adele to the infirmary where he helped clean the wolfbane from her wounds. The poison had seeped into her body through the garrote cut, and although she was a healer, it still weakened her.

She was pale and exhausted.

It was no surprise when she eventually fell asleep.

Micah would have stayed beside her, but there was far too much to do. The entire school needed securing.

"Psst," he hissed quietly toward the cat.

Or rather, his brother. Sort of.

God, this was weird.

He tried to get the animal's attention.

Rivere paused for a moment and looked at him.

Then, with what Micah could only describe as a deeply condescending expression, the cat went right back to licking his paw.

Micah sighed.

"Just look after her, alright? I'll be back."

Rivere remained silent, acting completely oblivious to the instruction.

Micah recognized the silent protest for what it was and ignored it. He stepped toward the doorway, but stopped just before leaving.

He turned back.

"Thank you," he said.

For the first time, the cat stopped grooming.

Those unblinking, annoyingly beautiful green eyes stared straight at him.

Then Rivere hopped onto the bed beside Adele and curled up next to her, sitting like a quiet guardian watching over her.

That was enough for Micah.

He stepped out of the infirmary, already dialing Samantha's number.

The phone barely rang before she answered.

"Is the barrier up?" he asked immediately.

"Reconstructing a ward larger and stronger than the one before is not child's play, Mr. Raymond," Samantha snapped. "I need preparation, assistance from sister witches, and considering how much werewolves dislike our kind, gathering help is taking time."

Micah's jaw flexed.

"How much time?"

"We need until midnight," she replied. "It's the witching hour. Magic is strongest then."

Micah stopped walking.

"We don't have that much time. Leaving the school unprotected until nightfall isn't ideal, Samantha."

"Well maybe you should have been more careful with the ward in the first place," she shot back. "This isn't beginner magic and I can't rebuild something like that alone."

Micah exhaled slowly, forcing his temper down.

"Fine. Do what you have to do. But be quick. I'll have the wolves secure the campus and make sure not even the shadow of a zombie gets near the students."

"Now you're talking."

The line went dead.

Micah headed straight for the ballroom.

Professor Alwen immediately brightened when he saw him.

"Have you found Adele?"

"Yes," Micah answered. "She's safe. Thank you for your help."

Then he stepped into the hall.

One of the teachers was currently guiding the human students through breathing exercises meant to calm them. The wolves, meanwhile, looked bored out of their minds.

Micah spotted Commander Malakai near the back.

"Rally the students," Micah said quietly. "The wolves. The ones in top condition."

Malakai raised a brow.

"The ward won't be restored until midnight," Micah continued. "Which means we need all hands on deck securing the perimeter. Nothing gets inside this school."

Something in Micah's expression made Malakai take the order seriously.

He nodded.

Then he stepped forward and clapped his hands loudly.

"Alright boys!" he barked. "If you're a wolf, on your feet. We've got zombies to hunt. Humans stay put."

The response was immediate. A thunder of cheers erupted as the werewolves leapt to their feet.

At last. Something worth doing. Far better than sitting around like helpless prey waiting for danger to come to them.

Coach Harrington and Malakai worked hand in hand, as they often did. It was no surprise to see them moving in tandem now, delegating tasks with efficiency.

They moved through the gathered wolves, selecting who would take which position around the school grounds. Some were assigned to patrol the perimeter. Others were placed at strategic points near the entrances and corridors. While the strongest and most reliable wolves were chosen to guard the main.

No one wanted to take chances.

In the end, the weapon room had to be opened.

The heavy metal door groaned as it swung open, revealing racks of old weapons that had not been touched in years. Most of them were coated in a thin layer of rust and dust from long neglect. No one had ever imagined the room would need to be opened again.

After all, those weapons had been used during the years when discrimination against wolves had run high, when the young werewolves of Lunar Academy had needed ways to defend themselves against hostile humans and hunters.

Those days had long passed.

Now the room buzzed with activity as the wolves set to work. Some wiped rust from blades, others tested the balance of spears and batons, while a few assembled crossbows that had been dismantled and stored away.

While the others prepared, Micah returned to the infirmary to check on Adele.

She was awake when he entered.

Rivere left immediately.

"Hey," Micah said softly as he approached the bed. "How are you feeling?"

He sat beside her and gently inspected her neck where the wolfbane garrote had cut into her skin. Most of the angry redness had faded, leaving behind faint pink marks.

"Better," Adele answered.

Micah's expression tightened.

"Listen, Adele...I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault, Micah," she interrupted gently. "It's not like you knew she was going to come after me."

"That's exactly the problem," Micah said grimly. "I knew one of them would come back for the girl. I just didn't think they'd come after you. I was careless."

"Well," Adele said with a small shrug, "now I know her face. It's not like she can catch me off guard again."

"There won't be a next time."

But Adele shook her head.

"You have her sister," she reminded him. "There will always be a next time."

Micah's jaw tightened.

"Not if I hide you somewhere she can't reach you," he said. "Then the fight will be between her and me alone."

Adele's face fell instantly.

"Are you serious right now?" she said sharply. "You know what happened the last time I was trapped in hell and you want to send me back there?"

"Technically, Rivere was the one holding you hostage then," Micah muttered. "That wouldn't be the case this time. You'd be a guest. And Rivere would be there to protect—"

"I'm not going back there," Adele said firmly, her features hardening. "End of discussion."

Silence settled between them.

Then Micah's phone rang.

At first he considered ignoring it, but the thought crossed his mind that it might be Samantha calling about the ward.

So he pulled the phone from his pocket and looked at the screen. His face fell.

"Well," he muttered darkly. "Speak of the devil."

It was his uncle.

Elijah.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 798: Good News At Last[1,063 words]

Chapter 798: Good News At Last

North pack Territory :

A zombie was strapped tightly to a reinforced metal chair, its limbs bound with thick restraints bolted into the floor. The creature snarled and twisted violently, the muscles in its body jerking in unnatural spasms.

Thick saliva dripped from its mouth, sliding down its chin and onto the front of the restraint harness. Its teeth snapped at the air, trying to bite something that wasn't there.

Various wires ran across its grayish skin. Sensors clung to its temples, chest, and arms, feeding readings to a row of glowing monitors.

A doctor in a white coat approached the creature cautiously, clutching a syringe filled with a pale blue liquid. His expression was tight with discomfort. Even after days of exposure to the infected, the sight still made his stomach turn.

The zombie lunged suddenly, its jaws snapping. But the thick strap across its forehead jerked its head back violently, keeping it locked in place.

"I hate this job," the doctor muttered, before driving the needle into the zombie's arm and pushed the plunger down.

The creature shrieked, releasing a guttural, inhuman sound that reverberated through the sterile room.

The doctor immediately stepped back, wiping his gloved hands against his coat in disgust.

The infected subject was contained inside a sealed cubicle made of reinforced transparent glass, allowing those in the observation room to watch safely from the other side.

Behind the glass wall stood a group of observers. Among them were Alpha Caspian and several members of his medical team.

And standing slightly apart from the others was Patrick.

Yes, Patrick was among them.

But unlike the rest of the doctors, a thick metal collar encircled his neck. One of the guards nearby held a small remote in his hand. With a single press of a button, the collar would release a shock powerful enough to incapacitate him. It had been designed to make sure Patrick behaved.

Caspian folded his arms as he stared at the struggling zombie.

"This will be our fortieth attempt," he said pointedly. "If this doesn't work..."

Patrick kept his gaze fixed on the glass cubicle.

"We'll see then," he replied.

No one else spoke. All eyes turned toward the infected man, and for several long seconds, nothing happened.

Then suddenly, the monitors began screaming.

Beep. Beep. Beep.

One of the assistant doctors leaned forward.

"Heart rate spiking!" he called out.

Inside the cubicle, the zombie began thrashing violently. Its body convulsed as the injected chemical raced through its system.

The restraints rattled as the creature fought against them.

"Hold the readings steady," Caspian ordered.

The zombie let out a monstrous roar.

Then something changed. Thin streams of blood began leaking from the corners of its eyes. Another line of dark red trickled from its nose. Its body spasmed harder. The creature suddenly went still.

The monitors emitted one long, flat sound.

The zombie slumped forward in the restraints. He was dead. For real.

For a full minute, no one spoke.

Caspian stared through the glass, his expression unreadable. Then he exhaled slowly.

"It still didn't work."

Patrick lowered his gaze to the floor, guilt written heavily across his face.

"We'll keep experimenting," he said hopefully. "Eventually we'll reach a breakthrough."

Before Caspian could respond, the door to the laboratory opened as one of the pack guards stepped inside.

"Alpha Caspian," he said, bowing his head slightly. "The Alpha King is here."

Caspian frowned.

"Elijah?"

He hadn't called earlier.

His eyes slid toward Patrick, a pitiful look on his face.

Caspian turned back to the guard.

"You know what to do".

The guard nodded.

Caspian removed his lab coat and handed it to one of the assistants before stepping out into the hallway. Behind him, the wolves moved quickly. Patrick's wrists were cuffed, and two guards seized his arms, dragging him along.

By the time Caspian reached the corridor, Alpha King Elijah was already waiting.

"Your Majesty," Caspian greeted, bowing his head respectfully.

Before Elijah could answer, the guards emerged behind Caspian with Patrick restrained between them.

Elijah's gaze immediately shifted. He walked slowly toward them, his sharp eyes scanning Patrick from head to toe.

Then he reached forward and tugged lightly at the collar around Patrick's neck. A smile spread across his face, but it was anything but friendly.

"I take it the cure hasn't been found yet," Elijah said casually.

Caspian straightened.

"No, Your Majesty."

Elijah let out a short laugh. "You'd better work harder, Patrick, otherwise your head might roll soon."

Patrick looked him straight in the eye.

"Whether I work hard or not, you never planned on keeping me alive anyway."

The smile vanished from Elijah's face instantly and for a moment the hallway fell silent.

Then Elijah turned away with a cold expression.

"Take him out of here."

The guards immediately dragged Patrick away down the corridor. His chains rattled as he disappeared around the corner.

Elijah then said to Caspian. "Walk with me, Alpha. Brief me on the way."

Caspian obeyed at once, falling into step beside the Alpha King as they moved down the long corridor of the facility.

"So far," Caspian began carefully, "every method we've attempted has failed. Antiviral compounds, regenerative inhibitors, neural suppression agents, none of them have reversed the infection."

Elijah's lips twitched.

"So Patrick is useless then."

Caspian did not answer. He knew Elijah well enough to understand that one careless word could seal Patrick's fate.

Instead, he continued speaking.

"However, we have made some discoveries."

That caught Elijah's interest.

"Oh?"

Caspian nodded. "We've confirmed that indeed the infected appear to operate on a hive-mind structure."

Elijah slowed slightly.

"Explain."

"We've recorded synchronized neural activity among multiple infected subjects," Caspian said. "Their movements are not random. They respond to signals, commands of some kind. Meaning there is likely a central source. A primary infected, what we're calling the original host."

"The boy who turned into the first zombie," Elijah concluded.

"Exactly."

Caspian continued. "If the infection is being coordinated through a dominant neural signal, eliminating the source may collapse the entire network."

Elijah stopped walking, his gaze sharpening with interest.

"So if we kill the original zombie..."

"The rest may lose coordination," Caspian finished. "Or die outright if their bodies rely on that signal to remain active."

Elijah smiled slowly.

"Well," he said, turning forward again. "That finally sounds promising."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 799: Turn One Of Their Own[1,620 words]

Chapter 799: Turn One Of Their Own

"Tell me something," Elijah said as they continued down the corridor. Wolves passed them along the way, lowering their heads respectfully as they greeted their king. Neither Elijah nor Caspian returned the greetings. Not while they were deep in conversation.

"Is it possible for a werewolf to get infected?"

Caspian blinked at the sudden question.

"Huh?"

He quickly recovered. "So far we haven't received any report of an infected wolf. That might simply be because no werewolf has been bitten yet. Our research has been focused on finding a cure rather than testing cross-infection between species."

Elijah pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"That might become a problem."

Caspian frowned slightly. "How so?"

"Some alphas are still unhappy with my decision to send their wolves to assist the humans," Elijah replied. "They believe I'm allowing President Roy to boss them around when wolves are supposed to be an independent nation under the Accords."

"Yes, independent," Caspian said carefully, "but still accountable to human authority."

That was the foundation of the Accords.

After the Great War between wolves and humans, the treaty had been written to maintain peace between both races. Wolves had been granted limited autonomy. They could choose their own leaders, follow their traditions, and govern their packs according to their own laws.

But complete independence had never been part of the agreement.

The wolves answered to the Alpha King. And the Alpha King ruled in cooperation with the human President.

Because the United Dorminia contained far more human territories than wolf lands, there was an unspoken understanding within the Accords: the human president ultimately held the greater sovereign authority.

It was a delicate balance.

Which was why every presidential election mattered deeply to the wolves. A fair-minded leader meant stability. A prejudiced one could make life unbearable for the packs, even with the protections written into the treaty.

At the heart of the Accords was one simple command: Wolves and humans must live in harmony.

And it was the duty of both the Alpha King and the human President to maintain that fragile peace.

Elijah stopped walking and turned to face Caspian.

"They're using that as an excuse not to help," he said coldly. "The pack alphas want the confirmation that wolves cannot be infected before they risk more of their soldiers."

His jaw tightened.

"Not to mention..." His eyes darkened. "President Roy has been getting on my nerves lately."

Caspian said nothing as Elijah continued, irritation creeping into his voice.

"He seems to have forgotten something very important. Humans are the ones in danger here, not the other way around. He should be groveling for my assistance, not making demands."

He folded his arms.

"So yes. That information could be very useful right now."

Caspian scratched the back of his head thoughtfully.

"I would look into it," he said slowly, "but we don't have an active test subject—"

"Then make one."

Elijah's voice cut through the hallway like a blade.

Caspian froze.

His eyes narrowed as the meaning dawned on him.

"You want me to infect one of my people?" he asked incredulously.

Elijah shrugged as if the matter were trivial.

"This is a research facility, and you're a pack leader. I'm sure it won't be difficult for you to find a suitable subject."

"You want me to deliberately infect one of my own wolves?" Caspian pressed, disbelief sharpening his voice.

"Oh, spare me the self-righteous speech, Caspian," Elijah replied with a dismissive wave. "You're a scientist. Don't pretend you haven't done far worse in the name of discovery."

"But even then," Caspian said, struggling to remain calm, "we're dealing with something that—"

"Dear gods," Elijah interrupted with a dramatic groan. "I cannot believe I'm saying this, but I'm beginning to miss your wife."

Caspian looked at Elijah with shock. How could he say that? Not that he blamed him.

Zara Storm had never been burdened with the same hesitation Caspian often carried. Where he weighed ethics, Zara simply acted.

Caspian had considered experimenting on werewolf tissue samples instead. But even he knew that living subjects produced far more accurate results.

Still, intentionally infecting one of his own, the thought sat poorly in his chest. It would have been easier if they had captured an already infected wolf.

Elijah seemed to sense his hesitation.

"Look at it this way," he said casually. "If werewolves are immune, then we gain valuable information and reassure the packs. A win for everyone."

He leaned slightly closer.

"And let's be honest, Caspian. This would be a controlled experiment. Pick one of the wolves from your dungeon. Conduct your tests. Then bring me the results I want."

Caspian's brows lifted slightly.

"And if werewolves can be infected?"

Elijah's expression hardened.

"Then we find the Noah boy much faster," he said flatly. "Otherwise he might very well exterminate both species."

Caspian swallowed.

As much as he hated the idea, Elijah was not entirely wrong. If wolves could fall to the infection as well, then the threat they were facing was far worse than anyone had imagined. And discovering that truth sooner rather than later might be the only chance they had to survive.

"Also you might want to conduct that experiment sooner rather than later," Elijah said.

Caspian frowned. "How soon are we talking about?"

"Haven't you gotten the memo? I have a meeting with the alphas in two days. They will want answers by then."

Caspian froze.

"Two days?" he exclaimed. "That's hardly enough time to—"

"Then I suggest you start now, Alpha Caspian." He placed a firm hand on Caspian's shoulder. "Your time is ticking."

Caspian felt the weight of the words settle in his chest. Elijah squeezed his shoulder once before letting go and turning away as if the matter had already been decided.

"Now," Elijah added, "if you would be kind enough to point me toward Patrick's cell, that would be helpful."

He paused briefly, his smile sharpening.

"If only Patrick were a werewolf," he mused. "That would have made your decision far easier, wouldn't it?"

Caspian's expression hardened. One of the wolves stationed down the corridor stepped forward as if he had been waiting for the order all along.

Caspian gestured toward him.

"Take His Majesty to Patrick's cell."

The guard bowed slightly. "Yes, Alpha."

Elijah began walking with the guard, but Caspian's voice stopped him.

"I still need him."

Elijah glanced back over his shoulder.

Caspian didn't elaborate, but the meaning was clear.

Patrick was still valuable and couldn't be killed yet.

Elijah lifted a hand in a lazy gesture.

"The man is human," he said smoothly. "He's not mine to kill. Am I wrong?"

Yet the menacing smile on his face told a very different story.

Then he turned and followed the guard down the corridor toward Patrick's cell.

"Here," the guard said, unlocking the door and pushing it open.

Elijah stepped inside without hesitation. The heavy door shut behind him with a dull metallic thud.

Patrick sat up immediately the moment Elijah entered. His expression turned wary at once. The chains that had restrained him earlier were gone now that he was back in his cell, but the collar still rested tightly around his neck.

He watched Elijah carefully.

Elijah, meanwhile, seemed in no rush. He strolled further into the room, glancing around casually as if inspecting a guest chamber rather than a prison cell.

And truth be told, it barely resembled one.

The room held a comfortable bed, a small desk, and a chair. In one corner stood a compact cubicle that served as both toilet and shower. Patrick had been treated well here, all things considered.

Elijah clasped his hands behind his back.

"Hello, old friend. I'd say you're having quite the comfortable stay."

Patrick's eyes hardened.

"Have you come to kill me?"

Elijah laughed.

"Not yet."

He stepped closer, his voice lowering.

"But I will."

Patrick gulped nervously.

"I won't tell you when," Elijah continued almost playfully. "Think of it as my own little game. I'll keep you on your toes while you wonder every day whether this is the day you finally die."

Patrick studied him for a long moment.

Then quietly, he said, "I'm sorry."

Elijah blinked in surprise. Then he burst into laughter.

"Is that supposed to change my mind about you?"

Patrick shook his head.

"I didn't mean for it to go this far."

"Oh yes," Elijah replied mockingly. "You only meant to destroy the wolves. Funny how karma works, isn't it?"

Silence stretched between them. Then Elijah's expression darkened.

"I trusted you," he said, his voice tightening with anger. "I placed the fate of my entire kind in your hands."

Patrick scoffed.

"Oh please. You're no different from me, Elijah," Patrick continued bluntly. "You only wanted a way to control the Cardinal Alphas. Don't pretend otherwise. It's not my fault your little plan blew up in your face. So for once, take responsibility for your own mistake."

Elijah's face twisted with rage, murder blazing in his eyes.

"How dare—"

At that exact moment, his phone rang.

He would have ignored it, but the caller ID read Christian.

The rage on his face slowly cooled as he answered.

"What?" he barked into the phone.

"We have a problem."

He listened in silence while Christian briefed him. By the time the call ended, Elijah's expression had turned dark and calculating.

He looked back at Patrick, deciding he simply wasn't worth the effort. Without another word, Elijah turned and walked out of the cell.

The moment he stepped into the corridor, Elijah pulled out his phone again and dialed another number.

His nephew. Micah.

That little bug had better not hold out on him this time.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 800: Hunting Expedition[1,647 words]

Chapter 800: Hunting Expedition

"Hello, Your Majesty," Micah said, trying to sound as casual as possible.

"Micah."

Elijah's voice on the other end was oddly calm, but there was a sharp edge beneath it.

"I hear something interesting is happening at the academy. Care to brief me on it?"

Micah's eyes shifted to Adele. She was practically holding her breath, her expression tight with anxiety.

He turned slightly away and answered.

"There was a small mishap with the ward," Micah said evenly. "But the witch is already working on restoring it. It should only take some time. Everything is under control."

A brief silence followed.

"Is that all?" Elijah asked.

There was expectation in his voice.

Micah paused.

He knew his uncle well enough to recognize when he was being tested.

Finally, he replied, "That is all you need to know for now."

Another pause.

Then Elijah chuckled in a way that sat uncomfortable with Micah .

"Alright then." Amusement lingered in his voice. "I trust you'll take good care of my young wolves. I'll be in Aster City soon. Until then, nephew."

The line went dead.

Micah remained standing there, ramrod straight. The tension in his shoulders eased slightly, but relief never came.

"Elijah knows something."

Adele's head snapped up.

"He knows you're keeping the witch from him," she said immediately.

Then her brows furrowed as another realization struck.

"But if that's the case, that means he knows you know Angus is alive."

Micah's lips twisted into a wry smile.

"I haven't opened my mouth, have I?"

"Oh shit."

Adele's eyes widened as another thought hit her.

"He knows you're the Oracle too."

Micah shrugged lightly.

"Well, that's hardly a secret around here anymore, is it?"

He ran a hand through his hair before continuing.

"Why do you think he offered me Lunar Academy to run in the first place? He wants me to see it as my little playground. That way he keeps me contained here, replaces Jameson with a wolf in charge, and strengthens pack influence inside the academy."

His tone turned more cynical.

"In case you haven't noticed, Elijah—just like Angus—believes in wolf supremacy. The only difference is that he isn't running some supernatural baby-farming program."

The sarcasm in his voice was unmistakable.

Adele muttered quietly, as if committing the thought to memory. "So as long as you keep his secret and act like his loyal soldier, he'll leave you alone."

"Pretty much," Micah admitted with a small shrug. "Although I doubt we'll see eye to eye on the witch situation this time."

He hesitated before adding more gently, his gaze tender.

"So please... consider moving to hell if push comes to shove."

Adele swallowed.

She didn't want to believe Elijah would go that far. That he would actually try to harm her just to force Micah into obedience.

But then again...

What kind of family had the Moon Goddess mated her into?

Her mate's sister wanted to kill her.

Her mate's uncle probably intended to harm her.

Her mate's demon brother—sort of—had tried to forcibly marry her off before.

And his demon father wanted to steal her child.

Adele shuddered.

Yep.

Her life was fantastic.

Just absolutely fantastic.

She glanced up at Micah again, suddenly wondering if the Moon Goddess had a strange sense of humor when it came to matchmaking.

Adele was quiet for a long moment. Micah didn't rush her. He had already asked more of her than he liked. Sending her back to hell was the last thing he wanted to do. But if Elijah and his devious sister Ziva decided to push things further, he needed a way to keep her safe.

Finally, Adele sighed.

"I'll consider it."

It wasn't a yes but it was something. And right now, that was enough.

Micah's shoulders relaxed slightly. A small breath left him, relief softening the tension in his face. He leaned forward and pressed a gentle kiss against her forehead.

"Thank you."

Before Adele could respond, his phone rang.

Micah pulled it from his pocket and answered.

"Hello."

He listened to the voice on the other end, his expression shifting from alert to thoughtful, and then he nodded once.

"Okay."

The call ended.

Adele watched him closely. "Who was it?"

"Witches," Micah said. "The ones Samantha requested to help rebuild the ward. They've arrived."

He slipped the phone back into his pocket.

"I have to go."

Then he looked at her again, his gaze searching her face.

"Do you still need to rest?" he asked. "I can ask one of the teachers to stay with you."

Adele shook her head.

"No. I'm fine."

She slid off the bed with ease, showing she was strong enough.

"I need to go back to the students," she said. "Midnight is a long time away, Micah. And I don't like the idea of what could happen before then."

She stepped closer and leaned in, pressing a brief kiss against his lips.

"Be careful out there," she murmured. "I'm not ready to be mate-less."

Micah smiled.

"And you won't be."

He kissed her once more before turning toward the door.

Moments later, Micah arrived back at the school gate.

Three unfamiliar figures stood near the entrance. The newly arrived witches. Two blondes and a brunette.

Samantha was already speaking with them when Micah approached and extended his hand politely.

"Hello. I'm Micah."

But none of them moved to shake it.

Instead, the witches stared at his outstretched hand as if it were something dangerous.

One of the blonde witches spoke first.

"We know what you are, Son of Angus."

"Oh." Micah blinked in surprise. He guessed no shaking then.

The witch continued coldly, "We'll do our work at midnight. After that, this alliance is over."

Micah pursed his lips. "If you say so." He dusted his hand lightly and slipped it back into the pocket of his jeans.

Whatever hostility they had shown him seemed to vanish once they turned their attention back to Samantha. The four witches moved aside together, immediately discussing the ward in hushed, focused voices.

Micah watched them for a moment. It wasn't just him they were avoiding. The witches kept their distance from the wolves entirely.

Across the courtyard, some of the wolves leaned against the walls with crossed arms watching the newcomers cautiously.

The tension between the two groups was obvious. Wolves and witches had never shared a friendly history. And tonight unfortunately, they had to work together.

Fate does have a way of bringing enemies together.

Ignoring the witches, Micah moved through the courtyard, stopping beside each cluster of wolves checking and testing their weapons.

"Careful with that," Micah said, reaching out to correct the grip of one of the younger wolves holding a crossbolt. "Your finger stays off the trigger unless you're ready to fire. The last thing we need tonight is one of you idiots shooting your own packmate in the face."

A few of the wolves snorted.

Micah grabbed one of the crossbolts from the table and held it up again.

"This latch right here controls the tension. Pull it back until you hear the click. If it jams, don't force it or the bolt will misfire."

Before he could continue, Jeremiah, Asher's beta, said with a smirk.

"You really don't need to fuss over us, Micah."

Micah glanced at him.

Jeremiah folded his arms confidently. "I don't know about the other packs, but wolves of the West Pack have been trained with weapons since the day we could walk."

The words barely left his mouth before Oscar, Griffin's beta, laughed loudly.

"Oh really?" Oscar said sarcastically. "The day you could walk?"

He leaned back against the table, grinning.

"That's pretty late, isn't it? In our pack we're taught how to fight while we're still babes in our mother's arms."

A chorus of wolf whistles and cheers erupted from pack members.

Jeremiah's face darkened immediately.

Abel, Roman's beta, stood nearby with his arms crossed, watching the exchange like a spectator at a boxing match. He didn't bother intervening. Let the two idiots go at it.

Jeremiah stepped forward, glaring at Oscar.

"Oh yeah?" he snapped. "Then why don't we test that out right now?"

Oscar pushed himself off the table.

"Gladly."

Before either of them could move, Commander Malakai stepped between them like a wall.

"No one is testing anything." His voice cut through the courtyard instantly. "You can rest assured that if it weren't for this situation, none of you would have a weapon in your hand until you graduated from this academy."

He pointed a stern finger at both of them.

"And for very good reasons."

Micah rubbed his temples.

Teenagers.

Give them one opportunity and suddenly they were ready to tear each other apart.

He stepped forward, his voice dropping into a command.

"Listen carefully. Tonight you follow instructions. If even one of you steps out of line—" His gaze swept across the wolves. "—I don't care if we're being overrun by a thousand zombies. You're stepping back immediately."

Silence followed.

"Am I clear?"

The response came in a collection of reluctant grumbles and nods.

Micah knew they understood.

Abel broke the quiet.

"So," he said casually, spinning a knife between his fingers, "when exactly are the zombies coming out so we can have some fun?"

Ajax, one of the wolves who had taken over the position of Finn, Alaric's beta, turned toward him with a look of disbelief.

"Do you guys do anything in your house besides sleep, party, and screw?" He asked. "Haven't you studied that zombies move more efficiently at night?"

Abel shrugged.

"Not in the movies I've watched."

A few of the wolves laughed.

Micah ignored their bickering and moved toward the edge of the courtyard to rest. He needed his strength.

Minutes felt like hours as the wolves waited in tense anticipation. And then, night finally fell.