

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 801: Crisis In Lunaris[1,535 words]

Chapter 801: Crisis In Lunaris

"Be on alert." Those were the words Micah told the young wolves after night fell.

Floodlights lined the courtyard and the surrounding walls, casting long beams across the grounds. Wolves could see in the dark, but a little light never hurt.

Nearby, the witches had already begun their ritual, drawing ancient symbols into the soil with salt. Symbols Micah recognized instantly. Witches dealt in the occult, and demons were practically family.

The main spell would not begin until a few minutes to midnight. Which meant the witches' safety was also a priority.

Once they began the ritual, nothing would be able to penetrate their circle. The magic would seal around them until the barrier was fully restored.

Micah couldn't help but rack his brain.

Why hadn't Mary seen this attack coming?

She had practically drawn an entire storybook across the walls with her prophecies, yet he hadn't recognized anything connected to Lunaris Academy.

He and Adele were still trying to decipher the visions she had left behind.

Micah could only hope this incident wasn't serious enough to appear in one of Mary's prophecies. Perhaps that was why she had never given them even the slightest hint.

Still, the thought nagged at him.

Time dragged slowly until sometime around ten o'clock, Micah heard a rustle.

Well, not just him. Every wolf in the courtyard heard it. Conversations stopped instantly as they all straightened.

Something was out there.

The air was so tight with tension that no one moved. Even the witches had gone still, holding their breath. The courtyard, which had been buzzing moments earlier, now sat in complete silence.

Every wolf was listening.

Then it appeared right at the cobbled pathway leading to the academy gates.

A lone figure stumbled into the pale wash of the floodlights.

The zombie moved with an unnatural gait, its body twitching in stiff, jerky motions as though its limbs no longer remembered how to work together. One leg dragged slightly behind the other, scraping against the stones with a dry, uneven sound.

Its head tilted at an odd angle while a wet gurgling noise escaped its throat.

The creature looked almost human at first glance. But the closer it staggered into the light, the more obvious the corruption became. Its skin had turned a sickly gray, stretched tightly over hollow cheeks. Dark veins crawled beneath the surface like rotting roots and blood crusted the corners of its mouth.

Its eyes were milky and empty. And it looked hungry.

The creature lurched forward again, sniffing the air like a predator that had caught the scent of prey.

Behind Micah, he could hear the students trying to act brave, but he could still feel the nerves rippling through them like a silent wave.

This was the first time most of them were seeing a zombie up close. Watching them on news broadcasts and shaky videos online was one thing but standing a few meters away from one was something entirely different.

Micah kept his eyes on the approaching creature.

Elijah's strategy was working, whether anyone liked it or not. Sending wolves out to hunt the infected had slowed the spread.

But the problem remained.

This was a virus. For every zombie destroyed, another seemed to appear somewhere else. And Aster City was the capital of the United Dorminia. It housed a massive population which meant an endless supply of new hosts if the infection continued spreading.

Fortunately, the zombie ahead of them was an easy target. It moved quite too slowly, almost killing them with anticipation.

Oh for crying out loud.

Micah stepped forward slightly, ready to end this misery when a hand landed on his shoulder.

"Let me handle this," Commander Malakai said calmly.

Micah stepped aside.

Malakai moved forward with the quiet confidence of someone who had done this many times before. He lifted the long rifle resting against his shoulder and settled it against his cheek.

The barrel pointed directly at the creature's head. As the zombie took another dragging step, Malakai exhaled slowly and pulled the trigger.

The crack of the rifle split through the courtyard like thunder and the zombie's head snapped violently to the side.

For a brief second it remained standing.

Then its body collapsed, dropping onto the cobblestones with a heavy, lifeless thud.

Dead.

For a heartbeat, the courtyard remained silent then cheers exploded through the night as the tension finally broke. Some of the students rushed forward, slapping Malakai on the back while others whooped loudly in excitement.

The fear that had been gnawing at them moments ago seemed to vanish as hope rushed in to replace it.

If it was this easy, then maybe the creatures weren't as terrifying as everyone feared.

If only they knew.

Meanwhile, inside the ballroom, the sharp crack of the gunshot echoed across the academy grounds. The reaction was immediate.

Several of the human students screamed, panic rippling through the crowded room like a spark hitting dry grass.

Chairs scraped across the polished floor as students shot to their feet, some already looking toward the exits.

"The zombies are here!" one boy shouted.

A wave of terrified murmurs followed.

Adele immediately stepped forward, raising her voice above the chaos.

"Calm down!" she shouted. "Everything is under control!"

But fear had already taken root, pushing several students over the edge.

"I said calm down!" Adele barked again, uncomfortable with the rising tension.

But the words barely reached them. Not even Jameson could calm them, not when she herself looked like a chicken about to be sacrificed for Thanksgiving.

"I can't stay here!" one girl cried suddenly. "I need to get out of here!"

Before Adele could stop her, the girl rushed toward the door.

Adele's eyes widened.

"Hey—!"

She lunged forward and tackled the girl to the ground before she could reach the exit. The two crashed onto the floor in a tangle of limbs.

The girl struggled beneath her, shrieking wildly.

"Let me go! I need to go to my mother! she screamed.

Adele cursed the day she stepped into this school. Stopping spoiled kids from ending up as zombie food was definitely not the way she forsee her future!

But the girl's words spread through the room like poison and the fragile calm shattered instantly.

Everything happened in the blink of an eye.

Suddenly teachers were moving everywhere, grabbing students who were trying to bolt for the doors.

"Lock the door!"

"Stop them!"

"Stay back!"

"Do not let them get to that door!"

Professor Alwen had two girls pinned against the wall while another teacher wrestled a screaming student away from the exit.

However, the population of the students were more than the teachers. It was too late. A few of the more foolish students slipped through the chaos and managed to reach the doors, shoving them open.

Once they left, the others lost what little sense they had left. After all, no one wanted to be left behind. Hence several more students rushed after them.

Within seconds a handful of the most empty-headed teenagers had already fled into the night.

Adele stared at the open doors in disbelief.

Just like that, she had a full-blown crisis on her hands.

Micah knew something was wrong the moment he heard the shrill screams. His head snapped toward the academy building, and what he saw made his stomach drop.

Students were running toward them.

Humans.

Dozens of them.

"Oh, you've got to be kidding me," Micah cursed under his breath.

Were these kids fucking out of their minds?!

The courtyard that had been so carefully secured moments earlier was now being flooded by panicked teenagers pouring out of the doors like a broken dam.

Some of them were already being intercepted by the wolves stationed closer to the building. A few unlucky escapees were grabbed mid-run and dragged back kicking and screaming.

"What the hell are they doing?" Micah muttered.

Malakai and Coach Harrington both stared at the chaos with the same stunned disbelief.

"These children have lost their minds," Harrington growled.

"Humans," Malakai muttered under his breath with exasperation.

As if the situation wasn't already bad enough, Micah's ears twitched.

Another wet dragging sound drifted from the darkness beyond the academy gates.

His expression hardened.

Not just one. More zombies were approaching.

What perfect timing.

Micah didn't waste another second.

"You two handle those idiots," he said sharply. "I'll deal with the zombies."

He cocked his rifle, pulling the bolt back with a sharp metallic click as he moved forward.

At once Malakai and Harrington sprang into action.

Malakai stepped ahead of the line of wolves guarding the courtyard and raised his voice like a battlefield commander.

"Catch the humans and put them back in their pen!" Harrington shouted, pointing toward the academy doors.

"I repeat, do not let come any closer!" he barked, "Move! Move! Move!"

The wolves moved into action at once.

Meanwhile Micah stepped toward the edge of the courtyard, rifle raised, his eyes locked on the darkness beyond the lights.

The first zombie had been easy. But the sounds creeping closer now told a very different story.

After this nightmare was over, he was so done with Lunar Academy.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 802: Magical Residue[1,029 words]

Chapter 802: Magical Residue

"Start the spell now!" Micah howled at the witches just as he released his bolt, the arrow striking a zombie square in the head.

There were only two ways to kill a zombie: a headshot or complete decapitation.

But even a headshot was risky.

That had been confirmed when the creature he had just shot kept walking forward, the arrow lodged deep in its skull like nothing more than an inconvenience.

Then another arrow whistled past Micah's shoulder and buried itself into the zombie's head. This time the creature dropped.

Micah turned to his side.

Jeremiah.

The boy had already reloaded his crossbolt.

Micah muttered a quick thanks before turning back toward the approaching wave of faster zombies.

Decapitation would have been faster, but they were holding the line here and Micah was no martyr. He wasn't stepping a foot beyond the gate just to make sure each corpse stayed down.

He had promised Adele he would stay alive, and he intended to keep that promise. Not that death would have been the worst outcome for him.

He was half demon. If he died, he would simply end up in hell, which was technically home. But Micah had no intention of abandoning his place in the mortal world and taking up permanent residency in hell. Not yet.

What bothered Micah most was the sheer number of zombies now approaching the academy.

It was uncanny.

Since the ward had been erected, they hadn't experienced a single attack. Not one.

And now suddenly they were everywhere.

Two possibilities ran through Micah's mind.

Either the creatures had been lurking deep in the surrounding woods, waiting. There was nothing but miles of forest around Lunar Academy. The school had been intentionally built on the outskirts of the city to provide privacy for the students.

Or...

Ziva had something to do with this.

It would not be beneath that diabolical sister of his to find a way to make everyone's life miserable after failing her mission earlier today.

And something told Micah the second option was far more likely.

And he was right.

Because what Micah did not know was that when Ziva escaped the academy—bleeding and nearly dead—she had cast a twisted spell.

Using her own blood that had spilled on the ground, she made it become a beacon. It called the zombies, drawing them toward Lunar Academy.

Then she bound the spell to activate at nightfall. Ziva had believed she was going to die earlier. And if she did, she intended for everyone at Lunar Academy to go down with her.

And though she hadn't died after all, Ziva had never bothered reversing the spell.

What was done was done.

Micah suddenly realized something. The witches weren't chanting.

His eyes blazed as he turned toward them.

"Why don't I hear spells filling my ears right now?" he shouted.

Samantha barked back immediately. "It's not midnight yet, Micah! It's barely eleven!"

But Micah wasn't having any of it.

He growled, "Unless you want to end up as zombie food, then I suggest you start doing something right now! I don't care if you have to manipulate time itself!"

The look in his eyes must have convinced them.

The witches exchanged uneasy glances as it dawned on them that they were just as trapped in this mess as everyone else.

Meanwhile the battle continued.

The wolves were holding the line, but the zombies kept coming. The bodies were beginning to pile up along the cobbled path outside the gate.

Then one of the witches suddenly spoke.

"Wait, maybe we can draw power from the zombies."

She pointed toward the growing pile of corpses.

Samantha frowned as the idea formed in her mind.

"Violent deaths release powerful magical residue," she murmured. "We might be able to tap into it."

"But they're already dead," another blonde witch said uncertainly.

"Not completely," the first witch argued. "There's still lingering energy."

Micah, already losing patience, shouted, "Enough chitchatting! Get those lips moving already!"

On any other day the witches might have bristled at the command.

Tonight they didn't argue.

The four of them joined hands and began chanting.

The strange words rose into the night air, low and rhythmic.

Seeing them finally act renewed Micah's focus. He fired another bolt into a zombie's skull, returning to Malakai and Harrington side.

Apparently the human situation had been handled.

Together the three of them held the line.

Behind them, the witches' chanting grew louder and louder.

Then suddenly, the pile of zombie corpses ahead of them burst into flame.

Everyone froze.

"I think it's working," Micah whispered.

"Step back!" he ordered.

Immediately the wolves retreated several steps from the gate.

A pale white mist began to rise from the ground, spreading outward before curving upward like an invisible dome forming around the academy.

Slowly it climbed higher and higher until the entire school was enclosed. A humming sound filled the air.

The ward had returned.

"Is it strong enough though?" Harrington asked skeptically.

Samantha approached them with a confident swagger.

"Five times stronger than the last one," she said. "Not even the most powerful witch could break this."

As if to test her claim, a zombie suddenly lunged at the barrier.

The moment it touched the invisible wall—

CRACK!

A violent surge of electricity exploded across its body. The creature convulsed wildly, its teeth gnashing as its limbs trembled uncontrollably before it collapsed into a smoking heap.

"Damn," one of the wolves muttered, fascinated.

Samantha smirked. "You might want to put up a voltage warning sign."

Micah let out a long breath. That was the least of his worries — at the moment though.

"Micah!"

He turned just in time for Adele to rush forward and throw herself into his arms.

He caught her instinctively.

For a moment they simply held each other.

Then they broke apart just enough to kiss. The kiss was rough, desperate and pure relief that neither of them had died tonight.

Someone cleared their throat.

Micah looked over with annoyance.

One of the blonde witches stood there, arms crossed.

"So," she said dryly, "where exactly are we supposed to spend the night?"

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 803: Sentient Power[1,093 words]

Chapter 803: Sentient Power

Violet and her mates stepped onto the training ground, the wide field stretching beneath the pale glow of the Fae sky.

Annequin was already there.

She stood at the center of the field like a statue carved from ice, arms folded across her chest, lips pressed into a tight line. The moment she saw them, her eyes narrowed and a scowl deepened across her face.

"You're late."

Violet frowned. "It's only two minutes."

Annequin's expression didn't soften in the slightest. If anything, it hardened.

"I do not joke with my time," she said coldly. The air around her seemed to thicken with authority. "If I volunteer my time and energy to teach you how to manage your powers, then you will take it seriously."

She took a step forward, her gaze burning into Violet.

"You have a competition ahead of you and you are a ticking time bomb, Violet Purple. The least you could do is show a little dedication."

The words struck harder than Violet expected. For a moment she opened her mouth to snap back, but the protest died before it could form. Deep down she knew Annequin wasn't wrong.

She had been acting like a brat.

Violet lowered her gaze slightly. She murmured. "It won't happen again."

Annequin didn't answer. Instead she stared at Violet with a look so intense it almost felt like a physical weight pressing down on her. Then she said flatly, "Run laps around the field. Give me twenty. Now."

"What?"

For a brief second Violet wondered if this was Annequin's petty revenge. After all, the two of them were far from friends despite this strange training arrangement.

Annequin raised a brow.

"Need to get your blood pumping," she said lazily. "Rouse your powers. It won't hurt to see how you perform physically either."

There was a hint of mockery in her voice.

Violet rolled her eyes.

"Fine."

Without another word she took off across the field.

The morning air whipped through her hair as she ran, boots pounding against the soft grass. But she knew the moment Annequin strolled over to her mates who were watching from the sidelines.

"Rough night?" she asked, making conversation.

None of the cardinal alphas answered her.

Pride swelled in Violet's heart, relishing Annequin's disappointment a little.

Nonetheless, Violet kept running. As she circled the massive grounds, her eyes caught the damage scattered from a section of the field to the palace landscape.

Entire patches of vegetation had been reduced to ash and sections of structures had collapsed. It was as if she had sucked the life out of them. Although the buildings had collapsed out of the force that had been created when Annequin's powers collided with hers. But it didn't eliminate the fact that this happened all because she had lost control of her power.

Even early that morning, Fae workers were already moving through the ruins, their magic weaving through the air as they rebuilt what had been destroyed, restoring the grounds with remarkable speed.

It was amazing but the sight still made Violet's chest tighten. And that was exactly why she was here. Even if training with Annequin meant enduring her sharp tongue and unbearable attitude.

Violet pushed herself faster.

Lap after lap, her legs carried her around the field with effortless rhythm. Her lungs barely burned and her muscles didn't ache the way they used to.

When she had lived in the human realm, her powers had been suppressed, but here, everything was different. The magic in the Fae realm was thick in the air, almost tangible.

The Fae breathed magic the same way humans breathed oxygen. And now that Violet had awakened her true heritage, that power flowed through her veins like wildfire.

By the time she finished the twentieth lap and slowed to a stop, her breathing was only slightly elevated. She wiped a strand of hair from her face and walked back toward the group.

Annequin watched her approach, her sharp eyes scanning Violet carefully, taking note of everything. When Violet stopped in front of her, Annequin tilted her head slightly.

"How do you feel?"

Violet wasn't sure whether the question was sincere or simply another way for Annequin to put her down. Either way, she lifted her chin with pride.

"Excellent," she said. "It didn't even feel like I broke a sweat."

Annequin nodded.

"Good. Hold onto that feeling because I want you to call out your powers now."

She waved her hand dismissively. "You know. The diabolical one."

The reaction was immediate.

Not just Violet, but the Cardinal Alphas stiffened. Even the word itself seemed to darken the air between them.

Violet hesitated. She had known this moment would come eventually. Annequin had been very clear about it yesterday. If Violet wanted to learn control, she would have to face the darkness inside her.

Still, the memory of what had happened yesterday was fresh and everything was going too fast.

She crossed her arms. "Isn't there something else you could teach me first? You know, before I unleash that thing again?"

Roman spoke up from the side.

"You know she's not wrong about that. All you asked her to do was run a few laps, and now you want her to bring out the big guns. I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm a little worried about your teaching methods." He added, "And I certainly can't be the only one." His gaze shifted toward the other Alphas, or more precisely Asher. The brains.

But Asher didn't respond. His face was tight with thought, watching Annequin like he was trying to solve a puzzle.

"Well," Annequin started, "since none of you are talking to me, I took it upon myself to do some research. And I discovered something interesting."

Annequin continued casually. "This isn't the first time Violet used that particular power. In fact, she once used it to save your life. Didn't she?" her gaze pinned Alaric on the spot.

Understanding struck Alaric instantly. His eyes widened.

"The attack on the North Pack..."

He remembered the destruction, and how Violet's strange power had swallowed the damage without harming any of them.

His gaze snapped back to Annequin.

"How did you—"

Annequin lifted a hand, cutting him off with a smug smile.

"Doesn't matter."

Then she turned back to Violet.

"What I'm trying to say," she continued calmly, "is that the lovely Princess of the Free Fae has a sentient power. A happy Violet equals hero princess. But an overwhelmed Violet..." She shrugged.

"Means bye-bye, everyone."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 804: Annequin's Secret[1,513 words]

Chapter 804: Annequin's Secret

Annequin went on,

"When the queen thought she was awakening Violet's power, all she really did was compress it into that dome. Imagine trying to force a beast through a tunnel meant for rabbits. It doesn't calm down. Of course it would go..." She didn't finish. Instead, the Fae spread her hands outward, mimicking an explosion, a dangerous thrill in her eyes.

The queen of Astaria continued, "Her powers wanted a release from their cage. Violet was overwhelmed all at once, and she panicked. Her unmaking ability—" she suddenly stopped and huffed. "Can we just call her power the Null or the Devourer or something? 'Unmaking' is quite a mouthful, don't you think?"

Violet lifted a brow. She was going to kill this bitch very soon.

"Atomization," Alaric said.

"What?" Annequin blinked, clearly lost.

"If we're going to give it a name, that would be the accurate one."

"Dude," Roman said flatly. "That sounds way worse."

"Can we go back to the story, please?" Griffin cut in. "Or am I the only one being told Violet's powers are sentient?"

Annequin took the cue.

"So she—"

"Lost control," Asher cut her off.

His voice was calm but edged with challenge as he continued, "Magic is an extension of one's will. How can you be certain her power is sentient simply because she spared a few people from being obliterated in the past?"

His gaze locked onto hers.

"With enough training and discipline, one can manipulate and direct their power to certain degrees."

No one else spoke, watching the exchange with quiet interest.

"You're right," Annequin conceded. "But you forgot one thing." Her eyes gleamed. "I have a sentient ability too and we know how to recognize one another. After all, no amount of discipline could have controlled that much destruction during the North Pack..." She trailed off mid-sentence as something clicked.

A slow, unsettling smile spread across Annequin's face. Her eyes slid back to Asher.

"But of course, you already know that, don't you, Asher Nightshade? You just wanted to know how I knew about the North Pack incident."

Oh. Everyone stared at Asher. That was a trick question.

Asher's gaze hardened.

"How do you know about the North pack incident, Annequin, Queen of Astaria?"

A subtle tension rippled through the training grounds. Even the fresh morning air that drifted across the field seemed to pause. The Cardinal Alphas had gone taut, ready for a fight.

Annequin watched them with lazy amusement.

Then, slowly, like peeling off a mask, her expression changed. A fiendish smirk curved across her lips.

"You certainly didn't think you were the only one with mental abilities, Asher Nightshade. You'd be surprised how easy it is to sift through a wolf's memory."

Mental ability?

Violet and the guys stared at one another, horrified. You have to be kidding.

Annequin went on, her tone taunting.

"This is the Fae realm. Has no one taught you lesson one-oh-one of visiting these lands? Always put up a mental shield." Her voice dipped, playful and dangerous. "We are tricky creatures after all."

No one saw Violet move. One second she was standing beside the others and the next, her fist slammed straight into Annequin's face.

Annequin staggered back a step, more from surprise than pain.

"How dare you!" Violet snarled.

Before anyone could react, Violet swung again, landing a second punch that snapped Annequin's head sideways.

"You went through their fucking minds?!"

Her voice shook with rage. The air around her trembled dangerously, magic stirring beneath her skin. She would have done far worse, but Griffin moved faster.

He stepped in behind her, wrapping his arms around her waist and hauling her back before she could launch herself again.

"Calm down, Violet," Griffin said firmly, holding her against his chest.

Violet did calm down. At least physically. But inside, she was still burning.

Annequin straightened slowly, wiping a trace of blood from the corner of her lip.

Then, to everyone's surprise, she laughed.

"Oh, come on, If I didn't want you to know about my mental ability, do you really think I would have mentioned the North pack in the first place?"

That made them pause.

So she had revealed it intentionally.

Alaric crossed his arms, his tone dry.

"So we should thank you for revealing that you've been strolling through my memories without my permission."

Annequin tilted her head.

"Oh, not just yours, darling."

She pointed casually at Griffin and Roman.

"All of yours."

Then her gaze slid to Asher.

"Except his, of course.. He would have figured it out immediately. Even then I had to be careful so he wouldn't suspect me."

She said it as casually as if she hadn't just confessed to mentally violating them.

Annequin dusted off her sleeve.

"You boys should be careful about how openly you leave your minds wandering in the Fae realm. The Free Fae like to claim they're benevolent. But make no mistake." Her eyes glinted. "Every Fae is capable of evil."

Roman's lip curled, a low growl rumbling in his throat.

"Why are you telling us this?" he demanded. "You just admitted to taking a trip through my head and I don't like that."

And yes, he looked one second away from tearing into her.

Beside him, Violet's voice came out dangerously quiet.

"Why are we still talking?" Her eyes flashed with Thalia's fury. "I should just kill her already."

How dare this bitch invade her mates' minds.

Mine.

Violet's fingers curled into claws.

She would rip Annequin's throat out.

Annequin raised both hands lazily.

"It's actually a peace offering."

The words left everyone surprised.

"I know we didn't exactly start on the right foot, but I'm willing to start over."

"Not happening," Asher said flatly.

His eyes were cold.

"I don't trust you."

He informed Violet.

"I'll speak to the queen. She's leaving the Free Fae today."

"Then you'll have no one to train Violet." Annequin argued.

"No need," Asher replied. "You already told me her powers are sentient. I'll take it up from there."

"Can you really?"

Asher's brows drew together.

"You are her mates. That means she cannot harm you and that puts her training at a standstill." Her eyes slid to Violet. "She needs to learn how to control that Unmaking ability. And for that, she needs to be pushed."

She looked back at the Alphas.

"But since she can't harm you as her mates, how exactly is she supposed to learn?"

Understanding dawned across Alaric's face.

"That's why you wanted us here," he said slowly. "We were supposed to be your test subjects."

Annequin shrugged.

"Who else would volunteer? The entire realm is terrified of the princess."

Violet snarled.

"Don't listen to her."

Her voice burned with stubborn determination.

"We'll find another way to train me."

Her glare locked onto Annequin.

"She's leaving today."

"Oh, you don't want to do that." Annequin said, though there was a strange tension in her voice.

Violet blinked at her.

"Excuse me?"

She stared at Annequin as if the Fae had suddenly lost her mind.

"What makes you think I won't?" Violet challenged, folding her arms as she looked at her expectantly.

Annequin didn't answer. Her silence stretched just long enough.

Violet's lips curled into a wicked smirk.

"Thought as much."

Satisfied, she turned to leave. She had barely taken a single step when—

"Please!"

Violet stopped so abruptly the sand shifted beneath her boot. Her brows shot straight to her hairline.

Did she just hear... please?

Slowly, she turned back.

Annequin stood where she had been, but the smug confidence that usually dripped from her expression was gone. In its place was something far less comfortable.

Anxiety.

Violet stared at her.

"What did you just say?"

Annequin made a low, irritated sound in the back of her throat, like the word itself tasted bitter. Begging clearly didn't suit her.

She looked like she'd rather swallow glass.

Finally she muttered through clenched teeth, "I said... please."

Violet and Asher exchanged a look. Oh, something was very wrong. Annequin had far too much pride for this. The spoiled queen practically breathed arrogance.

For her to beg?

No.

They were missing something.

Asher stepped forward, his voice careful.

"So why can't she kick you out of here?"

Annequin groaned, dragging a hand down her face.

"Fine," she snapped. "You want the truth? Here it is."

She looked away for a moment before forcing the words out.

"I can't leave because I have nowhere else to go."

Violet scoffed immediately.

"Oh please, that's not the truth."

She gestured at Annequin incredulously.

"You're the Queen of Astaria. You said it yourself."

The boys looked just as confused.

Annequin sighed heavily, like the admission physically hurt.

Then she muttered,

"I was the Queen of Astaria."

Her eyes flicked back to them.

"I'm exiled."

Silence fell over the training grounds.

"My father kicked me out of his kingdom."

She crossed her arms, clearly hating every second of this conversation. "So yeah, there you have it."

Violet's jaw slowly dropped open.

What in the Fae...

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 805: Stay In The Free Fae Realm[1,134 words]

Chapter 805: Stay In The Free Fae Realm

"All I did was for the prosperity of Astaria," Annequin began, pacing now as her voice rose with indignation. "Even though every single citizen there hated my ass..."

Violet and the Cardinal Alphas stood silently, watching as Annequin ranted with a fervor that felt wildly out of character compared to the smug Fae they had met earlier.

"What did I even do wrong?" Annequin demanded, throwing her hands into the air. "Perhaps I imprisoned a few council members who insulted my dear family. And yes, I may have turned their relatives into peasants."

She waved a hand dismissively.

"Okay, maybe I also ordered a statue or two built in my honor. But the point is I made Astaria the stronghold it is today!"

Her chest heaved with pride.

"I eliminated every threat that dared to suggest my family wasn't worthy of ruling Astaria. While my parents were busy fulfilling their sacred duty of replenishing the Dark Fae population, I was the one holding the kingdom together."

She scoffed bitterly.

"And what did they call me in return? Heartless. Entitled. A spoiled brat rotten to the core."

Annequin laughed incredulously.

"Rotten? Can you believe that?"

"Oh, I certainly believe that," Violet said flatly.

Annequin shot her a glare but continued anyway.

"Regardless," she said stiffly, "my father banished me. Told me to go learn what it means to be a leader." Her voice dropped mockingly as she quoted him.

"Do not return without a mate."

She rolled her eyes.

"And just to make matters worse, he ordered Uncle Zal not to offer me sanctuary in his kingdom."

She gestured around them.

"So here I am."

Violet stared at her, stunned.

"And you thought what exactly?" she asked slowly. "That my kingdom would become your asylum?"

Annequin shrugged.

"Your mother treats me like the royalty I am. There's a roof over my head, and food for me and the loyal soldiers who followed me into exile."

"In one word," Violet said coldly, "you're a freeloader. Leeching off my family."

Annequin rolled her eyes.

"Oh please, it's not permanent. Once I find my mate, my father will welcome me back and I'll be queen again. You'd certainly want me in your favor by then, wouldn't you, Princess Violet?"

"And so you assumed I was your mate?" Asher asked.

Annequin didn't even hesitate.

"I certainly hoped you were."

She studied him openly.

"You may be a shifter, but you have the qualities of a strong consort. Someone who could rule beside me." Her lips curved. "It's quite unfortunate you belong to the spoiled princess."

Violet growled. "You might want to watch how you speak to me, considering you're nothing more than a refugee in my mother's kingdom right now."

"Your mother's kingdom," Annequin corrected pointedly. "Not yours yet, princess."

The audacity of this Fae. Violet saw red.

But before she could lose control and give Annequin a piece of her mind, the Fae queen added casually,

"But a kingdom that will soon belong to you once I help you destroy your enemies and win the Trial of Ascension."

Violet stopped.

Roman chuckled from where he leaned against a pillar. "She's a scheming one."

And yes, Violet could see that clearly.

However, there was no denying that having this bitch as an ally—not a friend—could be useful.

"Moreover..." Annequin added, looking entirely too pleased with herself, "if I end up finding my mate among the Free Fae, wouldn't that make us something like in-laws?"

Somebody kill her now.

Violet groaned inwardly.

Inside her mind, Thalia grunted.

I don't want to die before tasting our pending mate, the wolf muttered darkly, but death does sound tempting right now.

See? Even her wolf thought Annequin was an insufferable bitch.

Still, Violet forced herself to rein in her temper. She was the Princess of the Free Fae and that meant making difficult decisions.

She turned inward.

What do you think? Violet asked Thalia. *Is she trustworthy?*

Trustworthy? No, the wolf answered immediately. *Useful? Yes*.

Violet looked back at Annequin.

Even in her current situation—exiled and dependent on another kingdom—the woman didn't look the least bit rattled. She stood there like she still ruled half the world. Her confidence was a case to be studied.

Violet narrowed her eyes. "Without the Free Fae," she asked, "what's your plan B?"

Annequin shrugged.

"The human realm."

Violet blinked.

"That's where my father met my mother," Annequin continued casually. "Well, more accurately, that's where he kidnapped her. That's my plan B."

She sighed dramatically. "Unfortunately, I'd be a nobody there. Just another face among millions." Her nose wrinkled in distaste. "Not to mention I'd have to glamour myself constantly and live far below my potential. That's why the Free Fae is the far better option."

Then she smiled again, a little slyly.

"Besides, your mother is beloved by the entire kingdom. Perhaps she can teach me how to be a good leader like my papa wants me to be. And once I find my mate..." Her eyes glinted. "I'll be out of your hair."

Ugh. Violet made a face of pure disgust.

She had no idea how she would manage the arrangement between the human realm and the Fae realm in the future, but she silently prayed Annequin never found her mate here. It would be a repeating nightmare knowing there was a bond tying their lives together.

Violet turned back to her.

"I'll speak to my mates, then we'll let you know our decision."

Annequin merely shrugged.

The Cardinal Alphas caught Violet's cue immediately and followed her to the far side of the training field.

"Tell me this is a bad idea," Violet said to them under her breath.

"I can still hear you from over here," Annequin called lazily, brushing imaginary dust from the tip of her finger.

Roman rolled his eyes.

"Bitch, shut up."

Good luck to whoever ends up as her mate. She would drive the poor bastard insane.

Griffin crossed his arms thoughtfully.

"I don't trust her," he admitted. "But I can't deny it's better to have someone like her as an ally than as an enemy."

A quiet chuckle drifted across the field.

Annequin was clearly listening with her sharp Fae hearing—and enjoying every second of it.

Asher spoke next, his tone calculating.

"We don't have to like her. Or trust her, but with the dangers surrounding us right now, having a force like her could be useful. We just need precautions."

Violet understood exactly what he meant.

"She'll have to swear an oath. Lila told me Fae oaths are binding. She helps us, and we make sure she doesn't stab us in the back."

She glanced toward Annequin again.

"If that bitch plans to stay here and torture my life, she's going to earn her keep."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 806: In Three Days[1,116 words]

Chapter 806: In Three Days

Queen Seraphira knew something was up the moment the Councilors requested a private meeting. They rarely came to her like this, unannounced and together.

Now they sat around the square table in one of the palace drawing rooms, the atmosphere thick with unspoken tension.

The drawing room was one of Seraphira's quieter chambers, reserved for more intimate discussions rather than the formal court.

Tall arched windows lined the walls, draped in luxurious-threaded curtains. At the center of the room stood a polished obsidian table, its surface reflecting the golden glow of enchanted lanterns suspended above it.

Seraphira was more at ease here, and most importantly, she could not risk her citizens suspecting that she was weakening.

Rumors moved faster than magic in a kingdom.

Two guards stood like statues at the corners of the room, vigilant and unmoving. Whatever was spoken in this chamber would die within its walls.

The queen sat at the edge of the table, composed as ever, her crown resting lightly against her purple hair. Across from her, six councilors occupied the remaining seats.

There should have been ten. Seraphira noted the absence immediately. Which meant they had already discussed the matter among themselves before coming here. That was not entirely unusual—disagreements among the council were almost a tradition—but the timing of it was interesting.

If she had to guess, this had something to do with Violet. Or more precisely, the trial.

She had seen this coming after all.

A servant moved quietly between them, finishing the last of the tea service. Porcelain cups were placed neatly before each councilor, steam curling upward in delicate spirals. Seraphira waited.

The moment the servant finished pouring, she dismissed her with a gentle gesture. The girl bowed and slipped out of the room, closing the doors behind her.

Silence settled across the chamber.

Then the queen lifted her cup.

"I must say," Seraphira started, her gaze sweeping across the councilors, "this is quite a pleasant surprise."

Councilor Enock cleared his throat, drawing the attention of the room. He had clearly come prepared to lead this conversation.

"Your Majesty," He began carefully, "we have deliberated on this matter among ourselves..." His gaze shifted briefly to the other councilors seated around the table.

"And we have decided that it cannot wait any longer."

Queen Seraphira's expression was perfectly composed. "Pray tell," she said smoothly, "what matter is so urgent?"

The councilors knew she was pretending.

But she was the queen. The courtesy had to be observed.

"It concerns your daughter," he said. "Princess Violet."

Seraphira's fingers tightened almost imperceptibly around her porcelain cup.

Zion continued.

"The council has reached a decision. The Trial of Ascension will be moved forward."

He paused just long enough for the weight of his words to settle.

"The competition will begin in two days."

"What?"

The word escaped before Seraphira could fully contain it. She had expected resistance from the council eventually. But two days? That was absurd.

Her composure snapped back into place quickly, though the tension in her voice remained.

"The princess is not ready."

Councilor Enock shook his head.

"On the contrary, Your Majesty, we believe she is more than ready. Princess Violet possesses a level of power none of us have witnessed before. If there was ever doubt about her strength, yesterday's incident erased it."

Seraphira steadied her breath as anger coursed through her veins. These bastards.

"The council is meant to remain neutral," Enock continued. "But in this case, we are offering your daughter an opportunity. One might even say a free passage. We cannot wait any longer for her to take her rightful place."

Pretenders. All of them. What rightful place? They wanted to see Violet fail.

Seraphira set the cup down before she accidentally shattered it.

She said tightly. "You're wrong, yesterday's incident proved the opposite. Violet is not ready. I will not force my daughter into a situation where she could endanger herself, or every fae citizen in this kingdom."

Another councilor spoke then, his voice gentler but firm.

"Your Majesty, the Ascension of Death requires no display of power."

Seraphira looked at him sharply.

"It is a spiritual trial," he explained. "The princess must face the spirits of our ancestors and earn their approval. She will not need to use her powers at all."

They were right. Violet did not need to wield magic for the Ascension of Death. The trial was simply a communion between the heir and the ancestral spirits of the Free Fae. Power meant little before the judgment of the dead.

But Seraphira also knew something the council knew too. Once the competition began, it would not stop.

The trials would come one after another, relentlessly. Traditionally, there were a few days between each challenge so competitors could prepare themselves, recover, and plan.

Even that would not be enough for Violet.

Not when she was facing opponents who had lived centuries. Fae who had been born into magic and spent their entire lives mastering it.

They would all be competing against her daughter.

Another councilor said. "Your Majesty, tensions among the citizens are rising. The people want to know when the trial will begin."

He glanced briefly at the others.

"If we delay it any longer, they will begin to question the princess's capability. Moreover, the other competitors are waiting. At this point, it appears we are showing the princess preferential treatment."

Seraphira's jaw tightened.

They can wait for all I care! The words burned on the tip of her tongue. After all, there would be no competition without Violet. But she forced the thought down. She was a queen. She would not allow her emotions to rule her in front of the council.

Still, beneath her calm expression, Seraphira understood exactly what was happening. This had to be Baron. He was moving his pieces. And he was making sure she had no choice.

Seraphira straightened in her chair.

"Three days." She declared.

Councilor Enock immediately said, "But Your Majesty—"

"Take it or leave it," Seraphira cut him off.

Her voice carried the quiet authority of a ruler who had commanded armies.

"I am still the queen and I decide what it will be. Council or not."

Enock opened his mouth to argue further, then slowly, he closed it again. He knew not to cross the queen. Moreover, he was trying not to be suspected here.

If only he knew.

Councilor Zion exchanged a brief look with the others before nodding.

"Three days then, Your Majesty. We accept."

It was just one extra day, after all. Celeste would have to deal with that.

Seraphira did not relax.

"Now, if that is all, you may leave."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 807: Discipline[1,581 words]

Chapter 807: Discipline

Annequin had readily agreed to their deal.

Not that she had much choice.

Right now, her only usefulness lay in the fact that she was powerful. And if Violet had to choose between having Annequin as an enemy or an ally, she would reluctantly take the latter.

Still, Asher decided Annequin's services would not be needed for the rest of the day.

They had only just reached an agreement. Trust did not come that quickly. For now, they would observe her carefully.

Which meant today's training belonged to Asher.

Since Violet's powers were sentient and reacted strongly to her emotions, Asher decided to focus on one thing.

Discipline.

The training field stretched wide beneath the pale Fae sky. The earlier damage from Violet's uncontrolled outburst had already begun healing, the Fae magic slowly coaxing life back into the torn patches of earth and crushed vegetation.

"Stand here."

Asher placed his hands on Violet's shoulders and guided her to the center of the field.

"Annequin was right about one thing," he said. "You are a ticking time bomb."

Violet made a face.

"You, Violet Purple," he continued bluntly, "are as unstable as water in a storm. And your temper is worse than a sailor's."

Violet quirked a brow.

"Thanks for the compliment, love."

Asher's expression didn't falter.

"It wasn't a compliment."

Violet pressed her lips together. Right. Asher was in teacher mode.

He continued.

"Annequin's idea about pushing you wasn't entirely wrong. And I intend to do exactly that."

He took a step back.

"Call out your power."

Violet's breath stuttered.

Behind them, the others immediately reacted.

"Asher," Alaric said carefully.

Roman and Griffin shifted uncomfortably as well. Annequin wasn't here to contain anything if things went wrong.

But Asher remained calm.

"We are her mates, she cannot harm us."

He paused, his expression turning thoughtful. "Though that limits the effect somewhat."

He looked back at Violet.

"Violet is not weak. And if her power is truly sentient, then it should understand that she does not want more destruction. The more afraid you are, Violet, the more likely you are to fail."

Violet swallowed. Then she closed her eyes and drew in a deep breath.

Yesterday's demonstration might have been a disaster, but it taught her something important. She could now recognize the feeling of each of her powers.

The moment she reached inward, she felt it.

The darkness.

It rose like wildfire through her veins, the sensation almost violent, as if someone had drenched her soul in gasoline and struck a match.

The air around her began to thrum. Black tendrils of energy rushed outward her body like living smoke.

"Control."

Asher's command landed like a blade.

Instantly the growing surge halted. The darkness froze mid-rise, hovering around Violet like a suspended storm.

"Good." Asher nodded. "You're not a lost cause after all."

Inside Violet's mind, Thalia preened.

See? the wolf purred smugly. He likes when we obey.

Her tail swished happily in Violet's mental space.

Command me, daddy.

What the—

The sudden thought nearly made Violet lose control. Now was seriously not the time for Thalia to be lusting after Asher!

Asher began circling her slowly, studying the dark energy radiating from her body.

"I want you to hold this exact level of power," he said. "No more. No less. I don't care how long it takes. Or distractions you hear."

He said finally, "Now, close your eyes."

Violet's hackles rose immediately. That tone meant trouble. Asher was up to something.

She could feel it.

Still, she had agreed to the training. And despite every instinct screaming at her to question him, Violet forced herself to obey.

Slowly, she shut her eyes. The world fell into darkness.

At first, there was nothing but the quiet calm of the training field. The faint breeze brushed against her skin, carrying the scent of fresh flowers from the garden and the lingering tang of magic in the air.

Violet focused on the darkness swirling around her body. It pulsed like a living thing, waiting for instruction.

Steady, she reminded herself. Steady.

Feeling more in control, she pushed her senses outward, tapping into her Fae hearing. She could hear her mates breathing and was able to pick them out individually.

Roman's lazy inhale.

Griffin's slow, steady breaths.

Alaric's quieter rhythm.

And Asher. Always controlled.

They were all watching her.

Then suddenly—Crack.

Roman yelped.

"Aww! What was that for, man?"

Violet's heart lurched. The darkness around her flared slightly in response.

What just happened? Her mind raced.

Why was Roman in pain?

She couldn't see anything with her eyes closed. Instinct screamed at her to open them, to look, and make sure everything was fine.

But then Asher's voice from earlier echoed in her mind. No more. No less. She was flustered as it was already. So she held her ground.

Breathe. Just breathe. She told herself.

Another sharp sound echoed through the field.

"Come on, man, stop it!" Roman groaned. "That hurt!"

Violet's pulse quickened. The darkness thickened around her shoulders. Something was wrong.

Her chest tightened.

Was Asher hurting him?

Why?

Another voice broke in. Griffin this time.

"Hey! Asher! Cut it out, what the hell is wrong with you?"

A low growl followed.

Asher.

Then there was a thud. Another hit.

Violet's control wavered. Her power flickered dangerously.

Hold it together. She must hold it.

Then Alaric shouted.

"Hold him down!"

The sounds exploded all at once. Grunting.

Struggling. Bodies shifting. Roman swearing with Alaric and Griffin shouting.

It became a chaotic storm of noise Violet couldn't untangle. Her heart pounded so loudly she could barely hear herself think.

What was happening?

Were they fighting?

Was Asher seriously attacking them?

Her instincts screamed. Her mates were in danger.

Her power surged.

No.

No.

She had to hold it.

She tried.

Gods, she tried.

But the noise kept coming.

Roman groaned again.

"Seriously, what the hell—!"

Another thud and Violet's control snapped.

"Stop it!" she screamed.

The moment the words left her mouth, the darkness exploded outward. It erupted from her body in a violent wave. Darkness surged across the field like a storm breaking free. But it didn't destroy anything, thankfully.

The power rolled over her mates like wind, brushing past them before dissipating across the grass.

The field fell silent.

Violet's breathing came in ragged bursts.

Her eyes flew open and the moment she saw them, her stomach dropped.

Roman looked completely unharmed. The earth around them had been kicked loose during the struggle, but he stood there perfectly fine.

Understanding crashed into her. This was all a test and she failed.

Fuck.

Asher walked toward her.

Violet lowered her head immediately, unable to bring herself to face him. Shame twisted inside her chest like a knot. She already knew what he was going to say.

Still, a single hand reached out and lifted her chin. Slowly, unwillingly, Violet found herself staring into those striking gray eyes.

His slitted pupil narrowed even further, and under any other circumstance, she might have found them hypnotic. But not now. Because right now there was a storm in them.

"Did I ask you to let go?"

Asher's voice was way too calm, and somehow that made it worse.

"No," Violet whispered, the word barely leaving her lips.

Asher's gaze didn't waver.

"Then why did you?"

Violet swallowed.

"I was worried," she admitted. "I thought something had happened to them..." Her voice faltered before she could finish the sentence.

Asher's features didn't ease one bit.

"But I gave you an instruction."

"Yes, you did, but—"

"What if you had harmed us?"

Violet shook her head. "No, you're my mates. I can't harm you guys —"

"I'm not mate-bonded to you yet." Asher threw the hard truth in her face. "You could have killed me if you weren't careful."

Violet didn't respond. What was she going to say?

Asher continued, his voice stern.

"That could have easily been anyone else. Your loved ones. Nancy. Ezra. The queen."

Each name felt like a stone dropping in Violet's chest.

"You would have harmed them."

Asher went on, "In battle, you cannot afford to be emotional. Not when you carry power like this. The lives of people will be in your hands, Violet. One mistake..." He held her gaze. "And you end it all. Do you want to live with that kind of weight?"

Violet barely dared to breathe. She stood so still she might as well have been carved from stone.

Asher watched her for another moment before continuing.

"Discipline," he said quietly, "is being in control even when the world around you is loud. It's being the calm inside the storm. It's knowing people can trust that their lives are safe in your hands. Do you understand, Violet?"

"Asher," Griffin's voice broke the tension, "I think that's enough."

He glanced toward Violet. "She gets the point."

For a moment, the hardness remained in Asher's eyes. Then slowly, it faded. He stepped forward and pulled Violet into his arms, the sudden warmth of the embrace shocking her.

"Don't worry, I'll be here." He murmured, hand resting against the back of her head.

"I won't let anyone's blood end up in your hands."

Violet didn't even realize she was trembling until she clung to him. Her fingers gripped the back of his shirt as if he were the only solid thing in the world.

The adrenaline from the training finally caught up with her. That had been terrifying.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 808: Destroy The Palace Again[1,637 words]

Chapter 808: Destroy The Palace Again

Asher focused on teaching her to steady her emotions, block out distractions, and maintain perfect control. Although he did not pull the stunt from earlier again, Violet found herself far more conscious of his instructions and sensitive to every correction he gave.

Asher Nightingale Nightshade might be sweet with her, but when it came to training, he was scary as hell. It was almost as if he became a completely different person. If it were not for the small moments in between when he softened slightly, Violet might have believed she was dealing with a stranger entirely.

They trained until noon, until her muscles ached and her magical reserves were pushed to a limit she had never reached before.

And for the first time, Violet realized her power was not the dangerous part, losing control of it was.

Exhausted, she began to trudge back toward their quarters, but Griffin, out of nowhere, carried her into his arms. Violet nearly screamed. That had been sudden.

"You don't need to." She wriggled in his arms. Wasn't the whole point of the training to return to the palace looking badass?

Apparently, that didn't matter to her mates.

"Baby Violet," Roman teased, pinching her cheeks. Unsurprisingly, her cheek was soft, still possessing a bit of her baby fat.

So adorable.

Violet playfully glowered at him. Nonetheless, she leaned further into Griffin and took a deep breath. That familiar warm blend of sun-soaked woods and deep amber, brightened by fresh citrus and spice, filtered into her nose.

Violet breathed it in deeper, filling her lungs with it until Thalia expressed her own satisfaction with a low growl that reverberated through Griffin.

Griffin halted immediately.

Those beautiful warm eyes fell down on her, then narrowed, and finally darkened.

Violet saw the moment his wolf flashed through his eyes, and Thalia perked up inside of her, eager to meet her mate.

"Okay..." Roman, who had stopped walking as well, patted Griffin on the back. "Unless we all agree to outdoor sex to assist Violet in her training, I'd say we make a move."

That roused Griffin from whatever trance he and Violet had been caught in. Their faces were so close they could kiss right now.

"Yeah, that was a close one," Alaric pointed out, scratching the back of his nape, redness spreading up his neck. He had felt it through the bond, and right now all the blood in his body had rushed to a certain area.

A blush crept up Violet's cheeks and she cleared her throat.

"Maybe I should walk instead."

The instant Violet tried to move, Griffin growled a warning.

His eyes were glowing.

It was his wolf.

She couldn't get off. His wolf needed this.

So she relaxed back into his embrace.

Even with his eyes still glowing, Griffin walked on, showing he was still in control. Although his beast was trying to tear through.

Mine.

It roared in his head.

Ours.

Griffin roared back mentally.

If the beast was going to be an insufferable bastard, then it needed to remember that.

No one noticed Asher falling behind them, quietly watching their backs. He understood the joke well enough, but he couldn't feel it the way they did. It was small moments like this that reminded him he was still standing outside the bond they all shared.

Together they entered the palace. Except the moment they stepped through the entrance, all eyes turned to them.

It felt exactly like those cinematic scenes in movies where the main character and her crew walk in with that effortless, badass energy. Everything plays out in slow motion while everyone else just stares, unable to look away.

Except this time it was Violet and her four mates. And true to the movies, no one could take their eyes off them. After all, it wasn't every day someone was mated to four different males.

They continued walking with that same haughty air until Violet suddenly asked, "Urm... guys, what's going on?"

She could feel the sudden swagger in Griffin's step even while he carried her.

And she had just witnessed Roman run a hand through his hair and fluff it slightly.

A Fae nearby nearly fainted.

Alaric casually tugged at his jacket with a cool, practiced motion, as though he had been born for dramatic entrances.

As for Asher, he had that tall, dark, and dangerously handsome look going on. The kind that said *I will destroy you with a single smoldering glance*.

Violet felt like she had stepped into a movie. And somehow she had ended up playing the—unfortunate—rescued damsel.

Roman whispered so quietly it could have been mistaken for breathing.

"Don't worry. Just go with the flow."

Apart from the slight crease that briefly appeared between her brows, Violet didn't respond. Instead, she slipped into the role perfectly.

She began batting those long lashes at anyone who dared look their way, then leaned comfortably against Griffin's broad chest as if to say *yes, this is exactly where I belong*. Comfy as a pillow.

It didn't help that the palace was buzzing with activities with the whole re-construction going on in the palace. Some Fae hovered effortlessly several feet above the ground, working.

Broken pillars floated upright as runes stitched the fractures back together. Shards of marble drifted through the air like obedient birds returning to their nest. It was a delicate process that required focus — until Violet and her mates stepped in. And that was when everything went wrong.

One Fae hovering near the ceiling lost concentration and the chunk of marble he had been guiding dropped two inches.

A second Fae gasped.

"Hold the line!"

But it was too late with half the Fae distracted.

The sudden shift disrupted the magical alignment holding the broken column together and the pieces slid apart.

As the column lurched sideways, the Fae holding the lower half panicked and shoved more magic into the spell. Which was exactly the wrong thing to do.

The lower half shot upward like it had been fired from a cannon. Three hovering Fae scattered as it soared past them and slammed into a floating ring of marble tiles being guided into place along the ceiling.

The tiles exploded outward and one of them struck another worker in the shoulder.

"Ow!"

The Fae's spell flickered and which meant the decorative archway he had been repairing suddenly lost its support. The archway snagged.

A wave of magic rippled through the room as several Fae scrambled to catch it. Unfortunately their spells collided and the archway spun.

A stunned silence filled the hall as a massive marble arch slowly rotated in midair like a confused carousel.

Roman blinked.

"I think we just broke something."

Nearby, a group of Fae repairing a crystal chandelier had turned to stare at the commotion. Which meant the chandelier was no longer being stabilized.

It began drifting sideways and directly into a cluster of floating wall fragments. The fragments shattered. Like a domino effect, it was one destruction onto the other.

Alaric stared at the scene, dumbfounded.

"Why does this feel like our fault?"

Violet quickly told Griffin, "Quick. Let's get out of here."

Like that, they took off while the Fae workers tried to stabilize the whole thing.

Behind them someone finally shouted the obvious.

"STOP STARING AT THE PRINCESS AND FIX THE CEILING!"

Yep, it was definitely their fault.

Griffin still carried Violet in his arms while Roman and Alaric hurried beside them, and even Asher picked up his pace behind them. The moment they slipped inside their room, Asher shut the door behind them.

For a heartbeat, there was silence. Then they all burst into laughter.

Violet dropped her face into her hands, laughing so hard her shoulders shook.

"Oh my gods," she gasped between breaths. "My mother is going to kill me."

Roman wiped at the corner of his eye dramatically. "Hey, that's not our fault," he said, straightening his shirt. "We're just damn irresistible."

Griffin snorted. "Tell that to the royal purse. Half the palace just collapsed again because you couldn't stop preening."

"Excuse you," Roman said indignantly. "I was not preening. I was enhancing the moment."

That only made Alaric laugh harder. And then, a different sound joined them.

It was Asher laughing. Not the small amused huff they sometimes got from him.

No. He was actually laughing hard enough that tears slipped from the corners of his eyes.

The room went quiet as everyone stared at him.

Asher eventually noticed the attention and cleared his throat, wiping at his eyes.

"What?" He gave them pointed looks.

No one said anything but the look they all shared spoke volumes. It was good to see Asher like this. Relaxed and happy.

Violet smiled before clapping her hands once.

"Alright," she announced. "I'm going to bathe."

Roman's mouth opened immediately but Violet pointed a finger at him.

"Not happening, Roman."

He closed his mouth with a grin. "As you wish, my lady."

Violet shook her head, then hurried into the bathroom before he came up with another antics.

Steam quickly filled the room as she washed away the sweat and grime from training. The hot water helped her relax and by the time she finished, she felt normal again.

As she stepped out, toweling her hair, her stomach growled loudly. Violet grimaced. She was so hungry she could eat an entire cow.

She walked back into the room, fully intending to demand food from the guys.

But the words died in her throat because someone else was standing there.

Lila.

Violet's steps faltered.

Lila's expression was hard to read.

"The queen wishes to see you," she said.

Then her gaze shifted to the others.

"All of you."

"Shit," Violet muttered.

They were in real trouble this time.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 809: Take Out The Queen And Princess[1,009 words]

Chapter 809: Take Out The Queen And Princess

"I can explain!"

Those were the first words Violet blurted out the moment she stepped into her mother's private chamber.

"It's not their fault. It's mine. They were only following—"

"Take a seat, Violet."

Queen Seraphira cut her off with a voice so flat and serious that Violet halted mid-sentence.

The queen's gaze moved slowly from her daughter to the four men standing behind her.

"All of you."

The Cardinal Alphas exchanged brief looks with one another before glancing back at Violet. Then, without another word, they began pulling out chairs around the table and sat down.

Their expressions were puzzled and wary.

Just like Violet, they could sense something was wrong.

Seraphira sat at the head of the table, her back straight and her hands clasped neatly on the glossy surface. While the queen was never particularly expressive—as a ruler she rarely allowed her emotions to show—this was different.

There was tension in the room. Heavy and

ominous. It hung in the air like the warning before a storm. And because of it, Violet began to suspect that the palace reconstruction disaster might not be the reason they had been summoned.

Queen Seraphira didn't beat around the bush. "You have just three days to the Ascension of Death."

"What?!" Everyone in the room shouted.

"But I'm not ready!"

"What do you mean she has three days —?"

"Are you kidding me?!"

"That's not enough time!"

"That doesn't make sense!"

Their voices overlapped in a chorus of protests.

"Trust me," the queen said calmly, though there was steel beneath her tone. "I refused as well. But the council has made up its mind. My hands are tied."

The moment those words left her mouth, the Cardinal Alphas gave the queen incredulous looks.

Roman let out an exasperated breath and muttered under his breath, "We might as well have Annequin teach you how to handle an insolent council."

"Excuse me?" Queen Seraphira heard that.

Not that Roman had gone for subtlety, everyone heard that.

Violet told her. "You are letting the council walk over you, Mother!"

"And what do you want me to do? Kill them? Fire them?"

"Maybe," Roman mumbled.

Queen Seraphira's furious gaze shot to Roman, who turned the other way with an innocent look, his lips pursed. He was beginning to get on her nerves.

Queen Seraphira said to her, "I could fire the members of the council, but it would be just the same. Baron would sneak his way in again."

"But Violet would have more time, and the newcomers might be a little more respectful, with all due respect, Your Majesty." Griffin said, his expression serious.

The queen shot back. "No amount of time is enough for Violet. That's the one thing I can agree with the council on."

"And whose fault is that?" Violet snapped.

The moment the words left her mouth, she regretted them. She saw the hurt that flickered briefly across her mother's face.

They had already argued about this before.

Her temper had simply gotten the better of her.

"I'm sorry —" Violet wanted to say, but the queen lifted a hand, halting her. So she worked her jaw, letting the matter be.

"I have already made my mistake," Seraphira said. "However, the Ascension of Death itself requires no special training. Violet only needs knowledge of our people and the ancestors who came before us."

"And the other trials?" Alaric asked. "Violet doesn't have enough training for those."

"There won't be any other trials."

The queen said it so suddenly that silence crashed over the room. For a moment no one spoke, and then the questions burst out.

"What?"

"What are you talking about? Aren't there three trials?"

"What do you mean by that?" Asher spoke up.

Seraphira's expression hardened. "Baron is making his final move. Lila believes that he intends to take me out once and for all. We are willing to bet it's during the trial."

Lila, who had been standing silently beside the queen, finally stepped forward.

"We have been quietly observing Baron's residence, and while he had been oddly inactive, the same couldn't be said for his lover, Celeste."

"We've followed Celeste certain times only to suddenly lose her. And then here comes the council demanding the competition be moved suddenly?"

She shook her head. "It's a suspicious and bold move. Which brings us to think Baron might have found a way to eliminate Violet or take out the queen. Or both."

Violet couldn't understand it. She said, frustrated, "So if we're sure that the evil Fae is planning something, why can't we drag his bitch out and torture her until she speaks the truth? Or are your hands tied until you end up dead in Baron's hands?"

"We can't make a move because we can bet that Celeste has already sworn a Fae oath to keep quiet. Fae oaths are binding, and if she tries to speak, she'd likely end up dying. That would not solve our problems, and we'd end up alerting Baron that we know they're up to something. It's best they presume we don't know a thing. That way they end up caught unaware."

Violet threw her hands up. "So we just sit around and wait for them to attack? Or is there a plan?"

"Exactly, Queen Seraphira," Asher supported her. "What's the plan? And you know what I mean. It's three days."

Perhaps it was the meaning in Asher's words and the way he pinned her mother with that stare, but Violet suddenly felt like something was off.

She frowned. "I don't understand. What do you mean by that?"

She looked at her mates as well, who all looked anywhere but at her.

Asher insisted. "Are you going to tell her, or should I tell her? We don't have much time here, and she deserves to know."

"Tell me what exactly?" Violet's voice rose. "What are you guys hiding from me?"

Queen Seraphira sighed heavily. "You're right, Violet. There's something I need to tell you."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 810: The Plan[1,069 words]

Chapter 810: The Plan

Violet's heart hammered in her chest.

In all her years of living, this kind of tension had always been reserved for bad news. Her instincts had never failed her before.

And right now they were screaming.

The queen spoke slowly. "Trust me, daughter, I never intended to burden you with this. I would have found a solution on my own, but there's no more time."

"No more time for what?" Violet's voice shook.

She knew it. She felt it deep in her bones that something was terribly wrong. But she refused to accept it.

Seraphira held her gaze.

"I'm dying, Violet."

For a moment, Violet didn't speak. It was as if her tongue had suddenly turned to stone.

Her body felt strange. Heavy. Her head swam with confusion. She felt like she should sit... or stand... or do something, anything, but her limbs refused to cooperate.

The words simply echoed in her head.

I'm dying.

Then, before she knew it, tears filled her eyes.

"No," she croaked.

She was supposed to be brave. Strong.

But how did anyone respond to something like this?

"No," Violet said again, shaking her head. "You can't die."

She had only just found her. They had barely spent any real time together as mother and daughter. Barely begun to know each other.

What did she mean dying?

That couldn't be true.

"Violet, calm down," Alaric tried to wrap his arms around her, but Violet shoved him away.

"What do you mean calm down?" she demanded, her voice rising. "Didn't you hear her? My mother is dying. I just barely met her!" Her chest rose and fell unevenly.

Asher dark eyes locked with hers.

"There's a solution, baby girl."

"What?" Violet blinked at him, her thoughts scattered. "What did you say?"

"We won't let her die," Roman said firmly.

Griffin nodded beside him.

"And Alaric won't let that happen."

Only then did Violet's eyes swing back to Alaric.

He was smiling at her in a calm and confident way.

Her voice softened into something almost fragile.

"You're sure?"

"Yes, little minx."

He stepped closer this time, lifting a hand to gently brush away the tears sliding down her cheeks.

"I'll save your mother. Nothing will happen to her."

For a moment, Violet could only stare into those bright blue eyes filled with certainty.

The conviction in them steadied her racing heart.

Slowly, she wiped her face with the back of her hand, embarrassed by her outburst.

Goddess above.

What the hell had just happened?

One moment everything had been normal, and the next her entire world had felt like it was collapsing beneath her feet.

All her life, Violet had never had much. It had always just been her and Nancy. She had accepted that fate and the loneliness that came with it.

But then the Cardinal Alphas had crashed into her life like a storm and suddenly she wasn't alone anymore. Just like that, her family had grown from her friends to the pack and others. Her hope had grown with it.

And then the gods had given her something she had never expected. Her biological mother. Her identity. Her roots. She finally belonged somewhere.

And now fate wanted to take that away from her too. So yes, the news had shattered something inside her.

No one rushed her. The room remained quiet while Violet struggled to gather herself. The Cardinal Alphas stayed where they were, giving her space. Even Roman, who was rarely silent, kept his mouth shut.

Violet drew in a shaky breath and slowly, the storm inside her chest settled. She wiped the last traces of tears from her face and straightened, forcing her spine to stiffen.

When she finally spoke, her voice no longer cracked.

"How did this happen?"

And that was how Seraphira dove into the story, telling her how Baron siphoning her powers left her with side effects that led to the disease.

Violet swallowed.

"The disease is called Thalvo—" She stopped, stumbling over the unfamiliar word. "Thalvo... something."

"Thal'voryn Shai," Lila corrected smoothly.

The name alone sounded ancient and terrible.

Violet tried again. "So how do you intend to cure her of... that?"

Alaric answered. "We intend to move Queen Seraphira's soul into another body."

Violet blinked.

"Excuse me?"

"The flesh is nothing but a shell," Alaric explained. "Unfortunately, that shell is failing. Worse, the queen shares a life force with Baron. But if she can inhabit a compatible body, she'll survive."

Violet frowned, suspicion prickling at the edges of her mind.

"That doesn't sound easy."

Alaric's tone was careful.

"It isn't. But it's worth trying."

She rubbed her temples. "Oh gods." She might as well prepare for the worse.

Violet trusted Alaric but this was magic, not science. And magic had a tendency to go very, very wrong.

Roman reminded them. "Let's not forget we have three days until the trial." He scratched the side of his face. "Do we even have a compatible body?"

Silence fell. All eyes turned to the queen.

"We're searching," Lila said. "Zuru is working on a spell that should help identify a compatible vessel."

Her voice tried to sound hopeful.

"Everything will work out."

But no one in the room said what they were all thinking. They were gambling on luck here.

"That leads to one conclusion," Asher said.

Everyone looked at him.

"Baron is going to try to kill Violet during the trial."

The words hung heavy in the air.

"For the queen," Asher continued, "he doesn't need to do anything dramatic. Since he already has the advantage through their bond, he'll simply keep draining her until she dies."

"So," he finished. "What's the plan?"

Lila folded her arms, clearly having expected the question.

"For starters, we will replace the priestess who is meant to officiate the ceremony. But only at the last minute. That way, if she is in league with Baron, she will have no time to warn him or adjust whatever scheme they have planned."

Roman looked impressed. "You're planning to blindside them."

"Exactly," Lila replied.

She continued, "In addition to that, we will increase the number of guards stationed at the trial grounds. Not visibly enough to alarm the public, but enough that nothing will slip through unnoticed."

Her tone grew more serious. "The guards will have one priority and that is ensuring nothing happens to the princess's body during the ceremony."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 811: On My Last Breath[1,622 words]

Chapter 811: On My Last Breath

"So...." Asher started, "You're telling me the plan is to swap a priestess and add guards? You're betting the whole plan on Baron attacking Violet when she's asleep? What if he does it before the ceremony? What would you do?"

"No one is foolish enough to attack Violet, at least not when she's awake. You already know what she can do." Lila pointed out.

Yeah, they all knew that. Literally erasing one out of existence. Except that power was unmastered and, in the course of fighting back, she might as well delete the whole realm.

"I'm sure," Lila said with conviction. "That's when he'd attack. The Ascension of Death runs for an hour and in that window of opportunity, when Violet is unconscious and powerless, Baron would definitely not let it go."

"So while Violet is vulnerable, we just wait around for Baron to attack her?" Griffin frowned. "That sounds quite dumb to me, and I would rather Violet remain a stranger to the Fae than risk her life for this." He was seriously concerned.

"Like I said, the princess will be safe. We'd protect her."

"And you think Baron doesn't know that?" Alaric countered. "He's about to murder the queen and princess. What makes you think he doesn't expect resistance? Moreover, how are you sure that the so-called guards you trust aren't in cahoots with him?"

Roman concurred. "Exactly. I mean, if I'm about to take over the kingdom, I'll start by buying out the guards. Classic villain one-oh-one move."

Violet breathed, "And I'm just going to sit here and pretend my life as we know it has a possibility of ending soon."

What she heard next were growls from her mates.

"You are not going to die, not on my watch." Asher was the first to respond, his voice low and dangerous. "I'll rather burn down the Fae realm than lose you. Do you hear me?" he promised, his eyes filled with fiery intensity.

"Yes, my purple love, we'd rather render the Fae homeless than lose you." Although there was mirth in Roman's words, there was a promise there too.

"You are not dying. Not even the goddess can take you away from us." Griffin swore to her.

Alaric said his part too. "It's together, forever."

Violet's mouth hung open, rendered speechless by their words. Her pulse raced, her heart rejoicing, a comforting warmth washing over her at the thought of having mates who would fight even death itself just to keep her safe.

"Thank you," Violet whispered, smiling at all four of them.

They soaked in the moment for a while before Queen Seraphira said, "Since you all are against the plan, I'm trying to guess you have a better one."

Asher began, his words sharp, "How about locking up Baron, then executing Celeste and every single member of that council? You'd be known as a tyrant, but fear is better than respect. Your child will be safe, and your people would award you more respect. But of course you wouldn't do that, would you, Queen Seraphira?" he sneered. "You'd prefer to

be praised by your people on the surface and have your authority questioned by all and sundry, to the point you cannot protect the only child you have?"

"Enough!" Seraphira hissed, her eyes flashing with power. The palace seemed to quake with her authority, and while it was a powerful move, the effect was instantaneous.

The queen began to cough.

It seemed innocent at first until it became a wracking cough.

"Your Majesty," Lila said with alarm, lifting a handkerchief to her mouth. She took it and continued to cough.

Even Violet stood from her seat, having no idea what to do. When her mother finally lifted the handkerchief, there was a smear of blood on it.

Violet's stomach dropped.

If the thought of her mother dying had felt like a dream, then seeing this right now felt like a rude awakening.

She was really dying.

Asher and the others looked at one another. Though he felt pity for the queen, it only solidified his thoughts.

She was weak.

"You should not exert yourself anymore, Your Majesty," Lila chided her, concerned.

But Queen Seraphira, her gaze boring straight into Asher's, told him with fervor, "I will not make the same mistake as my ancestors. Violence is not always the answer. The goddess brought Violet this far, she will see her through to the end. So no, I will not turn into a bloodthirsty tyrant to prove your point."

If there was any way to groan out loud, Roman would have done it with the way his head fell in disappointment.

The queen continued, "We will assess the guards thoroughly and confirm those loyal to us. To further increase security, we will arrest Baron and the members of his household a few minutes before the trial. That way, we throw off their plan and demoralize his people. That should be enough, right?"

The question was obviously aimed at Asher.

The West Alpha merely shrugged. "Whatever the queen says."

Queen Seraphira stared hard at him, then let it go. "I'll want time alone with my daughter now."

None of the Cardinal Alphas protested. Each of them rose from their seats. They stole one last glance at Violet before exiting the room.

Once outside, Asher broke away from the group.

"Where are you going?" Roman asked, brows knitted with suspicion.

"I need some damn air," Asher retorted without looking back.

Except that had been a lie.

He had a destination in mind.

Unlike the queen, Asher Nightshade preferred to go on the offensive—or at the very least, have a backup plan. Since he didn't have the authority to eliminate his enemies outright and protect his girl, plan B seemed to be his only option.

Asher finally stopped at a certain door and knocked twice.

The sentient palace had made it clear it didn't like violence—almost like its queen. Asher snorted. It wouldn't surprise him if the magic of the palace was linked to her.

The door opened.

Annequin, Queen—no—former queen of Astaria stood there.

At first, confusion flickered across her face as she glanced around, half-expecting this to be some kind of trap. When she saw no one else, her expression shifted into something far more playful.

"Well, hello," she drawled. "Finally abandoned your unofficial mate and came for me?"

Asher's expression didn't change.

Cold. Unmoved.

"Don't make me think this was a mistake."

"Fine," she groaned, rolling her eyes. "If you didn't come to grace my bed, Alpha Asher of the West Pack, then I'm guessing this is serious. So what do you want?"

This time, Asher's expression eased—just slightly.

"How would you feel about doing something unselfish for once?" he said. "It might help your journey toward becoming a decent leader."

Annequin lifted a brow, clearly unimpressed.

Then she smiled.

"What are you waiting for?" She stepped aside. "Come in."

Meanwhile, back in the room, silence lingered between the queen and her daughter.

Lila stepped out briefly, only to return moments later carrying a small porcelain pot of tea. The faint aroma of herbs filled the air as she moved toward the queen.

"This will help stabilize you, Your Majesty," she said, pouring her a drink.

Seraphira accepted the cup without a word. She lifted it to her lips and drank.

Then she closed her eyes.

Her shoulders relaxed slightly as she exhaled, as though the weight pressing down on her had eased, even if only a little. The tension in her face eased, and she remained still, quietly savoring the effect.

After a few seconds, she opened her eyes again. She set the cup down.

Violet leaned forward, her voice cautious. "How do you feel?"

"Better," Seraphira answered simply.

Lila gave a small nod before stepping back, leaving the two of them alone once more.

Then came the awkward silence.

Seraphira broke it.

"You must resent me. Think me weak."

Violet's lips parted but no words came because deep down, it was true. If the queen had acted differently—stronger, harsher—maybe none of this would be happening. Maybe Baron wouldn't be a threat and she wouldn't be dying.

Seraphira didn't miss the silence. She gave a small, knowing smile.

"Your grandmother, Elowen, was everything you probably want me to be. You likely took your temper from her."

There was a faint trace of amusement in her voice, though it didn't reach her eyes.

"She was decisive. Ruthless. Quick to eliminate threats. And while it solved problems, it created others."

Her gaze drifted slightly, as though she was seeing a memory.

"Everyone feared her. There was no freedom. No joy. No room to breathe."

She looked back at Violet.

"I swore I would never become like her. And though it may seem like that decision has backfired, I do not regret it."

Her voice grew firmer.

"There is peace in the Free Fae realm. There is love. There is happiness. People are free to choose, free to live, free to love. That would never have existed under my mother's rule. And I'm not making excuses for my shortcomings, but I hope... you understand why my decisions are the way they are."

Slowly, Seraphira reached out, her fingers brushing against Violet's cheek.

The touch was gentle.

"I'm sorry I didn't train you properly," she said softly. "I only wanted you to have a normal life, far away from all of this. But in the end, that too was a mistake."

Then she took Violet's hand in hers, gripping it with surprising strength.

"But I promise you, Violet, I will not let anything happen to you." Her fingers tightened. "I swear it on my last breath."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 812: Last Night Together[1,534 words]

Chapter 812: Last Night Together

Later that night, Violet picked at her food even though earlier her stomach had been grumbling with hunger. The mood around the table was heavy. Violet was sad, which meant her mates could feel it too, and it dragged them down with her.

"Do you think it's wise for us to leave at a time like this?" Roman asked, peering at his Cardinal brothers.

Alaric lifted a brow. "If you really don't want to go, just say the word, baby Roman. We understand you don't want to leave Violet behind with us." His words were loaded with meaning.

Roman gave him the middle finger.

Asher spoke, his tone carrying that familiar authority. "If Nancy and Ezra are going to expose the truth, they'd need backup. We know what Elijah is capable of. The two of you will be there to secure his life and to confirm his story."

Roman made a sound at the back of his throat. Yeah, he had definitely been hoping to slip out of that responsibility.

"I'm going to miss you two," Violet mumbled, her mood dipping further. Why did it feel like everyone was leaving her?

She knew she was being a little dramatic, but between her mother's condition and the looming threat over her own life, everything felt heavier than it should.

"We are not going away forever, my love. Once things are settled over there, we'd come find you—"

Alaric cut Griffin off. "Or we return after everything is done and join you guys."

"That too," Griffin agreed easily.

Time ran differently in the Fae realm. For all they knew, they could finish everything here and return to the human realm in what felt like a blink. Not to mention, the wolves, with their endless politics, would likely drag things out far longer than expected.

"It's okay, I know that. Just saying. Everything's just happening too quickly." Violet attempted a smile and failed woefully.

She will continue her training with Asher tomorrow—with Annequin in attendance. It was surprising how quickly Asher had forgiven her. Not that Violet planned to dwell on that. She needed as much help as she could get.

Alaric would not be present at the training. Apparently, he'd be meeting with Zuru to work on his solution for the queen. Soul transfer, as it stood, was all theory. Now they had to make it a reality.

Though Roman and Griffin would be there, it was only to spend one last stretch of time with her. Right after training, they'd leave for the human realm through the portal.

So yeah, Violet released a quiet sigh. Too many things could go wrong in the span of a few days. If she died at eve trial, then she wouldn't even get to see Roman and Griffin one last time.

No.

Violet shook her head. There was no dying. No way in hell was Baron sending her to the land of the dead. That was never going to happen.

As if something inside her snapped into place, a renewed energy washed over her. She picked up her food and began shoving it into her mouth with more purpose. She needed the strength. Every bit of it for tomorrow.

Asher had already promised he would push her harder than before. It was going to be brutal.

"If you're going to miss us that much..." Roman began tentatively, pushing his food around his plate, "then we could spend one last night together."

The food went down the wrong pipe.

Violet immediately doubled over, coughing violently. She hacked so hard her chest burned, her eyes watering as she blindly reached for the glass of water beside her.

"Here—easy, princess..." Griffin was already moving, lifting the glass to her lips while another hand—Alaric's—rubbed slow circles against her back.

Violet gulped down the water like her life depended on it.

Roman Draven was going to be the death of her one day. She meant that. Literally.

Only when her coughing subsided did the tension in the room ease.

"I'm okay... I'm okay," Violet managed, waving them off when they continued hovering over her.

She deliberately avoided Asher's gaze. Because she had no idea what he was thinking right now.

Thankfully, no one brought up the "late-night" activity again. Still, by the time they left the table and walked back to their quarters, an awkward tension hung thick between them.

Griffin walked ahead with her while Roman trailed behind like a lost puppy. He had already apologized before the meal ended, but this was Roman Draven. He'd commit something, ask for forgiveness, and then sulk for the rest of the day until someone caved and comforted him.

Yeah, definitely a puppy.

Alaric and Asher were way behind them, deep in conversation. Alaric was going on about some quantum physics explanation of the Fae portal and didn't even notice that Asher had stopped listening a long time ago. He was startled when Asher suddenly pulled him into a corner.

"What are you—?" Alaric was startled, but Asher shot him a pointed look that cut the rest of the words off in his throat. That was when he understood.

Roman was the one who caught the whole thing. From his position, he cast Asher a questioning look, brows slightly raised. But Asher simply arched a brow back, as if to say, don't you want the opportunity?

And that was when it clicked. Asher was giving them permission.

Roman's eyes widened in disbelief before a slow, grateful smile spread across his face.

Meanwhile, Violet and Griffin continued their conversation about their return to the human realm and how his family would be thrilled to see him. They walked into the room, the door opening on its own accord to welcome them in.

It wasn't until Roman stepped in and the door shut behind him that Violet paused.

Something was missing.

"Where's Asher and Alaric?" she asked, a note of alarm creeping into her voice as her eyes flicked toward the closed door. For a brief second, she wondered if they had been taken while she wasn't paying attention.

"They're giving us privacy," Roman said simply.

"Privacy?" Violet frowned, confused at first. Then it hit her.

"Oh."

The single word came out slow. Heavy. Absolute.

And then the realization fully settled in. A blush crept up her face. Those idiots had been scheming behind her back.

Now that they were alone, Violet became acutely aware of the sexual tension humming in the air.

Looking at Griffin and Roman, she could see it in their eyes. Their wolves were right there beneath the surface, straining, barely held back by sheer control.

"Violet," Griffin said, his voice taut, controlled, "If you don't want to do anything... we won't. It's your choice."

At that, Violet slowly lifted a brow in Roman's direction. Sex was one thing a certain Alpha could never resist.

Roman huffed softly. "We can suffer a while longer," he said, though the restraint in his voice was obvious. "The anticipation would be worth it."

Violet blinked at him, mildly surprised. Roman, willing to wait? That was new.

Unfortunately for them, she was the problem. If they were going to leave, then she wasn't letting them go without one last night.

Violet closed the little space between them deliberately. She stopped right in front of Griffin.

Though she was tall for a woman, Griffin still towered over her—a full neck taller—and instead of intimidation, it sent a thrill through her. The kind that curled low in her stomach and spread outward.

The idea that she could bring a massive, powerful Alpha like him to his knees did something to her.

Her chin lifted.

"Take off your shirt."

Griffin's brow arched, his gaze sharpening as he studied her. He noticed the change in control, in tone, and in presence.

Violet didn't break eye contact. Her gaze slid to Roman.

"Both of you."

Griffin and Roman shared a look and grinned. There was something dangerous in that grin. Something knowing and said they were enjoying this far more than they should.

In perfect sync, they reached for their shirts and pulled them off. It was slow and

unhurried, as if they had done this before.

Violet's breath hitched before she could stop it. Heat flared through her instantly, sharp and consuming, pooling low and heavy.

Her eyes locked on Griffin first.

Every inch of him was built for power. Corded muscles stretched beneath his skin, his arms thick and sinewy, veins subtly tracing their way down. His shoulders were broad, carved, slabs of strength with not a single ounce of softness.

He looked like he was forged by the gods themselves. A weapon of destruction.

Her pulse quickened and then her gaze shifted to Roman.

Where Griffin was raw strength, Roman was leaner. Every muscle defined, probably earned through his good werewolf genes and rigorous training over the years.

Her eyes dragged down his torso, slowly, appreciatively and then stopped.

That V.

Dear lord.

It was defined and acutely tempting.

A sinful line disappeared beneath his waistband like an invitation and her throat went dry. For a second, Violet forgot to breathe.

Goddess above, help her tonight.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 813: Control[1,529 words]

Chapter 813: Control

Violet reached out tentatively, her hand slowly tracing the smooth tendons of his neck and down to his broad chest. Her eyes feasted on the tattoo of the dragon that stretched over those glorious muscles, the stunning black ink spanning his shoulders and trailing down his back.

She had no idea why he had chosen a dragon, but a funny thought crossed her mind. With a body like this, he really should have been a dragon shifter, not a wolf.

Nonetheless, she loved him exactly the way he was.

Violet's fingers brushed over his nipple, relishing the sharp catch of his breath. She smirked, her eyes gleaming with all the wicked things she could do to the big boy standing before her.

Griffin caught that look and laughed, low and amused. "Wicked princess."

Violet's smirk deepened. "You haven't even tasted a scrap of the wicked ideas in my head yet, my beast."

To prove her thoughts, Violet leaned in and took his nipple into her mouth.

"Fuck!" Griffin groaned, his body jerking as his balance nearly gave out.

He looked down at her, catching the satisfaction gleaming in her eyes—eyes that never left his even as her tongue flicked out, circling his nipple in slow, teasing strokes.

"Goddess..." His voice dropped, rough and strained. The veins along his throat stood out, his head tipping back as his eyes squeezed shut. A low growl built in his chest.

When his eyes snapped open again, they flashed yellow—his wolf pushing forward—and locked onto hers. But Violet didn't flinch. If anything, the challenge only fueled her. Her teeth grazed down, then bit him deliberately.

A string of colorful curses spilled from Griffin's lips, his restraint slipping by the second. Violet was a wicked creature like this, dangerous, intoxicating, and completely in control.

Heat surged through him, every drop of blood rushing south, his body responding faster than his mind could keep up. Yeah, he was rock hard.

Violet's hands turned greedy, roaming the hard planes of his back. Her fingers dug into his flesh, pressing, marking, as though she wanted to leave evidence of herself behind. Not that he minded, he'd wear her marks proudly for the whole world to see.

His hands roamed her body just as freely. She felt so small in his arms, yet so perfect.

His fingers found the hem of her shirt, gripping it before giving a sharp tug. It took no effort at all. The material tore apart in his hands as if it were nothing more than paper.

That snapped Violet out of it. She stepped back, staring down at her clothes now hanging in tatters. Her lips parted in disbelief before she pouted, shooting him a playful glare.

"Beast."

Griffin chuckled, the deep sound vibrating through her and sending heat straight to her core.

Inside her, Thalia purred in approval. Left to the wolf, she would have skipped the entire foreplay and taken what she wanted—wham bam, thank you!

But Violet was not an animal, and tonight was not going to be rushed. She would take her time with them. Savor them. Commit every touch, every feeling to memory, so even when they were gone, she would still feel them lingering on her skin.

She peeled off the tattered shirt and tossed it aside. Then she bent, sliding her pants down her legs until she stood in nothing but her underwear.

She could feel the shift immediately. The wolves in her mates stirred, dangerous and alert, watching... and waiting.

Griffin and Roman looked taut now, their muscles drawn tight beneath their skin, like beasts barely leashed.

Violet took a step toward Griffin but a low growl rumbled from Roman. Her attention snapped to him instead, a slow smirk curling her lips.

"Impatient, greedy Alpha, are you?"

While she and Griffin had been occupied, Roman had taken matters into his own hands. His pants were gone, leaving him in nothing but his boxer briefs.

Violet closed the distance between them.

She lifted her hand and cupped his face, her thumb brushing over the faint scatter of freckles across his nose. It was so subtle one could easily miss them.

But not her. It softened him. Made him look almost cute. The thought alone sent a flicker of mischief through her. For a second, Violet considered leaning in, tracing them with her tongue, but instead, her finger slid downward from his nose to his lips.

Perfectly shaped. Arrogant. And dangerously kissable lips.

Violet traced her fingers along the shape of his lips until Roman bit her.

"Ouch!" She glared at him.

Roman only grinned, wolfish and unapologetic. Then his tongue flicked out, licking across the tip of her finger. He circled it and then drew it into his mouth. He sucked. All while his eyes stayed locked on hers—dark, heavy with want.

Violet stared at him the whole time, spellbound. Each time he licked her finger, it was like a shock to her body, fueling the heat in the pit of her belly. She was so wet it was a miracle her panties hadn't melted off.

She could tell Roman could smell her arousal with the way his nose flared. His gaze darkened further until the line between pupil and iris blurred wildly. At once, Violet pulled her finger away. Roman's eyes cleared, but only slightly. He was wound tight, like a weapon about to be triggered.

Violet leaned in and pressed her lips against his. The kiss was gentle at first, their lips moving in tandem, as if getting to know each other. His scent washed over her, that tantalizing combination of pineapple and whipped cream teasing her all over. But only for a moment as his lips grew harder, the attraction between them intensifying.

She opened up for him, and Roman plunged his tongue into her mouth, tasting, probing, and dominating with every sweep. He intended to consume her whole, and Violet held onto him, her head swimming. His hand was around her waist, holding her so tight it would leave bruises.

But Violet was not easily breakable. If anything, she craved this hardness, her lips meeting every demanding stroke. She matched him. Heat for heat. Strength for strength. He was her mate. And she was his.

While Roman kissed her senseless, Violet's hand snaked into his briefs and—gods above—he was hard as a rock.

She stroked him and his breath faltered, a rumbling groan leaving his throat. But for once, Roman didn't break the kiss. If anything, he deepened it.

His hand came up, gripping her hair, winding it around his fingers like a fist. Violet's scalp prickled, but the sting only fed the hunger building inside her.

Roman grew insistent, nipping and tugging at her bottom lip until he drew blood and sucked it clean. He kissed her like he intended to swallow her whole. Violet kept up on her part, pumping his hardness and increasing her pace until Roman was panting, his breath hitting her face in short, sharp bursts.

He was close. Violet could tell by the way he thickened in her grip, and she was more than eager to drive him to the edge. But with their lips fused, she needed air too, and she was beginning to feel lightheaded.

So it became a challenge to see who would break first.

Roman seemed intent on kissing her until she passed out, but that was until she traced the head of him with her finger. Then he broke apart, panting hard for breath. Violet was heaving as well, her vision swimming slightly.

Griffin chuckled from the corner. "Both of you are crazy."

Roman looked at her, his eyes blown wide. His expression had shifted into something primal, and his voice was rough as he rasped, "Inside of you."

Violet lifted a brow.

He held her gaze and promised, "If I'm going to come, it would be inside of you."

A shudder washed over Violet, wetness pooling between her legs at the same time. That was it. She couldn't wait anymore. She wanted them.

Violet reached back and unclasped her bra, sliding it off slowly. She watched the way her mates' eyes were drawn instantly to her chest, their mouths parting slightly as they took in the way her flesh moved.

Then she bent, hooking her fingers into her panties and dragging them down her legs until they pooled at her ankles. She stepped out of them.

She stood completely naked in front of them.

Violet caught the way their eyes darkened, their noses flaring as her scent hit them. Low rumbles built in their throats. Yet none of them moved as if waiting for her order.

Then Violet turned, glancing at them over her shoulder.

"See you both in bed."

And just like that, she walked toward the bedroom, completely bare, her hips swaying with quiet confidence.

Behind her, tortured groans followed.

Violet barely settled on the bed when Roman and Griffin rushed into the room like two unruly children racing for a prize.

The sight alone drew a slow smirk from her lips.

Control.

She loved it and in this case, wielded it like a weapon.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 814: Punish A Princess[1,154 words]

Chapter 814: Punish A Princess

Violet shifted, settling back against the headboard in a relaxed, almost lazy posture. Then, deliberately, she spread her legs.

It was an invitation. And also a command.

Her gaze lingered on them, half-lidded and knowing, her expression calm, almost arrogant like a queen on her throne, waiting to be served.

The effect was immediate.

Both of them stilled for half a second, their restraint snapping like a thread pulled too tight. Their breathing grew heavier, eyes darkening with hunger as they took in the glittering wetness.

It was quite unfortunate that this particular kind of foreplay happened to be Roman's favorite pastime. Like a man starved and finally given exactly what he craved, Roman moved first — and fast.

Violet yelped as Roman reached her in a blink. He grabbed her and pulled her down onto the bed, his grip firm, and almost rough in his urgency. Her legs were pushed wider, held open without effort.

"Roman—"

But whatever she meant to say died in her throat because his mouth was already on her.

Sweet creator of the entire universe.

A sharp gasp tore from Violet's lips, her back arching instantly at the contact. Roman feasted on her with hunger, like he meant to ruin her completely.

As if that wasn't enough, his hands locked around her thighs, keeping her exactly where he wanted her, his control absolute despite the frenzy in him.

Violet's fingers flew to his hair, gripping tightly, having no idea whether to push him away or pull him closer—she did the latter.

She was no longer thinking, her mind slipping under the assault of sensation.

"Greedy Alpha..." she breathed, though there was no real protest in her voice, only heat and need thrumming through her.

Roman chuckled against her, the sound vibrating through her as more wetness trickled down. He licked it, no, consumed it like a cat unwilling to share his prize with anyone.

Griffin stood before them, watching with darkened eyes. He had undressed completely, now stroking that weapon of female destruction he housed between his legs.

His gaze locked with Violet's, who was lost to the throes of passion. Her hair was disheveled in a way that only made her look sexier, beads of sweat glistening on her skin, her mouth parted, her eyes half-lidded with need.

Griffin groaned, his hand moving faster, the image of her seared into his mind. Violet's composure was long gone. She was moaning, unashamed, riding Roman's face, the pleasure too strong to resist. So when Roman slipped a finger inside her, and then another, she knew she was done for.

He thrust hard and fast, curling his fingers at just the right angle, hitting that spot again and again. There was only so much a girl could take. Violet was pulled into an orgasm so quickly it tore her from reality, a cry ripping from her throat as she clutched Roman tightly.

Her nails elongated into claws, digging into his skin, drawing blood.

But Roman did not stop, cleaning up her wetness as she rode out her orgasm until there was nothing left to give. Only then did he press a lingering kiss on her clit, as if saying good girl, before finally pulling away.

Roman's entire chin was slick, and Violet stared at him as if seeing him in a new light. No one could tell her otherwise—he was a sex god brought to life.

A guttural sound drew their attention, and they turned to see Griffin finishing, ropes of his release spilling as his body tensed.

Roman leaned in and whispered into her ear, both of their eyes still on Griffin. "This is what you do to us, little mate. This is what you reduce us to—nothing but primal beasts craving you." As if to emphasize his words, his tongue swept slowly across his lower lip, his eyes flashing hungrily with his wolf.

The look in his eyes should have unsettled Violet. Instead, her wolf rose within her, her core pulsing with need. Just like that, she was ready again.

Roman's eyes twinkled darkly. "Griffin," he ordered. "Come. Hold our mate down. It's time we taught her a little lesson."

Griffin prowled toward her, all six-foot-six of him radiating intent. For a moment, Violet's heart skipped, a flicker of uncertainty rising as she tried to read them.

Distracted, she didn't realize what was happening until Roman pressed her back into the bed, her wrists caught and pinned above her head in one smooth motion.

"Hold that, would you?"

Griffin complied, pinning her hands to the bed. Violet tested his hold, but all she managed to do was strain her muscles. His grip was as good as iron.

"You're ours now, Little Vi."

Yep. Violet realized it then. She was completely at their mercy.

Roman settled between her thighs, the head of his cock nudging at her entrance. But he didn't push in like she expected. Instead, he dragged the tip slowly through her wetness, spreading it, teasing her.

A soft, helpless sound slipped from her throat. Goddess above. This was sweet torture.

"You like that, don't you, little mate?" He smirked as he tormented her a little more.

"Please." She begged him.

"Please what?" There was a dangerous gleam in Roman's eyes.

"Please... just take me already," Violet hissed out.

Roman laughed, smug as ever. "As you wish, princess."

Then he thrust forward, sheathing himself inside her in one deep stroke. Violet cried out, her body jolting from the force of it.

Fuck her life. He didn't ease her into it, he practically impaled her.

Violet was panting now, relishing the sweet fullness of him inside her. But Roman didn't give her time to brace herself.

"Punishment time, princess. Don't scream too much."

And then he moved.

Roman drove into her like an angry bull at the sight of red. The bed shook beneath them, the force of it rattling through the room as moans, mewls, and broken sounds spilled from her lips.

Dear lord, he was going to break her in two.

Roman took his pleasure from her, moving exactly how he wanted, claiming every inch without restraint.

But even with the sweet torture, Violet was not complaining. She loved the way he owned, dominated, and claimed her body.

It was just frustrating that she couldn't use her hands. Like yanking at his hair or clawing at his back until he bled.

Anything—anything other than thrashing and screaming beneath him as he fucked her senseless.

It was quick. The pleasure rising like a crescendo. And then it crashed over her.

Hard.

Violet bucked, her back arching as a soundless scream ripped from her throat, because Griffin had chosen that exact moment to kiss her, stealing the sweet sound from her lips.

But that was not the end because Roman was nowhere close to stopping. And it wasn't even Griffin's turn yet.

Goddess, save her.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 815: Consumed By Pleasure[1,451 words]

Note: This Chapter includes mature, intimate scenes. Please read at your discretion.

Violet's body hadn't even recovered when the next wave began to build again. Gods above, it was too much. Her chest rose and failed rapidly as she tried — and failed — to catch her breath. Every nerve in her body felt raw, exposed like a live wire, buzzing and alive in the most dangerous way.

Roman didn't slow. If anything, her reactions only encouraged him.

"Already falling apart on me?" he muttered, voice rough with satisfaction.

Violet glared at him, her words came out more like a whimper. "Shut up, asshole..." There was no bite to it.

Behind her, Griffin hands still wrapped around her wrists, tightened just enough to remind her she wasn't going anywhere.

Then one of his hands slipped free, and settled on her breast, massaging the perfectly shaped flesh one after the other.

They fit perfectly in his hands, warm and soft, yet firm enough to make him groan at the feel. Violet sighed, arching up, aching for more of his touch. Those rough hands on her sent tingles that shoot straight to her core. And she wanted more. It was not enough.

Griffin swirled his finger around the rosy nipple, fascinated by the way it pebbled.

Violet moaned, shivers running down her spine. Right now, she was being torn apart by two different heavenly sensations.

Another thrust from Roman stole the breath from her lungs, her body jolting under the force of it. Then Griffin lowered his head and took her nipple into his mouth.

Violet cried out, the sensation striking deep and fast. Griffin sucked, licked, nipped, and then pulled at her nipple. It was absolute torture because it felt like there was a cord connecting her breast to her clit, and with every lick, every pull, the sensation shot straight there.

Her toes curled. Nor could she form words, just breathless, broken moans.

Roman huffed out a laugh. "I see someone having a good time."

Violet didn't even get the chance to retort, already surrendered to the sensations coursing through her body. Goddess. She couldn't think. Couldn't focus. Couldn't do anything except feel.

Griffin moved to her other breast, sucking on it greedily like his life depended on it, a sharp contrast to Roman's relentless pace.

The difference nearly drove her mad.

They were two forces. Two different rhythms. Both pulling her apart in entirely different ways.

"Look at you," Roman breathed, watching her unravel. "All this... just for us."

Violet tried to respond, but the words tangled somewhere in her throat because another orgasm was rising.

Higher.

Faster.

Unstoppable.

Her fingers dug into the bed, her body tensing.

"Roman..." Violet gasped, not even sure what she was asking for anymore.

Without a word, Roman drove her straight into it, pushing her harder and harder until a broken cry spilled from her lips, her head spinning as everything around her dissolved into sensation.

This time, Griffin didn't steal the sound, letting her fall apart completely. And then, with one last savage thrust, Roman stilled inside her.

Violet felt his release, the heat of it spilling inside her. She would need a herb if she didn't want to end up pregnant after this.

Roman didn't pull out immediately. He remained there, riding out the aftershocks with her.

He reached out, brushing her hair away from her face. Her skin was coated in a sheen of sweat, flushed and glowing.

Still hard, Roman finally pulled out of her. As much as he wanted to stay buried inside her forever, there was another Alpha patiently waiting his turn.

Griffin didn't move in immediately. He remained in that position. Instead, he began to kiss Violet. Short, brief kisses on her nose, her eyes, her neck, her chest, as if applauding her for a job well done.

During that time, Roman vanished, only to return with a towel, which he used to wipe her clean. They had really made a mess. Not that it bothered Griffin, who then climbed onto the bed and grabbed Violet effortlessly, placing her on top of him.

Violet understood what he wanted immediately. She reached behind her for his hard cock, positioned it at her entrance, and eased down slowly. Griffin's breath stuttered while Violet breathed deeply through her mouth, taking him inch by inch.

Griffin was huge, filling her completely. Roman's release inside her made the whole thing smoother. She shifted her hips, finally settling fully against him, the both of them gasping at the same time.

Goddess of the Free Fae. Violet had to admit this position made her feel incredibly full, like he fit exactly.

Then she began to move against him. Griffin's hands moved to her waist, cupping her ass and guiding her down, controlling the pace as she rocked against him.

A low groan tore from his throat, his head falling back against the bed as he watched her.

"Just like that..." he muttered, his grip tightening slightly, urging her to move again.

Violet braced her hands against his chest, finding her rhythm, slow at first before building into a pace that made her breath hitch.

Griffin met her halfway, his hips lifting to meet every motion, his control slipping with each second.

"Fuck..." he breathed, eyes darkening as he stared up at her, completely captivated.

Above him, her hair falling over her shoulder, her breasts bouncing as she moved, Violet was a sight—wild, flushed, and unbearably beautiful.

A fucking goddess.

He wanted her. All of her. Both the good and the bad parts. Even her soul. He needed to possess every bit of it.

"I want more of you." Griffin grumbled, taking over.

His hands dictated Violet's pace, dragging her down hard, then lifting her just enough before slamming her back onto him again.

Violet gasped, her fingers clutching at his chest as her rhythm was completely stolen from her. Her body yielded, giving in completely as he used her the way he wanted, guiding every movement, and setting every pace.

A sharp smack echoed through the room.

Violet cried out, her body jolting at the sudden sting as Griffin's hand came down on her ass.

"Work for it," he ordered.

"What?" Violet was confused, overwhelmed by pleasure.

Another slap on her flesh and she got it.

This time she moved faster, harder, her body responding instinctively, chasing the feeling, chasing him.

"That's it," Griffin growled, gripping her tighter. "Don't slow down."

Violet obeyed, riding him harder now, her movements turning frantic as pleasure coiled tighter and tighter inside her. Moans spilled freely from her lips, growing louder, and more desperate.

Griffin spanked her again, the sound mixing with her cries, pushing her further, driving her on.

"Louder," he demanded.

And she broke.

Violet's voice rose, her moans turning into breathless cries as she lost herself completely, her body working harder, and faster, chasing the edge he was dragging her toward.

Griffin held her there—controlled her there—watching her unravel under him, a dark satisfaction flashing in his eyes.

"Good girl," he muttered again, forcing her down one more time.

And Violet screamed, her orgasm rippled through her hard. Her juices gushed around him. She panted hard.

That was not enough for Griffin. The sound of her breaking seemed to snap something in him.

With one hand locked around her hip while the other slid up her spine, he dragged her body forward until she was flush against his chest.

"Look at me," he ordered, his voice low, and commanding.

Violet tried—goddess, she tried—but her vision blurred, her body too far gone, too consumed by the pleasure he was forcing out of her.

Another sharp thrust upward met her descent, knocking a cry straight out of her.

"There you go..." Griffin murmured, his lips brushing her jaw, his breath hot against her skin. "Take it, princess."

His pace didn't falter. If anything, it grew more punishing.

He drove into her with controlled force, lifting her and slamming her back down in a rhythm that left no room for thought, only sensation.

Only him.

Violet's hands clutched at his shoulders now, nails digging in, her body trembling as the pressure built once more, fast and overwhelming.

"Griffin—" she gasped, the sound breaking apart on his name.

"I know," he cut in, voice rough. "I feel it."

Of course he did.

The bond thrummed between them, alive, electric, feeding into every movement, every breath, every pulse of pleasure tearing through her.

"Then take it," he growled.

And Violet did.

She shattered again, her entire body tightening as a scream tore free, her head falling forward against his shoulder as the world blurred into white heat.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 816: Infected Alpha[1,034 words]

Chapter 816: Infected Alpha

Griffin held her through it, worked her through it, dragging every last second of it out until her body trembled uncontrollably in his arms.

Only then did his control slip. A feral sound ripped from Griffin's chest as his grip turned bruising, his movements sloppy.

"Mine," he growled against her skin. And then he followed Violet over the edge. He shot his load inside of her. The hot and thick seed spilling out around them.

Violet honestly thought that would be the end of it, but it wasn't.

With a sense of urgency, Griffin shifted, flipping her onto her back in one smooth motion. Violet knew at that moment, she was a goner.

The mattress dipped beneath her as her mate followed, one large hand gripping her thigh and lifting it over his shoulder. And the new angle — Goddess, help her.

It stole the air straight from her lungs.

"Mine. All mine." Griffin growled, completely animalistic as he drove into her deeper and harder.

Violet cried out, her back arching off the bed as the force of it hit a sweat spot that made her vision blur. Her hands flew to the sheets, clutching, grounding herself as Griffin set a brutal, unforgiving pace.

He didn't hold back. Didn't slow down.

Each thrust was precise, controlled, driving into that same spot again and again until her body had no choice but to respond.

"Griffin—!"

Her voice broke, her body shaking. The
pleasure was too much.

"That's it," he growled, his grip tightening on her leg, keeping her exactly where he wanted her. "Take it."

He owned the moment. Owned her. Her body. Her soul. Every movement, every breath, every sound that tore from her lips belonged to him.

Violet could only feel as the pressure spiraled higher, tighter, until it snapped.

She broke for the nth time. Her body arching, and every muscle tightening as the wave of pleasure crashed through her. The warmth of her release spilled down her thighs.

Griffin broke too. Her body clenched around him so tightly his hips bucked, a rough sound tearing from his chest as he followed right after her.

For a moment, everything stilled. Just the sound of their breathing. Her body twitched beneath him, still riding the waves, every nerve alive, and the sensation lingering long after the moment had passed.

Griffin lowered his head, pressing his forehead briefly against hers, his grip on her still firm, still possessive as if he wasn't quite ready to let her go.

After a while, he pulled out, and Violet sighed at the loss of contact. For once, she was grateful to be Fae—no way in hell her human self would have survived this sexathon.

Violet groaned. Her body had turned to mush, and she was so satisfied all she wanted to do was sleep.

Roman's chuckle followed, his breath fanning her cheek, suggesting he was close by. "Someone's really satisfied, isn't she?"

Violet purred, wishing he would go away.

Roman grinned, clearly amused. "You're so, so cute," he murmured, brushing a damp strand of hair from her face. "However, little mate, you do not want to torture the others all night with the scent of sex. You need a shower."

Violet made a soft, incoherent sound, too tired to argue.

The next thing she knew, Roman carried her toward the washroom. Her head lolled against his shoulder, her body loose, her mind drifting in and out. She was practically asleep until the hot water hit her skin.

Violet sucked in a breath, her eyes fluttering open as warmth cascaded over her, washing away the evidence of their love making and exhaustion.

"Finally," Roman laughed when he saw her eyes open.

"Alright," he said, "stay still and let me do the work."

Violet didn't argue. They could do whatever they wanted with her. She was too tired to form a single independent thought. What was so bad about a little baby treatment?

Roman reached for a loofah, working the scented soap into a rich lather before running it over her skin. He was so gentle with her that she didn't even realize he was done until he was carrying her back to the room.

The room had been cleaned, and when Roman placed her on the bed, she sank into clean sheets. Violet didn't have the strength to ask who had done it. She closed her eyes and slipped into deep sleep.

It must have been sometime later in the night when Violet felt the bed dip. She opened her eyes, only to meet slitted gray ones. Even half-asleep, a wide grin curved her lips.

"You..." Violet murmured.

"Yes, me, your one and only Asher." The West pack Alpha leaned closer until he was spooning her. He breathed in her scent.

Asher chuckled. "My nose is picking up all sorts of things on you. Whatever scented soap Roman used to erase it only made it worse. It's all mixed with you now."

A small smile crossed Violet's lips. She reached up and cupped his face, her thumb brushing his cheek. "Thank you."

Violet wasn't stupid. She saw the sacrifices Asher kept making, over and over again.

Asher placed his hand over hers. "It's nothing. Now sleep. You have a long day tomorrow."

Violet didn't argue. She leaned into him, her eyes drifting closed as she settled comfortably in his arms.

While she slept, Asher watched her, taking in her features.

"For you, my purple queen," he whispered, "I'd give anything in the world."

He closed his eyes too. Peaceful.

Except nothing good lasted forever.

While they slept, none of them noticed the small, pulsing translucent caterpillar that had appeared out of nowhere. It crept over Asher's hair, then slipped into his ear.

Asher jerked upright at once, a strange sensation crawling through him. His sudden movement startled Violet awake, her vision blurry with confusion.

"What is it?" she asked.

Asher was certain he had felt something.

But he shook his head, "It's nothing. Let's go back to sleep."

They lay down again. Content in his arms, Violet closed her eyes, and missed the brief purple glow that flickered in Asher's eyes before he shut them.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 817: Getting Better[1,036 words]

Chapter 817: Getting Better

"Harder! Faster! Control! Deflect!" Asher's voice echoed through the clearing as Violet executed the series of moves he had taught her that morning. Well, them.

Annequin was here. Except this time, she was the test subject.

Unlike her mates, Violet could not attack them, but she could attack the former queen of Astaria, and she very much enjoyed it. The silver lining was that even if Violet lost control, Annequin could contain her power. That made the exiled queen the perfect punching bag.

They moved through the drill again. And again.

Violet struck first, channeling just enough of her power, keeping it tight, contained. Control. She increased her speed, adjusted her pace, met Annequin's counters, then reset.

Again. They repeated it. This time faster and stronger.

Asher didn't let up. "Don't hesitate! Move!, move!"

Magic flared between them, volatile, but Violet held it. She shaped and directed it. Each strike more precise than the last.

Annequin met her head-on, deflecting, redirecting, occasionally pushing back just enough to keep Violet on edge.

They went on and on, layering movement with power, instinct with control, until Violet didn't even realize it anymore, but she was wielding the darkness.

Not fighting, or fearing it. She was using it like a weapon.

A brush of that power grazed Annequin during a parry but nothing happened. Because even now, even in the heat of it, Violet held the line. No matter how insufferable the Fae was, she still didn't want her dead.

Roman and Griffin stood at the edge of the clearing, watching. As much as she tried to focus, Violet stole occasional glances at them whenever she could.

They were impressed. She could see it. And it stirred something in her chest. Pride.

Violet was like a peacock flaunting its wings, except this time, she was doing it for her mates. Her movements grew more fluid, more confident and a little arrogant.

She knew the rhythm now. The regimen. It was starting to feel like second nature.

Which was exactly why—

"Abandon drill. Fight."

Asher's voice cut through everything.

Fuck her life.

Violet barely had time to brace herself before Annequin's strike came for her side, a blade of condensed darkness slicing through the air.

Violet snapped her hand up, darkness forming instantly into a shield. The impact rang through her bones.

That evil Fae.

To think she even had her well-being in mind.

All bets were off now.

"Don't block. Redirect!" Asher barked.

Violet grit her teeth and shifted. The darkness bent, curved, slipping the attack past her instead of stopping it. The strike hit the ground behind her and exploded in a burst of shadows.

She didn't get time to breathe. Annequin came at her immediately, faster this time. No warning. No mercy.

Good.

Violet met her head-on.

Darkness flared around her hand, tightly controlled. She struck forward, aiming for Annequin's shoulder. The Fae twisted, catching her wrist mid-motion.

"You're slow, princess," Annequin said flatly.

Violet snarled and pivoted, her leg sweeping low but Annequin jumped back, barely avoiding it.

"Better," Asher said. "Now faster."

Violet launched forward again, pushing more power into the strike. Not too much, just enough. Control.

The darkness wrapped around her arm like a living thing, responding to her intent. She drove it toward Annequin with precision. Annequin met it with her own magic, shadows colliding with Violet's darkness.

The air cracked and they broke apart.

They were evenly matched. Except Annequin knew the truth—Violet was only just stepping into her power. Give her the same level of training, and she would be unstoppable.

"Again," Asher ordered.

Violet attacked. Again and again.

Each time faster and stronger.

"Damn," Roman whistled from the sidelines. "Asher's not holding back this morning, and our mate's on fire."

"It's two days to the trial," Griffin pointed out. "Violet's going to train like her life depends on it—because it does. And the Asher we know? He'll push her to the limit."

He sighed.

"We can only hope he doesn't break her in the process."

Roman didn't argue with that, his attention drifting back to the fight.

Faint traces of magic lingered in the air now like smoke. Violet's breathing grew heavier, but she couldn't stop, not with her mates watching, and Annequin pushing.

"Don't hesitate!" Asher noticed from his observation. "You pause, you die!"

"I'm not pausing!" Violet shot back, deflecting another strike.

"You are thinking," he corrected coldly. "Stop it."

Annequin smirked. "He's right, little princess. You're predictable when you think."

"Oh shut up," Violet snapped, lunging forward.

This time she didn't lead with power, but instinct. Her body moved before her mind could catch up. Violet made a feint to the left and Annequin shifted to counter it.

Wrong move.

Violet redirected instantly, her darkness snapping out from the other side, catching Annequin off guard. It wrapped around Annequin's ankle like a rope and flung her hard to the ground.

Annequin groaned, the breath knocked out of her lungs.

For a split second, Violet froze. Shit. What had she done?

But aside from the groan, Annequin seemed fine. "Sentient bastard," she cursed, still sprawled on the ground.

"Nice work," Asher commented, eyes on Violet.

Violet shook her head. "I didn't know I could do that. I could have hurt her."

Asher explained calmly. "You'll discover a lot more you're capable of with training.. But on the bright side, you didn't."

"Yeah," Annequin rolled her shoulders. "Not bad, princess. You didn't kill me."

"Give me time," Violet scowled.

Annequin smirked. "Looking forward to it."

Violet shook her head in disbelief. The Fae was crazy. She turned to Asher, only for him to clasp her face with both hands.

"You were amazing today, my love."

"Oh." Violet blushed.

She cleared her throat. "And you're an amazing teacher." She kicked at the soil beneath her feet, suddenly acting like a shy teenager—which she technically was—being wooed.

"Ugh. Blah." Annequin made a face as she got to her feet. She was getting out of here.

Neither Asher nor Violet noticed her. The two of them were already locked together, the kiss deepening— and unfortunately for Annequin, the sound would haunt her for the rest of the day.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 818: The Infected. The Vessel[1,080 words]

Chapter 818: The Infected. The Vessel

"You were amazing today, my love."

Baron jerked out of the vision the moment Asher Nightshade kissed the princess. The sensation had been too close and intimate for his liking such that disgust twisted through him.

But it wasn't a clean withdrawal. Pain exploded behind his eyes and he gripped the arm of the chair tightly, swallowing down the surge.

"Ron..." Celeste was at his side in a flash, her eyes filled with concern. She asked. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," Baron gritted out, the nausea slowly receding.

When his vision steadied, he met her gaze.

"What did you see?"

"Nothing useful," Baron snapped, his eyes darkening. "Just the princess training and a foolish beast lusting after her."

His lips curved in annoyance.

"Perhaps Asher Nightshade was not the right choice after all. I may have wasted our only advantage on a horny teenager."

The Fae had a saying: nothing is more relentless than a leecher once set upon its path. It does not return. It does not rest. It binds itself to a host—or it dies trying.

Baron had spent days planning before sending the leecher out to find its target, Asher.

The creature was so small most Fae would overlook it, thinking it one of the insects that roamed the realm. Moreover, only a handful had ever seen one and knew to kill it before it reached its intended host.

It was rare and deadly. He had sacrificed his own people to rear one. And just as expected, the leecher had successfully infected Asher Nightshade.

That morning, Baron had actively channeled his magic, tuning into the leecher to spy through Asher's eyes.

Except it had been a wasted effort.

All he saw were fragments of him training with the princess and finally the kiss. There was no plan, or strategy. Nothing that told him what they were preparing against him.

And he couldn't stay long. Not with the splitting headache clawing at his mind, and the risk of being discovered.

Asher was a mental user, meaning his mind resisted intrusion naturally. The only reason Baron could access it at all was because of the leecher.

But the creature was still feeding and had not fully integrated. The possession was not complete, and he would need more time.

"It was a calculated decision, Ron. The princess trusts the shifter, and he is not yet bonded to her. No divine rule binds him. Nothing stops him from harming her. Give it time, and you'll have complete control." Celeste advised.

Baron's gaze hardened. "Time we don't have."

Celeste balked. He looked at her as if this was her fault when all she had done was to help him. Nonetheless, she swallowed down her anger.

Instead, she took his hand in hers, promising him. "Everything would work out. We have the upper hand now, Ron. The queen and Violet don't know what's going to hit them." her eyes gleamed with the dark promise.

Meanwhile...

Back at the palace, Violet and her mates—Asher, Griffin, and Roman to be precise—were having breakfast after the intense training. Alaric was still busy with Zuru the healer.

However, one person held their attention.

"Dude, calm down. One would think you haven't eaten in days." Roman made a face at Asher, who was devouring food like a man starved for a week.

"You don't understand how insanely hungry I am right now," Asher replied, before diving back into his food.

"Just let him be," Violet told Roman.

Training did that to her too, except she had never gobbled up food that fast. Not to mention, Asher hadn't used his mental powers in a while, not that she knew of.

Still, she didn't mind. If Asher wanted to eat like a caveman, then let him.

"Do you still want those?" Asher pointed to the plate of sandwiches in front of her.

"No..." Violet slid it toward him. "You can have it."

Asher took it, but not before leaning in to press a quick kiss to her lips. "Thank you. You're the best."

A blush crept up Violet's neck to her cheeks. Asher was being unusually affectionate today, far more than his usual controlled self.

Not that she was complaining.

"You're oddly happy today," Griffin pointed out.

Asher smirked. "You two are about to leave, and I'll have Violet to myself. Isn't that a thing of joy?"

"Whoa." Roman gasped, pointing his fork at Asher. "I told you, didn't I? He had an ulterior motive for sending me away."

Asher only grinned.

Griffin grumbled. "You know he doesn't mean it."

Roman rolled his eyes just as Alaric chose that moment to come in. The North pack prince looked exhausted. He pulled out a chair and dropped into it.

"Someone had a lovely day," Asher said, sarcasm dripping from his voice.

"You don't say," Alaric heaved.

"What happened?" Violet asked, concern lacing her voice.

Alaric sighed. "If you mean going through ancient texts you can't read—only for magic to force the knowledge into your head—leaving you with a raging headache and an empty stomach, all to find something about soul transfer... then yes. I'm extremely hangry."

"Alright, he deserves to rant," Roman said.

Alaric looked around the table. "Where's the food?" he scowled at the nearly empty spread.

All eyes turned to Asher.

Roman snorted. "I think our brother contracted some sort of parasite that eats everything in his womb."

"It's stomach, idiot, not womb. Asher's male," Alaric corrected.

Roman gave him a sweet smile that didn't reach his eyes. "Do you want to eat or not?" The threat was there. They could go at it all day—he was the one that would lose. He wasn't the "hangry" one.

Violet ignored them, calling over a Fae servant. The servant took her instructions, vanished, then reappeared moments later with fresh dishes.

Thankfully, Asher seemed to have had his fill. He stopped eating, settling for a drink instead.

"So... did you find anything that could help my mother?" Violet asked, hope threading her voice.

Alaric looked up. "Yes. We did."

Violet's heart jumped.

"According to one of the texts on soul magic..." Alaric paused.

"Your mother has to die."

"What?"

"Once she dies, a spell is used to capture her soul, but not for long. It has to be transferred quickly. The vessel must also be dead, but fresher. Preferably moments before the

transfer. Then your mother's soul is moved into that body," Alaric finished. "That's how she survives."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 819: Back To The Human Realm[1,088 words]

Chapter 819: Back To The Human Realm

An hour later, her mates stood at the "Gate," as the Fae called. It was the access point through which Griffin and Roman would return to the human realm.

There was nothing particularly special about it at first glance. It was simply an alcove-like brick structure, built into a quiet corner outside the palace grounds, almost as if it had been forgotten. If one didn't know its purpose was to summon portals to other worlds, it would be easily overlooked.

But magic lingered there. It was subtle and invisible, but Violet could feel it buzzing on her skin, waiting to break out.

They had decided to send Griffin and Roman to the West pack, hoping they would meet up with Ezra and Nancy. Time ran differently in the Fae realm. A single day here could stretch into several in the human world. Which meant stay too long, and the world you left behind would move on without you.

Her mother, Seraphira, had come to see them off. The news of Griffin and Roman returning was bound to spread, and the Fae would question it if the queen failed to appear. After all, what kind of ruler would not stand beside her daughter while she sent her mates away?

Already, Seraphira had been absent from far too many gatherings she was known to attend. Whispers would start soon.

And whispers, in the Fae realm, were dangerous.

They could only hope Seraphira found a suitable body—and transferred into it—before the citizens began to notice her weakness and challenge her for the throne.

"I don't know what the situation is in the human realm, but promise me you'd stay safe," Violet said to Griffin as she bid her final goodbye.

Her gaze shifted to Roman. "Both of you."

Griffin and Roman shared a look before saying at the same time, "We'd be safe."

Violet breathed out in relief. Those were not just words but promises.

"Keep an eye on him, would you?" Violet told Griffin, nodding toward Roman.

Roman lifted a brow. He was right here, you know.

But Violet knew exactly what she meant. If there was any of her mates who had a penchant for getting into trouble, it was Roman Draven. Trouble was practically his second name.

"I will," Griffin promised.

Roman rolled his eyes in exaggerated annoyance. "And I'll make sure to be there to rein in his temper."

Griffin shot him a look. His temper was short, yes—often enough to let his beast slip through—but lately, he had been better. Ever since he bonded with Violet, there was just this peace between him and the beast, as if his mate brought the balance they had been missing.

"Both of you should simply be there for each other, idiots," Alaric jibed, clearly annoyed with Roman always trying to have the last word.

Asher cut in, more serious. "You have the stones, right?"

Since the Fae did not use phones like humans, the two alphas had been given enchanted stones—Summoners, as they were called.

All they had to do was hold the stone before a reflective surface, preferably a mirror or a body of water, and focus on the person they wished to reach.

Mirrors and water, in the Fae realm, were not just reflections. They were mediums. Natural conduits that bridged spaces, capable of carrying intention, magic, and even presence across realms.

When activated, the Summoner would send a signal to the one being called. And if the other party accepted, the surface between them would ripple, connecting both sides for communication. Simple and efficient.

Griffin and Roman nodded.

Asher said. "Good. Hold the line over there. We'll be back sooner than you think."

"We know." Griffin replied.

There was no world where they would leave them to face whatever storm was brewing in the human realm alone.

Violet stepped forward and threw her arms around Griffin, hugging him tightly. He held her just as firmly.

Roman didn't wait his turn. He simply stepped in and wrapped an arm around both of them, pulling them closer.

"Oi," he muttered, voice lighter than his grip. "Group hug, apparently."

Alaric snorted and joined in, slinging an arm around them as well. His gaze flicked to Asher pointedly, practically daring him to stay out of it.

Asher hesitated. Then, with clear reluctance, he stepped in and wrapped an arm around them too. For a moment they stayed like that, drawing strength from one another.

Then Lila's voice interrupted the moment.

"It's time."

They broke apart slowly.

Violet's chest tightened as she stepped back, her gaze lifting toward the Gate.

Two Fae stood before it, chanting in the ancient tongue, their voices low and rhythmic. The air around the alcove began to shift, vibrating with power.

Then like a generator roaring to life, the portal condensed into view with a deep, humming pulse. Dark purple nothingness swirled within the alcove, a vortex twisting inward, pulling at the edges of reality itself.

The air grew heavier and charged, but it didn't stop them from walking toward it.

Queen Seraphira came forward, her gaze settling on Griffin and Roman.

"May the goddess be with you both."

They inclined their heads in subtle acknowledgment.

Lila gestured toward the portal.

"Go."

Griffin and Roman stopped just before it, both staring into the swirling void.

The East pack Alpha tilted his head slightly. "So... do we go in together, or one after the other?"

Roman grinned, all teeth. "Definitely one after the other. Just in case the portal isn't what it looks like and you end up cut in half. Our mate can only mourn one person."

Violet face-palmed.

What exactly was she supposed to do with this man?

Griffin shot Roman an incredulous look. Then, as if determined to prove he wasn't a coward, he walked straight into the portal, and the vortex swallowed him whole.

He was gone just like that.

Now it was Roman's turn. He took a step only to pause, turning back with that familiar gleam in his eyes.

"Perhaps, Violet, I could get one last—"

He never finished because Alaric kicked him straight into the portal.

Roman's voice cut off mid-sentence, the rest of his words dissolving into a garbled shout as he disappeared into the swirling void.

The portal pulsed for a moment, then flickered and vanished. It had served its purpose.

Silence fell over the space.

Violet stood there, staring at the empty alcove. This was it. Roman and Griffin were gone.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 820: In love With A Shifter Fae[1,585 words]

Chapter 820: In love With A Shifter Fae

Griffin and Roman's absence felt like a vacuum in Violet's heart.

But instead of staying indoors and sulking, she was outside training. She had to be powerful enough if she wanted to return to the human realm and help them

Until she could control her powers, she was nothing but a threat even to the said human realm.

Asher was by her side, of course. With just two days left until the trial, they had no choice but to train like mad. While her unmaking powers were their main focus, she had to train others too and her mother, Queen Seraphira, assigned another Fae to guide her through her elemental abilities.

Although it took practice, Violet quickly realized it was easier to bend the earth and manipulate it than it was to control the darkness. Perhaps it was because she wasn't at risk of destroying the entire Fae realm with it, but there was a strange peace in that.

After hours of relentless training, they finally took a break. Asher got them food, and now the two of them sat on the ground, eating. It was oddly relieving to see that he wasn't wolfing down his meal the way he had at breakfast. That was so weird and unlike him.

"So what's next?" Violet asked, a hint of excitement in her voice.

Her muscles ached, but in a good way. She could feel it. She was getting stronger.

From his position beside her, Asher replied, "We'll practice your flying. We don't know what situation you might find yourself in, so we have to make sure you can get out of it if given the chance."

Violet understood exactly what he meant.

If Baron made a move, she needed to be able to escape.

"So who's teaching me? You?" Violet raised a cocky brow, chuckling.

"Funny," Asher said flatly. "However, love, it's quite unfortunate I'm a land creature."

"Oh, I know. I just can't help pulling your legs now that Roman's—" Violet trailed off.

She didn't need to finish. Asher understood.

Roman, who usually filled the silence with jokes, was gone. They hadn't heard from either of them yet, which likely meant they were busy or something. Besides, time moved slower in the human realm than in the Fae realm.

Alaric, too, was still occupied with Zuru the healer, working on a way to track a compatible body for the queen.

Before Asher could respond, his attention snapped elsewhere. His features hardened instantly, as if he had seen something unpleasant.

Violet turned to follow his gaze and found Annequin.

She frowned. "What's she doing here? I don't need her for training."

"Beats me," Asher said curtly.

"You do know I have Fae hearing, right?" Annequin's voice cut in smoothly.

Violet wasn't moved, fixing her with a flat, unimpressed look.

Annequin lifted her hands in surrender. "Alright, I admit it. I was bored. And it seems there's no one else around here I can relate to except you two."

"You mean torment?" Violet replied sweetly. Too sweetly.

"Fine," Annequin sighed in exasperation.

Then, without warning, she dropped to her knees in front of Violet.

Violet startled.

Annequin clasped her hands together like she was praying. "To Princess Violet Zinnia purple of the Free Fae, my sincerest apologies for attempting to steal your mate. This Fae was in the wrong and has come to repent."

She blinked up at Violet, all mock innocence.

"So, can we be friends?"

Violet was dumbfounded, completely thrown off by the sudden shift. What game was she playing now?

But before she could respond, Asher's nose flared and a low growl rumbled from his chest.

"Who invited him?"

Both women turned. And their reactions couldn't have been more different.

While Violet scrunched her nose in annoyance, Annequin practically lit up. Her eyes widened and her tongue nearly slipped out. She looked like a dog salivating at the sight of a bone.

"On my father's balls... he is mine," Annequin murmured, her gaze locked on the peryton walking toward them.

"Princess," Lucen greeted, bowing his head to Violet. He barely acknowledged Asher, right before his gaze landed on Annequin who was staring at him, unblinking. It was quite unsettling.

Still, she was royalty, so he inclined his head slightly. "Your Highness."

"Such a gentleman," Annequin purred, dragging her gaze over him like she was already claiming him. She licked her lower lip. "Where have you been all my life?"

Huh?

Lucen wasn't the only one caught off guard. Violet and Asher exchanged a bewildered look.

What in the name of the goddess was going on?

As an Alpha among his kind, Lucen was used to being desired. It was something he often enjoyed. But this was different. This wasn't admiration, but hunger.

Aside from the fact that Annequin was a foreign queen from an unfamiliar Fae land, there was something about her that made him uneasy.

She wasn't just dominant but dangerous.

And something in her eyes warned him he did not want to find out just how dangerous she could be.

It dawned on Asher.

"Don't tell me you're the one the queen brought to teach her how to fly."

Lucien didn't even flinch. If anything, the corner of his lips lifted slightly, like he found the irritation amusing.

"I'm the best flyer in the realm," he replied. "The queen knows that."

His eyes flicked briefly to Violet before returning to Asher.

"But if you don't like it, you can take it up with her."

A low growl rumbled from Asher's chest and Lucien answered with one of his own.

The air tightened instantly, thick with tension, like a spark waiting for something to ignite it.

Violet's heart skipped. For a second, she thought they were actually going to fight.

Behind her, Annequin chuckled.

"Oh," she mused, clearly entertained, "he has balls. I like it."

Violet shot her a look.

Annequin only shrugged, completely unbothered. "I haven't touched it yet, but I think I'm going to like it."

Violet shook her head. She didn't know which was worse—when Annequin had been flirting with Asher, or now that she was openly simping over Lucien.

Still, she would take this. Anything was better than having that Fae eyeing her mates again.

So yeah. This was the lesser evil.

Violet stepped forward, her hand brushing lightly against Asher's arm.

"Let it be," she said softly. "It's just training anyway. What's he going to do to me with witnesses around?"

Asher's jaw clenched, but the tension in his shoulders eased just a fraction. The growl died in his throat.

Across from them, Lucien's expression didn't change, but a tick appeared in his jaw. He might have stepped back from chasing Violet thanks to the Queen's verdict, but his ego had not recovered.

Lucien's gaze sharpened as it settled on Violet, all traces of amusement gone.

"Take off your shirt," he said, his tone suddenly professional, all business. "We begin immediately."

Before Violet could even react, he had already pulled his shirt over his head and tossed it aside.

Annequin let out a low whistle.

"Now that," she murmured shamelessly, eyes dragging over him, "is a sight."

Lucien was built with a clean, defined strength, muscles layered over power, every movement carrying a kind of predatory grace that spoke of both speed and control.

Annequin had never thought she would be into shifter Fae. In her court, most High Fae looked down on them. But right now, she was very into this one.

Her gaze lingered, unashamed, tracing every line of his body, from the width of his shoulders down to the sharp cut of his waist, pausing deliberately on the ridges of his six-pack.

"Damn," she breathed.

Then with a sudden, fluid motion, black wings burst from his back, unfurling in full, magnificent span.

Annequin swore she nearly combusted on the spot.

Oh, he was an Alpha through and through.

Her lips curled slowly. She couldn't wait to see how this one fought.

Beside her, Violet stiffened.

Nudity might not have been a big deal for shifters, but she wasn't entirely used to it. Had she known she'd be flying, she would have worn one of the special shirts designed for that.

A flush crept up her neck as she reached for the hem of her shirt.

"No."

Asher's voice cut in sharply.

Before Violet could question him, he stepped forward. His nails flicked out, carefully slicing clean slits along the back of her shirt.

The fabric gave way, and her wings unfurled. Violet sucked in a breath as the pressure released.

Behind her, a pair of radiant purple wings spread wide, catching the light, shimmering with an otherworldly glow.

Asher went still, forgetting how to breathe. She was so beautiful.

Even Annequin fell silent, begrudgingly acknowledging the princess was a work of art — in her mind, of course.

Lucien's expression didn't change, assessing her instead.

"One thing you should know," he began, stepping closer, "is that your wings are not separate from you. They are an extension of your body, just like your limb. Treat them like one."

To demonstrate, his wings snapped wider, cutting through the air with a controlled force. He used them, a single beat lifting him clean off the ground.

It was so effortless, like breathing.

"They respond to intent," Lucien folded them back just as quickly. "Not effort. If you force it, you fall. If you move with it, you fly, princess..."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 821: Put Her To Sleep[1,541 words]

Chapter 821: Put Her To Sleep

Note: This is an explicit scene. Tread carefully.

Flying lessons with Lucien went surprisingly well. Violet wasn't an expert yet, but she could flap her wings with enough control to stay airborne and even fly a mile without completely exhausting herself.

Up there in the sky, the feeling had been exhilarating.

The wind rushed past her, cool against her skin, her wings catching the currents as if they had always known what to do. For the first time in a long while, Violet felt light.

Free.

From that height, the palace, the grounds, everything that once felt so large and overwhelming suddenly looked small and insignificant.

She understood then, why creatures of the sky carried themselves with such arrogance. If everything beneath you looked that small, then of course you'd believe you were the bigger predator.

Their lessons were set to continue the next day, much to Asher's visible displeasure.

Because it turned out, flying wasn't just about staying in the air. There were techniques. Angles. Trick. And more importantly—combat.

Violet was not the only Fae with wings. And those Fae fought midair. Which meant Violet had to learn how to maneuver, strike, and defend herself while airborne if the situation demanded it. Just the thought of it made her wings twitch.

Eventually, Lucien dismissed them. Annequin followed him immediately, practically glued to his side, trailing after him like a lovestruck teenager who had just discovered her first obsession.

Violet watched them go, equal parts amused and disturbed. Better it be Lucien than Asher. And if she had to admit it, they would make a cute couple—even if they'd probably be absolutely insufferable together.

Night fell soon after. The two of them had dinner, the atmosphere calmer now—without Roman and Griffin—before finally retreating to their quarters.

Alaric returned to their room eventually and went straight to bed, collapsing onto it. Violet had no idea whether he had even eaten dinner. Knowing Alaric, his own well-being usually came last whenever he slipped into work mode.

So, with Asher's help—who had gone to get them soup—she ended up propping him up against her body and feeding him. Even with his eyes closed, he accepted each spoonful, which was honestly kind of amusing.

It was in the middle of his half-asleep feeding that he managed to blurt out that he and Zuru were building some sort of tracker—a combination of technology and magic—to locate a suitable body for the queen.

If everything went according to plan, it would be ready by tomorrow. And by the day of the trial, they would have the body.

It was a close call. But it was something.

Violet felt both relieved and grateful at the same time. The way her mates were working so hard to save her mother filled her chest with something heavy and overwhelming.

And in that moment, she made a quiet vow to herself. She would protect them. Lay down her life for them. There was nothing she wouldn't do.

Eventually, Alaric drifted off to sleep. Then it was just her and Asher.

She lay down between them, her body nestled in the middle, her head resting on Asher's chest while he absentmindedly played with the purple tips of her hair.

"You should sleep. You have a long day tomorrow," he murmured, his voice raspy in a way that did dangerous things to her body.

"I can't." Violet sighed.

Maybe it was Griffin and Roman's absence. Either way, sleep wasn't coming.

"Is that so?" Asher rumbled.

There was a dark note beneath the words—something amused, something daring—that made Violet pause, her brows knitting slightly.

"We'll see about that."

Violet stilled. Yeah, he was definitely up to something.

Before Violet knew it, he gathered her hair off her shoulder, his touch so gentle it gave nothing away until his hand slipped beneath her nightwear and closed over her breast.

Her breath stuttered.

Her wolf stirred at the same time heat pooled low in her belly.

Asher's hand moved slowly, deliberately, massaging the soft mound of her chest while Violet sighed, shivers trailing down her spine.

"What were you saying again?" he murmured, amusement lacing his tone. "Ah... not able to sleep."

A pause.

"Oh yes. That's a problem, isn't it?"

His fingers tightened, tugging at her pebbled nipple as he continued, "We should remedy that, don't you think?"

"Yes..." Violet groaned, her senses beginning to swim. The thing about Asher was that his control extended even into lovemaking, and it was always torture for her.

A sweet torture.

Asher's fingers moved expertly, swirling around the tip of her nipple, controlling and drawing out her pleasure. He seemed to know exactly when he hit the right spot, from the way her pulse raced, her breath caught, and her body tightened in response.

The way he played with her like that sent small, controlled bursts of pleasure through her, and Goddess above, she felt like she might weep from the sharp, sweet intensity of it.

Then he shifted her, pulling her onto his lap until she was almost straddling him, facing him.

Violet wore a soft camisole with thin spaghetti straps, paired with matching loose shorts that barely brushed her thighs. The material was light and breathable, but right now, pressed against Asher, she might as well have been wearing nothing at all.

One hand pressed firmly against her back, holding her in place, while the other tugged her cami down, exposing her breast. Her nipple already pebbled, sensitive to the air.

Violet could hardly breathe under the weight of that look in Asher's eyes. Dark. Hungry. Like he intended to devour her whole and leave nothing behind.

Then, with a low growl, he took, no, swallowed her breast into his mouth. Violet threw her head back and cried out. Thalia keened inside her.

She didn't even realize it, but her hands had already found his head, pressing his face harder against her chest. Nor did she notice the way she was shamelessly grinding against him.

Asher made soft, wet sounds as he suckled, alternating between licking and nipping in an unpredictable rhythm.

Violet was lost. Her blood pounded in her ears, roaring with pleasure that built and built, climbing higher until it snapped.

She shattered.

Her body shuddered violently as the release ripped through her, a wet heat spilling between her thighs.

Violet knew without a doubt that her shorts were soaked. She rode out the last waves of her orgasm before Asher finally pulled away.

For a moment, she could only stare at him.

Awed.

A predator in his own right. They weren't even mated yet, and he could already ruin her with his mouth alone.

She could only imagine the chaos they would leave behind when he was finally able to sink inside her and truly take her apart.

Even now, she could feel the hard press of him through his briefs—so thin, so little between them. It would take almost nothing to rid him of it.

The thought alone made her mouth water.

She wanted him. Badly. Her hand moved on instinct, reaching for him, but Asher caught her wrist before she could touch him. His grip was firm.

Asher looked at her, something dark gleaming in his eyes as he said, almost lazily, "You're the one I'm sending to sleep, not me."

He turned her around once again, so her back was pressed against him. This time, his hand slipped beneath her shorts and Violet forgot how to breathe.

"My love," Asher groaned, the sound rumbling deep through her. "You are so wet. What dirty, dirty things have you been thinking about?"

His finger slid through her, stroking up and down, coating himself in her slick heat.

Violet gasped.

She was already so wet, so overwhelmed by the roaring need building inside her that she began to move against his hand, riding his finger, soft whimpers spilling from her lips at the sensation tearing through her.

Goddess... it felt too good.

Asher groaned again.

Her scent filled the air, thick and intoxicating, stirring his wolf. The restraint he prided himself on was slipping, inch by inch. He needed to end this.

Violet cried out as his fingers shifted, brushing, then circling her clit. Her head lolled to the side and her heart skipped. Alaric was watching. Not just watching—

Watching her.

His gaze was fixed, unblinking, pinned on her face as if he was committing every of her pleasure to memory.

Heat rushed through Violet all over again, and when Asher added a second finger to her entrance, beginning to fuck her, she knew it was over.

Alaric never took her eyes off her, enamored at the sight. Violet gasped, her body going taut as the sensation crested, too fast, too strong.

She clenched around Asher's fingers, her breath catching as the wave hit. And then, she broke completely.

A soft cry escaped her as everything crashed over her at once, her body trembling, her mind blanking under the force of it.

Then Alaric's eyes closed, and he drifted back to sleep as though nothing had happened at all.

The pull of sleep followed soon after, heavy and irresistible, and Violet felt her own eyes flutter shut.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 822: Pulled Into The Dreaming[1,015 words]

Chapter 822: Pulled Into The Dreaming

Asher, Violet, and Alaric lay comfortably in bed, all of them asleep after the blissful experience. When suddenly, Asher's eyes fluttered open, an unnatural purple glow pulsing within his familiar gray orbs.

For a second, they stayed that way. Just watching without blinking. Then, just as suddenly, his eyes closed again like nothing had happened at all.

But something had.

Asher Nightshade found himself standing in the dream realm. Something was wrong. He had not walked into this shift, rather, had been pulled into it.

The space around him stretched endlessly, a vast, shifting kaleidoscope of colors, like reality itself had been stripped down to its bare bones. The ground beneath his feet existed, but not quite, rippling each time he moved, unstable and uncertain.

Silence pressed in from all sides as he waited for the culprit to reveal itself.

Then something moved, not through the space, but from it.

The landscape itself twisted, shadows folding inward as an apparition began to take shape. Slowly, it gathered, its form thickening until it stood before him.

Asher's gaze hardened. He knew that face.

Consort Baron.

Anger rushed through his veins. That fucking bastard.

He had warned him the last time, hadn't he? That warning had been for Violet, but his mind? For a mental user, having someone pull a stunt like this, even through a dream, was unforgivable.

Asher moved to lunge at him only for a powerful whisper to echo through his mind. It was soft, soothing, and utterly overwhelming. It didn't want him to hurt Baron. And to his shock, Asher obeyed.

At the same time, Baron stood there, head tilted, studying him. A slow smile curved his lips at what he saw.

"Finally, it's done," he said, almost beaming, his eyes gleaming with pride.

Asher's face twisted in horror.

"What have you done to me?"

"Nothing much except putting you where you're supposed to be, beast." Baron sneered.

He lifted his chin arrogantly, chest puffed out. "Now tell me, what are the Queen's plans? I know you're preparing for the trial."

Asher glared. "Like hell I would—"

The whisper returned, but this time, it wasn't gentle. It hit like a crashing force, slamming into his mind, demanding obedience. Asher tried to fight it, but control was no longer his.

To his horror, the words spilled out of him.

"The Queen knows you'll strike against her and Violet. That's why she intends to detain you before the trial and increase security around Violet during it."

Baron frowned. That wasn't enough. There had to be more.

"What else?" he demanded. "Tell me everything. Don't leave anything out."

Asher groaned, struggling, his stomach twisting violently. It felt like his body would tear itself apart if he resisted any further.

"The Queen is sick," he forced out.

"What?"

"She has Thal'voryn—"

"Shai," Baron finished, eyes widening. "The disease of the bone."

For a moment, he stood frozen.

"How?" he whispered.

"They believe she contracted it after you drained too much of her power."

For a moment, Baron went silent. Then he began to think, seeing the million ways this could turn out for his good. And then he cackled like those famous villains in movies.

"How can this be?" he murmured, eyes gleaming. "The goddess must finally be on my side."

Baron threw his head back, laughing once more.

Then he began to pace, thinking hard.

"All I have to do is drain her again and she's as good as dead. But not yet, not with Violet Purple around."

His lips curled with annoyance.

"Even if I take the throne, the girl could obliterate me, and the entire court. Not that I could blame her...." His smile darkened. "If I can't have the kingdom, I'd rather see it burn."

He stopped abruptly, turning back to Asher.

"I can't act until the trial. That's my only chance to get rid of Violet. But I know Seraphira, she's not a fool. If she's dying, then she must have a contingency. Do you know it?"

The answer came without permission.

"She intends to move her soul."

Baron went still.

"What?"

"The Queen will transfer her soul into another body."

"And then I'll be dead." Baron muttered, the words falling like a death sentence.

Seraphira might be many things, kind, loving, but not towards him. The only reason he still existed was because their life was linked together. And once she's no longer tied down by him, she'd give him a swift death.

He knew about soul hopping. More like heard about it. Though it had not been outrightly banished but the knowledge had been hidden away by their ancestors. It would be a chaos if every Fae destined to die started jumping bodies to escape their fate. But of course, Seraphira was queen and decided the rules.

Baron grumbled. That was not going to happen. He couldn't wait for the trial to come already so he could send mother and daughter to their swift deaths.

He demanded. "Has she found a body?"

Asher said robotically, "Not yet. Zuru the healer and Alaric are working on a device to help locate a compatible body. They should be done with it, today."

At once, Baron got in Asher's face and snarled. "Now listen to me. Find a way, get that device and destroy it. Do you understand it?"

Asher wanted to revolt. He didn't take orders from the bastard, nor would he destroy the very thing that would give them a chance to destroy him at last. Yet he found himself saying, "Yes, Baron."

And Baron knew this wasn't just compliance, Asher would do it. The control was complete.

Although he was still rattled, a sense of order settled over him. He had control over Asher now.

"You will return to the waking world," Baron commanded, "and you will forget this conversation ever happened."

"I will," Asher replied.

"Of course you will," Baron smirked. No one ever fought the leecher. They were already dead by then.

The dream realm began to dissolve, and everything faded into nothing.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 823: Meeting Of Alphas[1,207 words]

Chapter 823: Meeting Of Alphas

A ripple in the fabric of reality had Griffin stepping out of it.

The sun shone overhead as he looked around the spacious compound, immediately recognizing it as the West pack house.

He was still taking in his surroundings when the fabric behind him tore open again and a startled scream made him whip around.

Roman came hurtling straight toward him.

Instinct took over. Griffin reached out and caught him effortlessly in his arms, cradling him like a child.

For a moment, the two of them just stared at each other.

Griffin had one arm under Roman's legs and the other around his back, while Roman's arm was looped loosely around Griffin's neck.

"Well," Roman drawled, "this is comfy, darling."

Click.

The cocking of guns snapped through the air.

Griffin dropped Roman at once, raising his hands into the air. Roman hit the ground with a hard thud.

"Aww. Not cool," Roman complained from where he lay sprawled face-first on the ground.

But Griffin was already standing still, hands raised, while armed guards closed in around them.

"Alpha Griffin?" One of the soldiers recognized him, his eyes widening in shock. Then his gaze flicked down to Roman, "And you..."

"Yeah. The one and only Roman Draven." He threw up a peace sign, looking absurdly relaxed for someone still lying face-first on the ground.

The guard gestured to the others, and two men quickly stepped forward to help Roman to his feet.

Now that Griffin had a proper look at him, he realized the soldier was Mark, Ezra's beta from his pack in the city.

Mark shook his head like he still couldn't quite believe what he was seeing. "When Ezra said one of you might be returning soon, I thought he'd finally lost his mind. You guys have been gone so long we all thought you were dead."

"Well..." Roman dusted himself off. "Clearly, the universe loves us too much."

Griffin ignored him. "Where's Ezra? We need to speak to him."

Mark scratched the back of his head. "About that, you just missed him."

Griffin frowned. "What?"

"Ezra and Luna Nancy left for Aster City. Alpha King Elijah called another meeting. Probably about the zombie virus." Mark checked his watch. "It should be starting in an hour or so."

Griffin and Roman exchanged a look.

"We need to get to that meeting," Roman said with a sense of urgency, his voice having lost all trace of playfulness. "Something big is about to go down, and trust me when I say our presence is essential."

Mark looked uneasy, but quickly straightened himself. "Then you need to get there fast. Would a chopper do?"

A pleased look crossed both Griffin's and Roman's faces.

"That," Roman said, "would be the sexiest thing anyone's ever offered me."

Griffin sighed. "That would be great, Mark."

Cars after cars streamed through Elijah's compound, one after the other, carrying alphas and sub-alphas making their entrance. Security was heavy like never before.

Men dressed in black tactical uniforms stood stationed at every point of entry, earpieces clipped to their ears, and assault rifles slung across their bodies. Some carried sidearms at their waists, while others had knives strapped to their thighs. Their eyes moved constantly, scanning every vehicle, and face stepping into the compound.

No one was taking chances.

Even the alphas who had come did not come alone. Each arrived with enough armed men to shield them should a zombie attack break out on the way.

Moreover, some packs, like the South pack and the North pack, had deployed the strategy of moving their sub-alphas together. There was strength in numbers, after all. Far safer than being isolated and picked off one by one by those creatures.

The parts with the zombie infestation had been marked and distributed ahead of time, allowing the packs to avoid them on their way in. Still, the atmosphere remained tense.

Alpha King Elijah's residence was bustling with activity as staff hurried across the grounds, directing vehicles toward designated parking spaces while attendants rushed to open doors.

And one by one, the alphas stepped out in all their glory. The air reeked of testosterone, power, and dominance. Well, not just the men.

Aeron stepped out first, stopping a nearby staff member from opening the passenger door. He reached for it himself and pulled it open, revealing Irene.

She stepped out with effortless elegance, dressed in a cream-colored suit set that looked both refined and commanding. It was cut in such a way that reminded everyone she was Alpha yet every bit a woman.

Aeron offered her his hand and she took it with a smile that might as well have lit up the world. Some of the sub-alphas from rival packs couldn't help but stare.

And honestly? Who could blame them?

There was something dangerously alluring about a woman like Irene—an Alpha in her own right, powerful and commanding, yet still able to bask so naturally in her femininity.

Aeron noticed. A low growl rumbled out of him before he could stop it.

It was enough. The men quickly looked away and minded their business.

As if it wasn't already bad enough having this many alphas packed into one space—each one's dominance scraping against the other and stirring his wolf's aggression—now they were staring at his wife too.

Yeah. No.

"You should let them," Irene said, not sounding bothered in the slightest. "It's not a crime to stare."

Aeron grumbled under his breath. "Yeah, they can stare after I pluck out their eyes. They can admire you sightlessly."

Irene only shook her head. These men and their possessiveness.

Right at that moment, a black Range Rover rolled into the compound. Both Irene and Aeron turned their attention to it as Alpha Ezra stepped out first, followed closely by his mate, Nancy King.

"Nancy," Irene called out with a smile, immediately closing the distance between them.

Nancy smiled back, and the two women embraced in a brief but affectionate hug.

When they pulled apart, Irene looked her over with clear approval. "You look dazzling."

Nancy wore a soft sage-green midi dress patterned with cream floral embroidery. The cut was thoughtful, the high waist giving way to a flowing silhouette that curved over her growing bump. Long sleeves framed her arms, the entire look matured and graceful.

Nancy smirked. "And you look magnificent as well," she said, winking.

"Well, thank you."

Behind them, Aeron stepped forward and addressed the other Alpha. "Alpha Ezra."

"Aeron," Ezra returned, dipping his head slightly.

Something unspoken passed between the two men. Respect and tension. As well as

the understanding of wolves who knew exactly how ugly things could get if today went wrong.

"Are you ready?" Irene asked Nancy carefully, her words carrying weight.

Nancy let out a measured breath. "Ready as the day I was born."

That got a small smile out of Irene. Not caring in the slightest that she was supposed to be acting all composed and Alpha-like, Irene looped her arm through Nancy's and began walking ahead with her, leaving their husbands behind.

Ezra and Aaron stared at their wives with the look of men who knew some things, apparently, even Alphas could not win against.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 824: Come For The Wolves[1,632 words]

Chapter 824: Come For The Wolves

Just like the other day, the alphas and sub-alphas were seated in Alpha King Elijah's meeting room.

This particular room was arranged in a conference style, with a long polished table dominating the center of the space. The table curved inward at the middle in a broad crescent before stretching back out along both sides, allowing everyone a clear view of one another.

The main alphas occupied the seats nearest to the head of the table, their spouses seated beside them on both sides, while the sub-alphas spread out farther along its length.

The only Alpha missing from his table was Alpha Caspian. None of them thought much about his wife, knowing she was better off wherever she was.

Not long after, Alpha King Elijah strolled into the room with Alpha Caspian right on his heels. The latter moved to his assigned seat just as Elijah came to a stop at the head of the table.

The room seemed to straighten around him, attention shifting to the Alpha king.

"Thank you, Alphas and sub-alphas," Elijah began.

The slight pause between both titles made the distinction clear enough, even without him saying more.

His measured gaze swept over the room.

"For honoring my invitation. It is a delight to have you here."

"Of course, I did not call this meeting out of boredom," he said, folding his hands behind his back. "I called it because of necessity. Because dark times have fallen upon us. At a time like this, we cannot afford to be divided. No time for foolish pride, old grudges, or

the luxury of pretending this is someone else's problem. We need unity now more than ever."

A few faces remained stoic while others looked less convinced. They were all familiar with Elijah's theatrics.

The Alpha king continued, "That is why today, we will be looking into the issues that threaten our very existence."

At once, low murmurs broke out around the room. Of course, the alphas already knew what "threat" he was talking about.

The virus. The infected. And the dead that refused to stay dead.

Some of the sub-alphas— not all—clearly still held on to the belief that it was humans who were truly at risk, not wolves. That this was another human mess, one they would eventually be forced to clean up.

Elijah ignored the muttering.

"The last time we gathered, the question was raised whether werewolves could be infected by this virus or not?"

That sentence drew the room's attention back fully and the murmurs died down.

"At the time, we did not have certainty. We only had assumptions. But now..." His gaze turned towards the side of the table where Caspian was seated.

"We have our answer." Then he lifted a hand. "And to present those findings, I invite Alpha Caspian Storm, who has carefully led the investigation, to speak."

Elijah lowered himself into the head chair while Caspian rose from his.

The Alpha of the North looked nothing like the image one would expect. Not in his dark green plaid cotton shirt, sleeves rolled neatly to his forearms, paired with plain charcoal trousers that fit him without trying too hard. His hair was roughly tousled, as though he had been absentmindedly dragging his fingers through it for a while now.

It was incredibly rare to see Alphas who were naturally shy. After all, Alphas carried a stereotype. They were expected to be loud, brash, commanding, and impossible to ignore.

And honestly, no one could really blame that expectation. Strength was everything in wolf hierarchy. The moment an enemy scented even the faintest trace of weakness, they would circle like sharks smelling blood.

But then again, what exactly counted as strength? Was it dominance? Throwing one's weight around? Being the loudest in the room? Because truthfully, anyone could pretend to be strong by being overbearing, aggressive, and impossible to miss. That kind of performance was easy. But real strength was something else entirely.

And Caspian Storm was a perfect example of that.

The North pack, while appearing simple on the outside, was perhaps the most complicated of all the major packs. It ran like a powerful, efficient engine except only the brightest minds could truly keep it running.

Caspian was brilliant.

The Storm lineage had always been known for producing minds that were terrifyingly intelligent. It was almost as if the moon goddess had blessed them with it. Or perhaps, it was simply the result of generations of careful, strategic breeding.

Either way, no one could do the North pack the way Caspian did. He understood every moving part of it in a way outsiders couldn't.

And yet, one would be a fool to mistake his quietness for softness. Because while Caspian Storm hardly felt the need to show off, he was no less lethal than the loudest Alpha in the room.

In battle, he was a different creature entirely. Cold and merciless. The men who had fallen to his signature blade were proof enough of that.

Caspian stepped forward and came to stand beside Alpha King Elijah, his presence alone enough to draw the room's attention.

He let his gaze sweep across the gathered alphas and sub-alphas before saying, "As His Majesty Elijah stated, I was able to conduct tests on some subjects—"

"Subjects?" someone cut in sharply.

It was a sub-alpha from the South pack. He leaned back in his chair with a scoff. "You mean werewolves, right? We're experimenting on our own people now?" His voice was full of disgust.

The wolf's aim of stirring unrest worked. Almost immediately, murmurs spread across the room like wildfire as men exchanged uneasy glances. The tension rose.

And through it all, Elijah said nothing. He merely sat there, silent and still, watching it unfold with the patience of a king who knew exactly when to let his wolves bare their teeth.

Caspian let out a slow breath. Then his eyes landed on the offending wolf, cold and cutting.

"Yes," he said flatly. "I experimented on our own because that is the situation we find ourselves in. Or would you rather I experiment on you, Alpha Wolfe?"

He held the younger wolf's gaze without blinking.

The sub-alpha scoffed, but under that crushing stare, he eventually looked away.

Caspian had the room now, and he knew it.

Undeterred, he continued, "The results came back, and it is a relief to announce that werewolves cannot be turned into zombies."

A visible wave of relief moved through the room.

"Unfortunately..." Caspian added.

And just like that, the room went still again.

Everyone knew something bad was coming.

"We are still susceptible to the infection."

This time, it was Ezra who spoke.

His brows furrowed. "What do you mean by that exactly, Alpha Caspian?"

Caspian said it plainly. "If a werewolf gets bitten or clawed and the wound becomes infected..." He paused. "You will die."

At once, silence crashed over the room. It was the kind of silence so complete that if a pin dropped, it would have echoed.

Caspian took advantage of it and spoke on, his next words more ominous.

"Our subjects only lasted two days."

That landed like a stone in the room.

"The infection took over their organs and weakened them rapidly. From our study, it would have taken only a few more hours for their bodies to fail completely, but we put them out of their misery."

"Of course, you did," Irene sneered.

Sure, the experiment had been done for the greater good, but the thought of their people—even if they had been North pack wolves—being reduced to test subjects was deeply unsettling.

Caspian did not let her words affect him. He slipped fully into that detached, clinical mode of his and continued as if they were discussing weather patterns rather than dying wolves.

"Before the subjects died, my team and I observed a few symptoms," he said. "Vomiting. A fever that seemed to burn them from the inside out. Feral aggression. And most concerning of all, hallucinations. They barely recognized us by the end."

The tension burst this time. One of the sub-alphas surged to his feet, his chair scraping harshly against the floor.

"And you want us to send our wolves out there so they can die too?" he snarled, fury thick in his voice.

The room stirred immediately.

A low ripple of growls followed, showing they agreed with him. And the commotion only grew louder and louder when no one stepped in to say anything useful.

"Enough!" Irene snapped, her palm slamming against the table hard enough to draw every eye in the room.

Silence did not fall immediately, but heads turned, attention falling on her.

Irene looked around the room, glaring at every single face, her temper flaring hotter by the second.

"I don't know about the rest of you," she said sharply, "but I did not come here to sit around yapping like women."

Of course, Irene meant no insult to her gender. But that particular jab had been used for so long by men that the irony of her using it now—of a woman having to remind them how to behave—was not lost on her.

Her gaze hardened.

"This is no longer a matter of whether or not we help the humans, this is a matter of survival. For all of us."

She leaned in, her voice cutting cleaner now, and colder.

"In case it hasn't been made painfully obvious to you yet, if we don't help the humans, they will turn into zombies. And when they do, they won't stop at each other. They will come for us next."

Her lip curved to the side sardonically

"So when that happens, I'd like to see what exactly the blame card does for any of you then."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 825: Join The Fight[1,056 words]

Chapter 825: Join The Fight

After Irene's speech, Alpha King Elijah wasted no time bringing the room to order.

"So..." he said, his eyes gleaming with anticipation, "all in agreement? We fight for the humans and rid our world of this... disease." The last word rolled off his tongue with open distaste.

Ezra was the first to raise his hand.

A few of the sub-alphas openly snarled through their noses, though none of them were surprised. Ezra had his pack planted deep in human territory, and his Luna was human. Of course he would be the first to support the cause.

But beneath all of that, there was also jealousy.

Ezra was just a sub-alpha, yet here he was making decisions on behalf of the West pack all because Asher Nightshade was absent. It stirred something ugly inside of them.

Because if their own alphas were dead like Henry, and their heirs were to suddenly... go missing?

Yeah. The thought of revolt had definitely crossed some minds once or twice. But thinking it and doing it were two very different things. None of them were brave—or stupid—enough to actually try.

Irene raised her own hands mere seconds later, calm and composed as ever. Then Leon and Caspian lifted their hands at almost the same time, both of them glancing at each other with raised brows.

And just like that, it was over. With the hands of the Cardinal Alphas already raised, there was no real room for opposition.

One by one, the rest of the sub-alphas followed suit, though some did so with visible reluctance. Unfortunately for them, their alphas had already decided and they had no choice but to fall in line. Not when they were easily "replaceable".

"Sweet," Elijah breathed, the satisfaction in his voice barely contained.

It grated on the nerves of some of the alphas who had no choice but to be dragged into this mess.

Then Alpha King Elijah snapped his fingers and Christian stepped in as he continued.

"Still on the matter," Elijah continued speaking. "our human leader and ally, President Roy, had his team provide us with information on the behavior of the infected, areas in Aster City with the largest infestations, and their migration patterns."

That was when the room's attention shifted to the blank screen mounted on the wall facing them. Christian moved toward it and, with a single swipe of his hand, the dark surface blinked to life.

A second later, a detailed map of the city spread across it in sharp, glowing detail.

Immediately, every gaze in the room locked onto it.

Christian swiped again and infection zones glowed in aggressive red, while safe territories pulsed in cool blue.

Some of the alphas sucked in sharp breaths under their noses at the increase of red markers, the glowing infection zones creeping outward like a disease that had no intention of stopping.

"Unfortunately," Elijah said, folding one arm behind his back as he stared at the screen, "our efforts are not enough. The infection spreads faster than we can cleanse it. For every one infected we kill, three more end up turning."

Murmurs rose immediately around the table.

"It doesn't help," Elijah continued, "that humans often hide an infected out of sentiment, especially when it happens within a family. They wait and hope, lying to themselves until it's too late."

Christian swiped again. A once-blue block flashed red and another.

"And then," Elijah said coldly, "we get a breakout. A larger infestation in what was once considered a safe zone. Which leads to more infections."

A heavy and uneasy silence fell after that. Everyone was speechless.

Alpha Caspian lifted his hand.

"How are they even able to pinpoint the infected from the unaffected?" he asked, genuine curiosity in his tone.

Christian answered. "Avax Tech. They've developed a layered scanning system that combines thermal irregularities, neural activity distortions, and low-frequency bioacoustic mapping. The infected do not regulate heat like the unaffected. Their brain activity is unstable, and their movement patterns emit an abnormal resonance signature that can be tracked over distance."

He zoomed in on one section, and tiny pulsing dots shifted across the map.

"Meaning," Elijah finished, "we can detect them before they even arrive if we're fast enough."

Caspian gave a slow nod, clearly impressed.

Then Leon frowned, his gaze narrowing at a section of the map.

"What is that?" He pointed to the screen.

Three large clusters of red dots were moving. It was unlike the other random, scattered dots.

Elijah followed his line of sight.

"That," he said grimly, "is their migration pattern."

Christian zoomed in as the map shifted and the room went dead silent. A marked point blinked on the screen. Lunar Academy.

Voices broke out at once.

"What the hell?"

"Why are they headed there?"

"That's the school—"

Elijah exhaled through his nose, already sounding tired. "There was an attack on the school. A magical mishap occurred."

Nancy and Irene shared the briefest glance at that sentence but looked away so fast it might never have happened at all.

What brought about this magical mishap? The question was right on the tip of their tongues, but none asked.

Elijah shrugged like this was merely an inconvenience. "It seems the magic at work acted like a beacon. It drew the infected toward the school grounds."

That only made the room more restless.

"Of course," Elijah continued smoothly, "our first thought was to dispel the spell. But President Roy and I have agreed it may actually work in our favor."

Several heads stared at him in open disbelief. Was he kidding them right now?

Elijah sighed with exasperation as if he was dealing with unruly children right now. He explained, "If the infected are all heading in one direction, then it becomes far easier to contain, round up, and eliminate them."

"But the children are there!" one of the sub-alphas burst out. "Our sons. Our heirs."

A growl rumbled beneath his words.

Elijah barely blinked.

"Your children are safe within the dome placed over the school."

"And what if the dome fails?" another challenged immediately.

That was when Elijah's eyes darkened. The room seemed to chill.

"Then," he said in a tone so cold it could have cut flesh, "you had better join the fight before they get to your son, wouldn't you?"

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 826: Fight For District One[1,147 words]

Chapter 826: Fight For District One

If eyes could kill, the sub-alpha would definitely be dead.

But Elijah's attention was drawn when Irene said, "But it's not working, is it?"

"What?" Elijah was confused.

"You said the spell was supposed to attract the zombies like a beacon, yet what about that cluster?" she pointed at the screen.

Elijah stared hard at it, his jaw working, obviously pissed. It was his beta who took it upon himself to explain.

"According to reports, these clusters have been moving for days. Oftentimes, they break up and separate, but they still remain a horde. Not just that, even stragglers seem to be adapting the same pattern. Separate, infect, conquer, and move on."

"Moving to where?" Leon demanded, something close to suspicion sitting in the corners of his eyes.

Christian and Elijah seemed to share a look, as if hesitant to reveal that piece of information. A gesture everyone noticed.

"Moving to where, Christian?" Irene demanded, her ire rising.

"District One," Elijah announced. "That's where they're headed."

For a moment, no one spoke, having no idea how to react, or perhaps what to do with that piece of information.

"But District One is a ghetto," Aeron muttered this time, confused.

"Yet it's also the place with the least protection. No authorities..." Ezra seemed to latch onto something, a new kind of understanding mixed with fear entering his eyes.

"Goddess above," Caspian exclaimed, "We all thought we were dealing with mindless creatures, but these are zombies with a hive system being operated by a genius general. District One is the perfect breeding spot. Their leader intends to build an army."

A chill washed over everyone, and not even Elijah was spared because though he hid it, he was obviously rattled.

An uproar broke out at once with several sub-alphas slamming their palms against the table so hard the sound cracked through the room. Chairs scraped while voices rose over one another in a sudden ugly wave of outrage.

"You planned to keep this from us? So that was your plan?"

Another Alpha barked, half-rising from his seat. "You'd treat us like fools?"

"And what exactly do you and your precious President intend to do about it?" someone else sneered, the mockery in his tone impossible to miss.

Unfortunately, that one was deliberate and whether intentionally or not, its aim to provoke the Alpha king worked.

Something flashed in Elijah's eyes. He snapped. "I will not take this disrespect from you!"

His Alpha voice ripped through the room with brutal force, thick with command and dominance. It slammed into everyone present like an invisible wall of pressure, heavy and merciless, pressing down on shoulders, throats, and lungs.

Several of the weaker sub-alphas recoiled immediately, their bodies reacting before their pride could catch up. One dropped back into his chair so quickly it nearly tipped. Another lowered his head with a stiff, unwilling submission, jaw clenched as though he hated himself for it. Even some of the stronger wolves went tense, their eyes flashing in instinctive caution.

Because no matter what anyone said behind closed doors, Elijah was still Alpha King recognized by their law and the gods.

And his power made sure nobody forgot it.

Still, Leon Draven asked, in a voice far too calm for the mood in the room, "How do you intend to stop them?"

The air tightened with tension. Christian chose to answer as his Alpha looked about two seconds away from reaching across the table and removing Leon's head himself.

"There will be no stopping them," he confessed. "The migration pattern was discovered too late. By the time president Roy's team confirmed the route, the infected had already breached too far inward. At this point, the only realistic course of action is to warn the civilians and begin evacuation procedures for District One."

Except Irene let out a short, disbelieving scoff.

"Evacuate?"

Then she leaned back in her chair, crossing one leg over the other with the kind of cold elegance that made her look far more dangerous than if she'd stood up screaming.

"Have you all suddenly forgotten what District One is?"

No one answered. They knew.

"District One has been the underbelly of this country for years. The human government abandoned it to rot, and what grew in its place was crime, violence, gangs, black markets, and people who learned to survive without law or mercy. What exactly makes you think they'll simply pack up and leave the broken place they've spent years clawing a life out of?"

"And go where exactly?" She gave a humourless laugh. "District Twelve?"

The sarcasm in her voice could have curdled blood.

"Would the rest of the precious polished districts even open their gates to those lowlives?"

There was nothing but silence. Everyone in that room knew Irene wasn't wrong.

This whole thing reeked of excuses. When the zombie outbreak in Aster City had happened, the response had been immediate. The infected had barely spread before containment units had moved in overnight. Soldiers had flooded the streets and entire blocks had been sealed before sunrise.

And yet now, somehow, they were expected to believe that stopping the infected from spilling into District One was suddenly too late?

Please. Irene knew an extermination plan when she saw one. Just like every other time people in power found it easier to burn a problem than solve it.

What was to say President Roy wouldn't simply let the infection swallow the district whole, wait until the numbers became too high and then level the city with a bomb under the guise of "containment"? Problem solved. If that wasn't the plan already.

"You seem to forget," Elijah spoke up, his tone clipped now, "that District One has always been resistant to authority. Even before this, getting operatives in and out of there was difficult enough. The place is run on power struggles, gang territories, and blood feuds. There wouldn't even be enough time to get in there and organize a proper evacuation before the infected numbers doubled. There is too much chaos in that district."

"So you'd give up?" Leon asked, and this time the challenge in his voice was impossible to ignore. "You'd let the zombies multiply in there until they become all of our problems next, Alpha King?"

A few heads turned. That was bold. Even for Leon.

But if Elijah was offended, he did not show it, at least not outwardly.

Instead, the Alpha king smiled. Unfortunately, there was absolutely nothing reassuring about that smile.

"Of course not. That," he continued, glancing around the room with chilling satisfaction, "is precisely why we are all here, isn't it? To coordinate with the human soldiers and clean up the mess. I'm just glad we're finally seeing the reality of the situation, and that there will be no more objections to wolves fighting for the humans."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 827: The Truth[1,145 words]

Chapter 827: The Truth

"Now, if that would be all on the political agenda..." Elijah said, in a tone of finality. "Then I'll say we lock up and call it a day. We need time to discuss District One, strategize, and estimate the number of werewolves needed for this battle."

For once, he sounded every bit the Alpha King serious about his duties.

Almost immediately, Nancy and Ezra King raised their hands at the same time. The timing was so exact it made several heads turn. They both paused and looked at each other, eyes locking.

And for a brief second, it looked almost comical — a completely silent marital battle happening right in front of a hall full of powerful wolves. But if one looked carefully, it was obvious Ezra wasn't amused in the slightest, if anything, there was a very clear, feral warning in his stare.

He was trying to will his mate into backing down but Nancy did not back down. Her hand remained lifted, unapologetically high for everyone to see.

Elijah's brows drew together, his surprise thinly veiled now as he studied the pair. Whatever antics they were up to now, he was very much interested. So he indulged her.

With a lazy flick of his fingers, he gestured for her to speak.

Though Elijah knew perfectly well who she was, he still asked in a falsely polite tone,

"And you are?"

The insult was on purpose. A calculated attempt to belittle her. To reduce her to nothing more than an irrelevant human in a hall dominated by wolves.

Of course, Nancy saw straight through it and remained unmoved. She had dealt with men like Elijah all her life back in District One. Men with too much power, ego, and just enough cruelty to think they were untouchable.

The dog of an Alpha King did not intimidate her.

So she rose gracefully to her feet and answered with a smile so sweet it bordered on insulting.

"Your Majesty, Nancy King. Mate to Ezra King, acting Alpha of the West Pack and former occupant of District One." She went all the way in, since apparently they were playing games.

"Nancy, you don't have to do this," Ezra warned under his breath, tension rolling off him in waves. A low growl rumbled in his chest, controlled but dangerous.

Do what? Elijah watched the exchange with growing interest. What exactly were they up to?

He pressed further.

"And what seems to be the problem, Nancy King?" Elijah asked. "Is this about District One? Well, do not worry, my dear. We will try our best to save it before it becomes overwhelmed by those creatures."

Then he added with a patronizing softness that made the insult even uglier, "You should sit down and focus on taking care of the pup in your belly. We wouldn't want anything happening to Ezra's heir. After all, humans are rather fragile, aren't they?"

The insult was wrapped in concern, but it landed exactly as intended.

This time, Ezra's dangerous growl came not in Nancy's direction but in Elijah's. But Nancy had been fighting her own battles long before Ezra King ever crashed into her life like a beautiful, violent disaster. She did not need permission to start another one.

She rose so abruptly her chair scraped back with a violent screech across the floor, the jarring sound cutting through the room and stunning the nearby Alphas into silence.

Several heads snapped toward her, mostly with surprise and curiosity.

"Now listen to me, you overgrown, barely leashed dog!" Nancy snapped.

The room froze.

"Oh no, she didn't," Aeron muttered, staring wide-eyed.

"Oh yes, she did," Irene murmured, her gaze fixed on Nancy with open pride.

Though they planned this, it still took a terrifying amount of courage for a human woman to stand up in a room full of werewolves and publicly insult the Alpha King to his face.

Elijah in question stood frozen with utter disbelief. He had not seen that coming.

Nancy continued as if her first insult had not already detonated through the room.

"Why don't your pathetic, lying ass open up and tell everyone the truth? About your brother, Angus, being alive all this while, and you hiding it."

For one long second, the room held nothing but stunned silence. Then everything exploded.

"What is the human talking about?!"

"Angus? Former Alpha King Angus?"

"Isn't he dead?"

"What kind of joke is this?"

"Is this true?"

Voices rose all at once with questions flying in every direction. Confusion tore through the hall like wildfire, swallowing what little order had remained.

And through it all, Elijah did not move.

He simply stood there, terrifyingly still. Predatory still. The kind of stillness a cobra held right before it struck.

Then he moved quickly but not fast enough. Ezra was already in front of Nancy, placing himself between his pregnant mate and the most dangerous man in the room.

When Elijah got close, Ezra's claws flashed out, striking him making him stagger back. The Alpha king looked down to see five long claw marks had torn clean across his chest,

slicing through his clothes and skin alike. His lip curled back instantly in a snarl, challenge blazing in his eyes.

Now the entire room had descended into complete chaos. Every Alpha was on their feet, voices piling on top of each other until the sound became one giant, ugly cacophony. No one knew what side to take or that was true anymore.

Ezra pushed Nancy behind him without ever taking his eyes off Elijah.

His entire body was wound so tight it looked painful, his wolf practically clawing beneath his skin. His eyes flashed dangerously, every inch of him ready to tear the room apart if Elijah so much as breathed wrong in Nancy's direction.

Then Irene stepped out too. She shifted just enough to cover Nancy's flank with her own body and said loudly, clearly, for everyone to hear,

"Why don't you stop trying to intimidate everyone and tell us the truth about your brother, Angus?"

Elijah's head snapped toward her.

"And who told you that?" he snarled.

"It doesn't matter how we found out," Leon shot back immediately. "What matters is the fact that you've been lying to all of us this entire time."

And yes. He was in too.

After the mirror call with the boys, Nancy and Ezra had made sure to tell their parents everything. And together, they had all agreed on one thing: this meeting would be the perfect place to expose Elijah. In front of this many witnesses, there would be no easy way for him to slither out of it.

And then it dawned on Elijah. His eyes swept across the room, narrowing as realization sank in like poison.

"You all knew," he said slowly. Then more darkly, "You all planned this."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 828: The Devil Arrives[1,085 words]

Chapter 828: The Devil Arrives

"Planning would suggest something more nefarious. More like working together to expose the ugly lie you've kept hidden all this while."

It was Caspian who spoke, his tone so cold he sounded nothing like the person he had been moments ago.

Elijah turned to stare at him.

"You too?"

Disbelief flashed across his face, raw and unguarded for the briefest second. Then a harsh laugh tore from his throat. It echoed around the hall, dry and jagged, bouncing off the walls until it finally died. And when it did, every trace of humor vanished from his face.

"And what exactly did you intend to achieve with this?" he asked, his voice turning so thin and brittle in the way something fragile could snap at any moment. It was almost unsettling.

"To dethrone me? Fine. Go ahead. Try it."

He looked around the room wildly.

"Who would rule after me? You?" he pointed at Irene. Then Leon. "Or perhaps one of the rest of you, waiting like vultures for a throne that does not belong to you?"

His lips curled in disgust.

"All of you. Your greed knows no bounds. You would rather tear each other apart than live long enough to see one territory rise over the other."

"That is not the point, Elijah!" Irene shouted back, rage blazing in her eyes. "The point is you acknowledging that you were wrong for withholding the truth from us!"

"The truth?" Elijah let out another harsh laugh, but this one carried no humor at all.

Only madness.

His gaze swept the room, taking in every face turned toward him with suspicion, doubt, and accusation.

He snarled.

"The truth is that your Alpha King Angus, in his greed for power, summoned a demon. A move that destroyed him."

He jabbed a finger against his own chest, his eyes wide with fury.

"Me! He destroyed me! My dreams! My entire life! My whole future!"

No one spoke knowing what he was talking about. His inability to spawn an heir. The room had gone so still it felt as though even breathing had paused.

Elijah raged on.

"The attack left him incapacitated. Close to death. No amount of healing could save him. The Council of Elders knew that truth would bring nothing but chaos. They knew the older alphas, your greedy parents, would start circling the throne like vultures. After all, I was nothing but a pup. So they declared him dead and made me Alpha King."

He looked around the room, daring anyone to challenge him.

"Tell me then, what would you have had me do? Speak!"

A few of the sub-alphas visibly winced beneath the weight of his dominance. When no one answered, a cruel smile stretched across Elijah's lips.

"Thought as much."

"You could have fought for your throne," Ezra finally said.

All eyes turned to him.

Ezra stood there, unyielding.

"It's in every wolf's blood to want more," he continued. "To rise. To dominate. To claim power. They would have come for the throne, yes. But you could have defended it. You could have proven yourself worthy of becoming King."

His voice hardened.

"But instead, you clung to it like a coward." You built your foundation on lies and doomed us all. Because Angus is alive. And he is coming for his throne."

Murmurs erupted around the hall.

Almost as if Ezra had jinxed his own luck, a voice suddenly rang from outside.

"Hey! Who are you? You're not permitted here—" The sentence broke off into a grunt of pain and there came the unmistakable sound of a struggle.

A body slammed into the wall. There was a torrent of curses and another sharp cry. At once, every Alpha in the room went rigid.

The meeting hall, which had been vibrating with arguments and accusations just seconds ago, fell into a chilling silence so fast it was almost unnatural.

No one spoke or moved. Every wolf in the room felt it. Something was wrong.

At the far corner, Christian was already reaching for the radio attached to his belt, pressing it hard as his jaw clenched.

"What's the situation outside?" he barked into it. "Report. Now."

But there was nothing. A dry crackle answered him.

Christian frowned and tried again, this time more forcefully. "Respond, damn it!"

Still nothing, just static.

His eyes slowly lifted and met Elijah's from across the room. That alone said enough. Something had happened.

Christian moved immediately. He strode toward the entrance, already pulling out his gun in one smooth motion before loading it with silver bullets.

The metallic clicks echoed too loudly in the silence, each one scraping against the nerves of everyone present.

And then, they heard the approaching footsteps. Whoever it was, walked casually as if he owned the room and not stepping into a room full of alphas.

Every Alpha in the room dropped instinctively into a fighting stance. A low ripple of growls rolled through the room as their wolves pressed restlessly beneath their human skin.

Ezra said to Nancy. "Don't worry, I'll find a way to get you out of here."

Nancy didn't argue. She only gave the slightest nod, holding onto him tightly.

Then the door burst open and Christian darted out with his gun raised, firing a rapid series of shots toward the figure standing beyond the doorway.

Bang.

Bang.

Bang.

But the bullets never landed.

A girl standing outside simply raised her hand and every single bullet froze in midair.

The room went dead still. For one suspended, impossible second, no one breathed.

Then with the flick of her wrist, she sent them flying back.

Christian's eyes widened. He twisted, trying to dodge but wasn't fast enough. One bullet tore into his leg and another lodged into his arm and stomach.

He let out a strangled cry and collapsed hard to the floor, his gun clattering from his hand as pain ripped through him.

The girl smirked and casually stepped aside. And that was when the real figure entered.

It was an older man. Tall, broad, and still carrying the kind of presence that made the air itself tighten around him.

The moment Alpha King Elijah saw his face, all the color drained from his own.

And one by one, gasps rippled through the hall because they knew that face. Every last one of them.

Speak of the devil and he shall appear.

It was Angus Sebastian Richmond.

The former Alpha King.

And he was very much alive.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 829: Unveiling[1,738 words]

Chapter 829: Unveiling

The girl who accompanied Angus was, of course, none other than Ziva. And right now, she wore a smug smile, openly relishing the shock on the faces around her as they took in her father.

As they should.

Lilian and the other witches remained outside, dealing with any werewolf guards foolish enough to interfere. They had arrived under the cover of a massive sleeping spell, one that had swept through the perimeter and knocked out most of the guards where they stood.

But not all of them had been caught within its radius and those who weren't, well, they hadn't lasted long enough to be a problem.

"Angus."

The name slipped from someone's lips.

It was the usurper. The so-called current Alpha King. Or more accurately, his brother, Elijah.

At the mention of that name, everything changed. The air tightened.

"Angus?"

"Former Alpha King Angus?"

The name spread across the room like a cursed thing, whispered from one mouth to another ominously.

Ziva nearly sneered at the one who had dared to call him former. For all she knew, her father had never stopped being king.

And now, they were all about to remember it.

Recognition began to dawn on the faces of the sub-alphas who hadn't identified Angus at first glance. One by one, their expressions changed from confusion into realization, and realization twisting into fear.

A low murmur rippled through the hall, growing louder with each passing second.

Eyes darted between Elijah and the man who stood in the entrance like a ghost dragged back from the grave.

What was he doing here?

"Peace be on this house," Angus said dramatically, spreading his arms wide as though he were some honored guest arriving at a celebration, and had not just crashed an important meeting.

He turned to Elijah, who stood a few feet away from him looking ready to tear the walls apart. Angus smiled wickedly.

"Little brother," he drawled, "how could you not invite the main character to his own unveiling?" He placed a hand over his chest in mock offense. "I'm hurt."

Elijah's lips peeled back in a snarl.

"Get out."

The amusement on Angus' face thinned almost instantly, leaving behind an unsettling coldness.

His face hardened as he said, voice low and dangerous, "Make me."

Elijah did not call for his men. Not when they were either unconscious outside or already dead.

Instead, he bared his teeth, sharp and glinting beneath the lights, before releasing a roar so violent it reverberated through the entire meeting room, rattling nerves and making a few of the weaker wolves flinch where they stood.

Ziva recognized the shift in him immediately and instinctively moved to step forward. But Angus lifted a hand, stopping her before she could interfere.

She looked up at him, questioning but the look he gave her in return said enough. He could fight his own battles. So she stayed back.

And when Elijah charged at him with claws out, eyes wild, every inch of him moving with the full intention to maim, Angus did not move from his spot. Not even an inch.

He simply stood there as Elijah struck once.

Then again, and again. His claws swiped left and right in a frenzy of violence, aiming for the flesh, bone, or something that would tear, split, bleed.

Except nothing happened. To Elijah's shock and dismay, his claws could not penetrate Angus' skin no matter how hard he struck. It didn't matter the force he put behind it, it was like trying to cut through stone.

A trace of confusion crossed Elijah's features. It was followed by disbelief and finally something dangerously close to fear.

Bewildered, he looked up at his brother with wide, disbelieving eyes and Angus laughed. A deep, ugly guffaw that carried far too much amusement for Elijah's liking.

"You didn't seriously think you were the only one wearing charms, did you?" Angus mocked.

Everyone in that room knew he was talking

Elijah's necklace, the one made to ward off psychic attacks from the likes of his heir candidate, Asher Nightshade.

Realization dawned on Elijah. Though he tried to bury it quickly, his brother caught that tiny flicker of fear. That moment of weakness.

The smile that spread across Angus' face after that was pure devilish delight. Without warning, he grabbed Elijah by the throat, lifting him clean off the ground.

A collective gasp was heard through the room. Elijah's feet kicked uselessly in the air, his fingers clawing at Angus's wrist, but it did nothing.

Yes, Angus was far stronger now. The witches had seen to that. Their spells were imbued into his body, sharpening his muscles, and every ounce of his Alpha strength.

He had not come into this room unprepared. He was here to take what rightfully belonged to him.

There was perhaps no quicker way to kill hope than to watch your once powerful Alpha King get lifted off the floor like he was nothing more than a mere boy.

A ripple of panic spread through the sub-alphas almost instantly, nervous sweat gathering along their brows. Even the Alphas looked visibly shaken. This was no ordinary display of strength, but a public humiliation.

Angus wasn't just overpowering Elijah. He was making a vicious statement.

Look. Even your Alpha King cannot save you. So who exactly are you to stand against me?

Angus let Elijah dangle there, kicking uselessly in the air, relishing the way his movements gradually weakened the longer his air supply was cut off. There was something deeply satisfying about the helpless look on Elijah's face. Something that soothed an old, festering wound inside him.

He had dreamed of this day. Dreamed of the moment he would finally punish his insolent little brother for what he had done. The bastard had declared him dead and left him to rot like a corpse long before his heart had even stopped beating.

But clearly, the Goddess had not been done with him yet. She had reached into the grave and dragged him back out. Gave him a second chance at life. And Angus intended to use every bit of it to exact his revenge.

Of course, he had no intention of killing Elijah. Not yet. He was still his little brother after all, and in a sick, twisted way, Elijah had taken care of things in his absence.

So no. Death would be too merciful. He would leave him alive to suffer and regret ever abandoning him.

So he tossed Elijah aside as if he was nothing more than a rag doll.

Elijah's body slammed hard against the floor, his head cracking against the surface with a sickening sound. Pain split through him at once, and darkness immediately began to crawl into the edges of his vision.

This time, he did not fight it. He let it take him.

Around the room, the werewolves watched in stunned silence. Some swallowed audibly. Others stood frozen, too shaken to even pretend they weren't afraid.

A heavy silence settled over the hall like smoke after a fire. With Alpha King Elijah down, no one knew what Angus intended to do next.

Irene took a leap of faith.

"What do you want, Angus?"

Angus slowly lifted his head to look at her, visibly intrigued. Perhaps it was because she was a woman. Or perhaps it was because she was the only one in the room with enough courage to actually speak.

His gaze dragged over her slowly, taking her in from head to toe like he was assessing a strange little creature that had unexpectedly grown teeth.

"Irene Hale," he said at last, voice almost thoughtful. "Daughter of Oswald Hale..."

Then, with a faint glimmer of delight in his eyes, he added,

"And brother killer."

Irene flinched. That was a dark Chapter of her life she did not like revisiting.

Angus, of course, did not care.

"I knew your father back in the day," he went on casually. "I must admit, I thought him a fool for placing so much power in the hands of his first daughter when he had a son. But it turned out you ruled the East Pack far better than your useless brother ever would have."

Aeron spoke up. "What is the point of all this, Angus?"

"Ahh, yes. You." Angus noticed him too.

He gave a low chuckle before glancing back at Irene.

"Funny, isn't it?" he mused. "You married the famed Twin Assassins, yet never forgave your brother for hiring them in the first place. Seems a bit unfair to me, don't you think?"

He clearly found Irene's twisted love life deeply amusing.

Someone snarled openly. Just like that,

Angus's attention shifted to Ezra.

And Angus's expression darkened the moment his gaze landed on the way Ezra stood protectively in front of Nancy. Disapproval flashed plainly across his face.

"Has our culture truly become so lax, that we now invite our human bitches into important Alpha meetings?" Angus said with cold disgust.

"How dare you—!"

Ezra's eyes flashed violently, and he would have lunged if Nancy hadn't caught him in time, her hand locking around his arm with more force than expected.

Ezra was no match for Angus and Nancy knew it. She would swallow a thousand insults from that man if it meant keeping her mate alive. Besides, she had heard words like that her entire life, it was nothing new.

Still, this time Angus's gaze settled fully on her. Nancy's heart began to pound.

He smiled at her.

"I do have to thank you," he said.

Nancy frowned.

"For taking care of my daughter, Violet. You raised her a little too well."

Nancy had no idea whether that was meant as a compliment or an insult.

And frankly, that was the least of her problems because another commotion was already breaking out.

"Did he just say Violet?" Leon demanded, his voice filled with disbelief. "You mean Violet Purple?"

"Ahh, right." Angus sounded almost amused again. "Did I forget to mention my half-Fae, half-werewolf daughter? Violet Purple."

Then, almost lazily, he added, "I suppose I should also thank her mother, the Fae Queen, for keeping me alive during my lowest period. Otherwise, I would have been long dead by now."

But by then, no one was truly listening to the rest of his explanation anymore.

Their minds were still struggling to catch up with the revelation.

Violet Purple was Angus's daughter.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 830: In Three Days[1,571 words]

Chapter 830: In Three Days

"No way!"

"How is that even possible? That doesn't make sense!"

"Violet Purple? But she was with us this whole time! How the hell did we not know?"

The room practically shook with the shouts of disbelief and confusion. To think Violet Purple had been among them all along and they had not recognized her as Angus spawn. No, the shock was too much for them to handle.

It was only Irene who remained unsurprised and calm in the middle of the uproar because she knew the truth.

Nancy had opened up to her. Probably because she was a fellow woman. A mother too. And perhaps because, out of all the Alpha parents, Irene had always shown the strongest support toward Violet from the very beginning.

Sure, the other parents of the Cardinal Alphas were tied to Violet now through their sons being mates and all. But they had never been close enough for Nancy to trust them with something this enormous.

Telling them their sons were alive and relatively unharmed had been enough. At least, until Angus and his reckless mouth decided otherwise.

Unlike Angus, who looked positively delighted by the commotion his confession had caused, Ziva stood beside him with a darkened expression.

Her hands were clenched so tightly at her sides that her nails nearly cut into her palms.

She hated this. Hated the way Angus's chest had practically puffed with pride the moment Violet's name left his mouth. As if she were some prized treasure. As if she were the only daughter worth claiming.

Ziva's jaw tightened. She was the one who had done all the heavy lifting. The one who had stayed by his side. The one who had schemed, bled, and dirtied her hands for him.

And yet even now, standing right beside him in the middle of his grand return, he had not once introduced her as his daughter.

Only Violet.

Always Violet.

No one cared about her. No one ever did.

And what made it worse was the ugly little truth curling at the pit of her stomach, that even if Angus did announce her now, it would never hold the same weight.

Because she was only a witch hybrid. She was not powerful or politically useful like Violet. Not like his precious half-Fae, half-werewolf daughter. His beloved daughter. The same daughter who was actively working against him even now.

The thought made something vicious twist inside her. It made her want to tear someone apart. But Ziva swallowed it down. For now.

Soon enough, Angus would be King. When that happened, Violet would no longer be useful to him. Then Ziva would have her revenge.

The thought alone made dark satisfaction settle in her chest. It would be fun, she thought, to break Violet. To strip away all the things that made people look at her like she was

special. Maybe then, they would all finally see there was nothing so extraordinary about Violet after all.

While the room still spiraled from Angus's confession, Irene faced Angus.

"If Violet is your daughter," she said, "then doesn't that make her your heir?"

That got Angus's attention. So did the room's.

Irene continued smoothly, her expression unreadable. "Is that your intention? To place her on the throne? Because if so, that would make sense."

Her eyes flicked briefly toward Elijah's unconscious body on the floor before returning to Angus.

"Elijah, after all, has no heir. And Violet, in this case, is more than strong enough to become the next Alpha Queen."

For the briefest second, Angus looked caught off guard. Then he recovered quickly, a slow smile creeping across his face. It seems Irene Hale was more conniving than he thought.

While it seemed like she had asked an innocent question, all she did was plant the dangerous idea into the minds of the gathered alphas. And in doing so, she had very deliberately shifted the attention in the room from him to Violet.

"Of course, Violet is my heir," Angus agreed, his voice carrying with ease. "And she will rule one day."

He emphasized the words "one day". Not now. Not while he was still breathing.

Then he continued, with the same calm arrogance that made several wolves bristle from their position, "But for now, I am here to take back my rightful position as King."

Leon scoffed.

"Rightful position as King?" he repeated in disbelief, as though the very phrase had insulted him personally. "Are you kidding me?"

His face hardened almost instantly.

"Elijah wronged us by lying about your death, but you, Angus, committed a far worse crime by practicing dark magic."

A murmur rippled through the room.

Leon pressed on.

"We should be discussing your execution right now."

"He's right," Caspian concurred, stepping in before the silence could settle. "For someone who committed such a heinous crime, you should be here on your knees begging for forgiveness, not standing there making foolish claims to the throne."

Just like that, the sub-alphas found their courage, encouraged by the confidence of their Alphas.

"The Alphas are right. Dark magic is forbidden."

"You should be punished!"

Angus let out a long, almost bored sigh.

Then he turned his head toward Ziva, and in that brief look, something passed silently between them.

Ziva slowly spread out her arms and began to murmur under her breath, her lips moving in a low chant that seemed to curl unnaturally through the air.

At first, nothing happened. Then every wolf in the room screamed, the pain hitting all at once.

A vicious, blinding force that felt like something was splitting their skulls open from the inside out. It drove straight through their minds mercilessly, as though invisible claws were tearing into their brains.

Several of the sub-alphas buckled immediately to one knee. Others crashed to the floor entirely, clutching their heads as guttural cries tore from their throats.

Even the stronger wolves staggered. Their bodies trembled under the assault, their wolves snarling restlessly beneath their skin, trying and failing to fight off the invasion.

While most of the wolves could at least endure the torment, the same could not be said for Nancy. Her scream ripped through the room, raw and horrifying, as she clutched her head and collapsed hard to the floor. Blood trickled from her ear, bright and terrifying against her skin.

Ezra's eyes widened in pure horror.

"Nancy!"

He tried to get to her but the sound was incapacitating. Every attempt only made his knees buckle harder.

He shouted anyway, his voice rough with desperation.

"Stop it! You're hurting her!"

But Ziva only continued, her chanting growing steadier now, almost stronger, as if she were taking pleasure in Ezra's helplessness. And maybe she was.

Then Irene and the others were shouting too, their voices strained through the pain.

"Stop it already!"

"The woman is pregnant!"

"Enough!"

Angus finally lifted a hand in a lazy gesture and Ziva stopped at once.

The silence that followed was almost as brutal as the spell itself. Ziva looked annoyed, if not petulant. Her father could have let her enjoy herself a little longer. If the human woman died from it, then perhaps it would have served as a lesson to them.

"You can't be crowned King," Leon snapped, his voice rough with rage and pain, still shaking from the remnants of Ziva's attack. "Even if we wanted to, we couldn't. Not when Elijah's blessed by the Goddess to rule."

That was the truth.

Each time an Alpha King was crowned, it was done under the blessing of the Goddess herself. The ceremony, while political, was sacred and final. Bound by their law so there would never be two kings rising at once and tearing the territories apart in the name of power.

The Council of Elders must approve it.

The Priestess seals it and finally, the Goddess gives her blessing. That was the law.

To everyone's surprise, Angus said.

"You're right, I cannot be King while my brother lives." his eyes darkened, "And that is why you should all encourage my younger brother to relinquish the throne to me."

A wave of murmurs spread through the room almost instantly. As if Elijah would ever surrender the throne willingly. This was bound to end in blood and war.

Then suddenly, a great roar rent the air outside, shaking the entire house to its foundation.

"What was that?" someone asked, voice edged with alarm.

"Griffin," Irene whispered. And for the first time in what felt like hours, hope entered her eyes.

Angus clearly sensed the shift in the air too and knew a fight was coming.

"You have three days," he said to them.

"Three days to make your decision. Otherwise, I won't be blamed for whatever happens."

Then, without another word, Angus turned and strode out of the meeting room.

Ziva followed closely behind him, watching and making sure no one tried anything stupid. Then she disappeared after her father.

The second they were gone, Ezra rushed to Nancy so fast he nearly slipped to his knees beside her.

"Nancy," he called, his voice breaking around her name as his hands hovered over her body, terrified to touch too hard and terrified not to touch at all.

But his mate didn't respond and his stomach dropped. Just like that, all the fury left in Ezra was replaced by fear.

"Someone call for help!" Irene thundered.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 831: Attacked By Witches[1,566 words]

The only worry Griffin and Roman had on their way to Aster City was arriving too late to the meeting.

Their parents needed them there as backup just in case Elijah somehow managed to slither his way out of the accusations. Or worse, try something stupid.

Hence, imagine their surprise when the chopper began its descent toward the center of Elijah's large compound.

Or at least, tried to.

Halfway down, something yanked the helicopter violently to the side.

The entire aircraft lurched so hard Roman had to grab onto the side rail while Griffin's shoulder slammed against the interior wall. The pilot cursed loudly, wrestling with the controls as the blades overhead let out a strained metallic whine.

"What the hell—?!"

Then they saw them.

About seven women stepped out from the corners below, their white dresses whipping in the wind as they raised their hands and began to chant in eerie, synchronized unison.

The air became charged. Griffin and Roman shared a look.

Witches.

They didn't have time to wonder what the hell witches were doing in Elijah's compound—especially witches who very clearly wanted them dead. Because the wind was beginning to gather now.

It curled around the helicopter, dragging at it, twisting, and trying to rip it out of the sky. The cyclone forming beneath them was unnatural, no doubt the result of the witches' spellwork. Overhead, the blades were already beginning to jerk and strain at awkward angles.

The chopper gave another violent shake and this time it dipped dangerously low.

The pilot's face had gone pale.

"You have to get out!" he shouted over the deafening noise, panic cracking through his voice. "Now!"

Griffin and Roman didn't hesitate. It wasn't that far of a drop. At least not one they couldn't survive. So they jumped together for once.

The second Griffin hit the air, his body began to change. His bones stretched while his muscles thickened, skin expanding with brutal, terrifying speed.

By the time he landed, it was no longer Griffin Hale crashing into the earth, but a seven-foot hulking version of him. The transition had been so seamless, it had happened in the blink of an eye.

And the moment his huge feet hit the ground, he released a ferocious roar that ripped through the compound and shook the morale of every witch present.

Surely, they must have heard about his beast and what he was capable of doing. Unfortunately, it seems knowing and seeing were two completely different things.

The witches asked for it.

Roman landed a second later. He touched the ground on all fours with a smooth precision that was elegant.

In Roman's place was a stunning green cheetah, sleek and lean but no less dangerous, his glowing eyes locked onto the witches with predatory focus.

When Griffin roared, Roman answered with one of his own, his body lowering, hind legs coiling beneath him, ready to spring.

Then Griffin shot high into the air with terrifying force and came crashing down directly in the middle of the witches.

One of them barely had time to scream before Griffin grabbed her by the waist like she weighed nothing. He tore her apart the way children would destroy a toy they didn't like anymore. Blood sprayed and the other women froze in horror. They could see their life flash before their lives.

In any other situation, Griffin might have respected women, but not the kind who tried to kill him. Or his loved ones.

Roman, even in his feline form, visibly recoiled at his wildness. So dirty.

There was nothing left in the eyes of the remaining witches but terror. They began hurling spell after spell at the two beasts, with shaking hands, as magical blasts shot wildly through the air. Unfortunately, panic made them sloppy.

The moment Roman moved, it was over.

Cheetah Roman was fast as hell. Too fast for the human eye to properly follow. One second he was there and the next, a witch was screaming as claws ripped into her throat.

Then another. And another.

He darted through them in green blurs, mauling them down in quick, brutal succession before their spells could even land.

By the time the dust began to settle, the ground was already stained with blood, bodies lay torn apart across the compound. Between Griffin's savage rampage and Roman's lethal speed, every last witch had been reduced to meat and regret.

There was a sudden rustle from behind and Roman's cheetah ears twitched instantly.

Someone was still here and had started running.

Roman shot off in that direction without warning, paws pounding against the earth as he followed the sound. Up ahead, a young girl was sprinting through the path, her heart hammering so loudly Roman could hear it over everything else.

He lunged at her, body slamming into hers and they both hit the ground hard. Roman pinned her easily, claws accidentally digging into her arm just enough to draw blood.

The scent hit him instantly and he froze.

He knew that scent. Recognized it, actually.

It smelled like Violet, but not exactly like her. But close enough to make something cold crawl down his spine.

His eyes narrowed on the girl's face. It dawned on him. This was Violet's sister. Angus's daughter.

No way. It couldn't be. Angus was here?

That split second of hesitation cost him.

The girl hissed something under her breath and suddenly a violent force blasted into Roman's side, hurling him clean off her body and straight into a nearby car.

By the time he recovered, shaking off the daze, she was gone. Roman snarled low in his throat, sudden fear flooding his system.

If Angus was here, then everything had gone wrong.

Griffin was by his side a second later, naked as the day he was born and covered in blood. But there was no time to think about that. The two of them rushed inside.

Roman didn't shift back. This form made it easier to hunt, kill, and right now his senses were too useful to give up. He could smell blood. Fear. Magic. Wolves. And somewhere ahead, a lot of wolves were gathered in one room.

That had to be where their parents were.

So they followed it.

The moment they burst into the meeting hall, it was utter confusion. The tension was so thick it felt alive. But even through all the chaos, the second their parents spotted them, relief fell over them.

"Goddess above," Irene didn't even think.

She threw herself at Griffin without a care for the fact that he was stark naked and drenched in blood. Her arms wrapped around him tightly as she laughed in pure relief.

Roman heard it next.

"Son."

His ears twitched and he turned his head.

Leon.

His father had crouched down, arms already open.

Roman moved before he could stop himself, crossing the space between them and pressing into Leon's embrace. Leon wrapped his arms around him, pulling him close despite being in beast form.

Roman nuzzled into him shamelessly, relishing the familiar scent and the grounding comfort of his father's touch.

"It's nice to have you back, boy," Leon said, patting him firmly.

When they finally broke apart, Roman's eyes landed on the real source of the commotion.

Nancy King.

She was unconscious on the floor while Caspian crouched beside her, trying to revive her.

"Shit," Griffin muttered.

Roman heard the fear in his voice immediately.

"Violet is going to lose her shit if anything happens to Nancy."

And speak of Violet.

Roman remembered the stone. He reached for his pocket instinctively, only to remember he was in beast form.

But then, it also occurred to him that they had left it in a sachet in the chopper. The same chopper that had exploded.

Oh, great.

How were they going to communicate with Violet now? Without the stone, they were practically stranded. Sure, Violet could still reach out to them somehow, but it wouldn't be easy.

To think they had barely arrived and somehow, they had already managed to mess things up.

"She's breathing!" Caspian said, relief and urgency colliding in his voice. "But she needs to be taken to a hospital. The spell hit her too hard. If we don't get her help soon, she could lose the baby."

Griffin opened his mouth. "We have.... "

Then he recalled. The chopper was gone — and quite possibly the pilot.

His mouth snapped shut.

Ezra didn't wait around. He scooped Nancy into his arms with terrifying care, and strode out of the room with Caspian following closely behind.

No sooner had they left than someone stirred from the side.

It was only then that Griffin and Roman properly took in their Alpha King, who had apparently been unconscious through the entire disaster.

Just like that, all the wolves in the room went tense. Every eye slowly turned toward Elijah, watching, and waiting for him to wake up.

Elijah groaned and stumbled up to his feet, one hand going instinctively to the back of his head where a painful lump had already begun to rise. He winced.

Lifting up his gaze, that was when he noticed his subjects were staring at him strangely now.

"What happened?" he rasped, voice rough from pain.

Irene folded her arms and said, coldly,

"Alpha King Elijah, we need to talk."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 832: Step Down As Alpha King[1,092 words]

Chapter 832: Step Down As Alpha King

"We want an explanation for this! You don't get to stay silent!"

"It must have been entertaining for you, laughing behind our backs, thinking we were fools."

The wolves were angry. And frankly, no one could fault them for it. They had just watched their once-assumed dead Alpha King walk straight into the room, very much alive.

That meant not only had Elijah kept the truth from them all this while, but he had also wrongfully ascended the throne. Perhaps the fact that he had made them serve him when he did not deserve it angered them the most.

However, a room full of hot-tempered wolves was far from ideal. Hence, Irene had Elijah seated as far away from the others as physically possible before anyone got ideas and did something irreversible.

Even then, getting through any sort of sensible conversation with the wolves was difficult. Not with the way they were all ranting over one another, voices rising, frustrations spilling out without restraint.

"This is a mess," Sub-Alpha Will growled, dragging a hand through his hair in visible agitation. "How was he even able to become Alpha King when Angus was still alive?!"

He genuinely could not wrap his head around it.

Another wolf answered before Elijah could.

"He must've exploited some kind of loophole," he spat. "He and that trickish-as-hell Council of Elders must've done something to make the Goddess condone it."

If a cheetah could visibly roll its eyes, that had to be Roman right now.

Angus nearly dying was the loophole, he muttered inwardly, since apparently no one in this room had the sense to think that far.

Roman still remained in his beast form, especially now that murderous energy was practically leaking off every Alpha in the room.

And it wasn't hard to guess what they all wanted to do right now. Especially the sub-alfphas. Goddess knew he hated Elijah's ass too, but killing him now would only create more problems.

No matter his crimes, the wolves still needed a leader to keep them in line. Such was their way of life.

Another wolf gave a harsh laugh.

"I think you're all avoiding the real question here," he said, his tone dark. "What exactly are we supposed to do now?"

"Not we," another sub-alpha corrected sharply, glaring hard at Elijah from across the room. "He."

His lip curled.

"What is he going to do about this?"

There was something in his eyes that said if Irene hadn't forced some level of order into this room, he'd already be trying to get his answer in a far more effective way.

"Of course, he's going to step down!" one wolf shouted.

That should have been the obvious answer.

But then Elijah scoffed, and the sound alone was enough to make heads turn.

And the arrogant little smirk that followed said everything.

Yeah. Fat chance.

That did not go over well.

Growls reverberated through the room almost instantly, not just from one wolf, but several. The sound swelled and layered until it seemed to press into the walls themselves, thick with challenge, hostility, and the dangerous edge of violence.

Click. Click.

The sudden sound made the room go even stiller.

Elijah's security detail—who had apparently woken up from their forced nap—raised their weapons and cocked their guns, silver bullets loaded and ready to tear into anyone stupid enough to lunge.

Werewolves were fast. But not fast enough to outrun a bullet already fired.

Especially not silver. Even if it didn't kill outright, it would leave them writhing and half-dead on the floor.

Just like Christian.

"Back off," Griffin growled at one of the guards, his voice low and lethal.

The guard hesitated.

Then another wolf, further to the side, took a threatening step forward.

"You too," Griffin warned, his tone even darker this time.

But the sub-alpha only growled in defiance, clearly too worked up and humiliated to stomach being ordered around by Irene's pup, Griffin Hale.

Wrong move.

Griffin slowly bared his teeth and let out a growl so deep and thunderous, it seemed to shake the walls themselves.

His heavy dominance flooded the room, the force of it rolling over everyone present like a wave and pressing the instinct to submit straight into their bones.

Several wolves visibly stiffened, while the stronger Alphas—especially Elijah—only frowned, visibly bothered by the force of it.

The kids were stronger than them. That had always been obvious. But experiencing it firsthand?

It was embarrassing, to say the least.

The sub-alpha who had defied Griffin didn't cower or retreat. At least not immediately. But when he looked down, he found his legs shaking so badly they might as well have turned to noodles beneath him.

He could still feel the weight of Griffin's power pressing against his spine, forcing every animal instinct inside him to recognize what stood before him. That was the terrifying difference between an ordinary wolf and a beast touched by divinity.

Even now, he had to fight the primal urge to lower himself, bare his throat, and submit.

Irene, meanwhile, was practically glowing with pride. That was her son.

And the way the sub-alpha slowly backed away now, stiff and awkward like a child learning how to walk for the first time, only made it better.

Now the others would learn.

Seeing that their violent outburst would not be tolerated, they switched tactics.

"What are we going to do now? Angus has given us three days to make a decision!"

Sub-Alpha Will spoke next.

"Of course, Alpha Elijah has to step down. That's the only way this ends without bloodshed."

Then he added with a sneer, "That's the sacrifice he has to make for his people."

His eyes met Elijah's and held. There was no fear in them, only cold, seething anger.

And challenge.

It was worth noting that this particular sub-alpha already had it out for Elijah after their last meeting, where the Alpha King had publicly intimidated and humiliated him.

So now that Elijah was in a precarious position, he intended to drag him down with everything he had.

"Sure," Elijah said.

And everyone stopped dead.

Huh?

Heads turned toward him at once, surprise flashing across several faces, followed closely by suspicion.

No way. Did Elijah just agree like that?

Sure enough, the Alpha King casually crossed one leg over the other in a manner that still somehow managed to scream superiority despite everything, then said,

"Come drag me off the throne."

The uproar that followed was one for the record.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 833: He's No Salvation[1,123 words]

Chapter 833: He's No Salvation

"Do you hear that?" hollered one of the devastated sub-alphas, pointing at Elijah with a shaky finger, his tone filled with utter disbelief. "Do you hear the arrogance in his voice? He doesn't fucking care about us!"

Another said from the side,

"He would rather let us die than surrender to his brother, who is the rightful heir! This is no king of ours!"

"Yes, he's not our Alpha King! Angus is!" another shouted.

"Give us our true king, Angus!" they began to chant in protest.

Griffin shared a troubled look with Cheetah Roman. This was not good.

Just one meeting and Angus had already managed to sway the Alphas to his side.

Then again, it wasn't hard to see why. Elijah had lied to their faces for years and shattered whatever confidence they once had in him.

Alpha Will lifted his head and looked directly at Irene, his Alpha and Warden of the East.

"Would you stay still and allow this to happen?" he demanded.

Irene stared back at him, her face impossible to read.

Will pressed on.

"He's a selfish prick and would let us all bleed if it meant keeping his position."

"Wow," Elijah drawled dryly. "You pretty much summarized me, Alpha Will. You should get an applause for a job well done."

It was Leon who hissed.

"Don't tempt me to throw you to the ravenous wolves right now and let them snuff the life out of you. In case you haven't noticed, you're quickly losing credibility, Alpha King." He said that last title with obvious distaste.

Whatever respect he had for Elijah was long gone.

Elijah said nothing. Not because he had no comeback, but because he wasn't stupid.

Right now, Leon and Irene were the ones holding this room together. Sure, his guards would protect him if the wolves attacked—but at what cost?

These were Alphas of various packs, no matter how small their territories might be.

They still held things together. And what would the news say?

Alpha King Elijah kills his own subjects?

That alone would be enough to set the territories on fire. There was already enough unrest in the kingdom with the zombie virus on the rise. The last thing he needed was civil conflict on top of it.

More importantly, if he harmed them now, no one else would stand with him against Angus. At that point, they wouldn't just want him off the throne. They would want him dead.

So no. For all his arrogance, Elijah knew he still needed them. Almost as much as they needed him.

Irene spoke to Will in a clear, steady voice,

"And you think putting Angus on the throne is the right choice?"

Will lifted his chin proudly.

"At least he's not a liar."

His words were aimed directly at Elijah, clearly meant to provoke him. But Elijah had been King for years. And one thing smaller leaders like Will often failed to understand was that men like Elijah had weathered too many storms to be rattled by a single insult.

It took far more than that to shake a man who had spent years surviving the throne.

"You're right, he's not a liar," Irene agreed.

A small light entered Will's eyes at her words, only for it to die the very next second.

Her expression hardened. "Because he's far worse."

Will's face fell instantly.

Before he could recover, Irene kept going.

"I do not, in any way, condone what Alpha King Elijah has done. But perhaps, I can sympathize with it in part."

That got everyone's attention.

"Or have you all forgotten that Angus used black magic and summoned a demon?"

That landed hard.

"That alone disqualifies him from the throne under our laws!"

The once-confident Alphas were murmuring now, Irene's reminder dragging them back to the truth they had conveniently overlooked in their haste to tear Elijah down.

Irene moved then, stepping away from the line of defense the guards had built between them and the angry sub-alphas.

The room quieted slightly as she approached. She stopped directly in front of Will.

She spat out coldly, "Elijah is only a liar and an asshole. But since when do we welcome back an Alpha King who doomed his own heir from birth?"

Her eyes sharpened.

"Whose deal with a demon rendered his own brother sterile?"

That one hit differently.

Elijah felt the room's gaze shift back onto him, but this time, it was less hostile and with a hint of sympathy — an emotion he didn't like.

This was an old wound. One that had quietly influenced nearly every decision he had made since, and somehow, still refused to heal.

Almost immediately, there was the smallest crack of bones, and in the next second Roman was back in his human form. Naked.

"That is the least of it," he said, picking up where Irene left off. "Angus has been building an army of witches and apparently owns a whole colony of brainwashed daughters."

Shock rippled through the Alphas. Angus didn't tell them that part.

Griffin added,

"Dark hair. Ruthless gleam in the eyes. Twisted smirk. His psychopathic daughter was probably the one who attacked you all and harmed Ezra's mate."

Then, as if they were simply discussing weather and not the crimes of a lunatic, Roman scoffed.

"Bro, you didn't even tell them he...." Roman made a slicing gesture with his hand, "deleted his daughter after she tried to run from his tyranny with her lover." He added, "And yes, she was pregnant."

The uproar this time was visceral. The pain raw and gut-deep. Because wolf or not, no father should be capable of such a thing.

And the fact that Angus had once worn their crown made it all the more revolting.

Irene took advantage of the fresh commotion. "Is that the kind of Alpha you want?" she asked.

That question cut through the room like a blade. And while everyone was still reeling, one person seemed to take the blow the hardest.

Alpha Will.

After all, he had been the loudest in Angus's defense. The most eager to believe there was some better alternative waiting on the other side of Elijah's fall. Now he just looked completely bamboozled.

"How can you be sure of that?" Will asked.

Irene lifted a brow. Then slowly narrowed her eyes.

"You think they would lie about this?"

Will opened his mouth and suddenly couldn't speak.

It was Irene who looked him straight in the eyes and said, "I don't know what light you think you saw..." Her voice dropped colder. "But let me make this very clear to you."

She held his gaze.

"Angus is not our salvation. He is our damnation."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 834: Portal Out Of Lunaris[1,941 words]

Chapter 834: Portal Out Of Lunaris

"So what do we do then?!"

Irene didn't need to know who asked the question from the crowd of sub-alphas, she heard it loud and clear.

Her gaze swept across the faces of the sub-alphas. Some met her stare with the same cold, unreadable expression she wore, while a few lowered their eyes.

That did not impress her. This was not the time for cowardice.

"We fight," she said.

That earned her a fresh wave of murmuring.

She went on,

"Angus is not our leader. He's a dictator who wants domination, and we will not let that happen. As Alphas, it is our duty to defend our territories, even if it costs us our lives. We will not be intimidated into submission." Her voice hardened. "Especially not by a king whose time is over."

This time, the wolves nodded, determination in their eyes. But there was something else there too.

Fear.

"How do we fight a man who can't be killed?" one of them asked. "You all saw what happened. Even our Alpha King was tossed around like a child."

This time, Elijah's face did redden. Yep, that

memory burned. And it would stay burned until he paid Angus back for it.

So he stood.

"Angus is not invincible," Elijah said. "No charm is that foolproof. For instance, my necklace—" He lifted his chin slightly.

"Take it off, and I'm no longer protected from psychic attacks."

The wolves listened.

"We only need to find out where he keeps his protection. Remove that, and he's no different from the rest of us."

"So how do we find out?" Will challenged.

Elijah's eyes met his and held. Will did not look away even as his eyes watered and Elijah's dominance pressed down on him, tightening around his lungs, trying to

force his body to remember its place—

he stood his ground.

"Would you both cut it out already?" Irene snapped.

The tension snapped with it.

Elijah looked away first, a small smile tugging at his lips, but his eyes said something else entirely: We'll settle this later, boy.

Griffin spoke. "Micah can."

Elijah frowned. "What?"

"Micah can find what we need," Griffin said. "If there's anyone who can get us that kind of information, it's Micah Richmond."

He didn't stop there.

"And if you want to win this fight, then you'd better involve your nephew. He's the best chance we have against your brother."

Griffin's gaze locked onto Elijah's, hard and unyielding. Elijah exhaled slowly. What was with everyone looking at him like that? Like he was the problem. Angus was.

"Fine," he said dryly. "We'll involve my demon of a brother's son stuck in Lunaris Academy. Happy?" He gave Griffin a saccharine smile.

Griffin only scowled. He was in no mood for jokes.

Leon spoke next, the thought clearly just hitting him.

"Say we find Angus's weakness—or we don't—what's the plan? Angus gave us three days."

"Don't worry," Elijah said. "We won't take that long."

Irene's instincts immediately prickled. That tone and confidence never meant anything good.

She narrowed her eyes. "What do you mean by that?"

Elijah's lips curved slightly.

"We have the Cardinal Alphas here," he said. "Or at least half of them." His gaze flicked between Griffin and Roman. "That should be enough to eliminate Angus. Don't you think so?"

There was a beat, then Irene let out a string of very colorful curses. Because if Elijah wasn't careful, she was going to kill him herself.

Meanwhile, at Lunar Academy....

Whatever shield the witches had thrown over Lunar Academy had effectively turned the school into a prison. No portal could be summoned within the academy grounds.

The witches had tried enough times to prove that. Every spell meant to rip open space either fizzled out or crashed against the barrier and snapped back, making the witches curse and the air hiss with burnt magic.

So now they were stuck with the students with no clear way out of the academy.

Right now, they were outside while the cries of the zombies echoed just out the academy walls.

They were a horde of zombies now, drawn to whatever wretched magic Ziva had spelled to the school.

They crowded near the barrier in ugly clusters, their ruined bodies dragging and jerking, mouths opening in soundless groans from this distance. Every now and then, one would slam into the dome and scream in pain from the electrical shocks, then slide down it, leaving behind a sick smear that made anyone watching want to retch.

No one dared risk lowering the shield and stepping out. Not with that many of them pressing in and with one mistake being enough to doom everybody inside. Which meant their only chance of getting the fuck out of Lunaris Academy rested on Micah.

They had discovered, quite by accident, that whatever magic blocked portals did not seem to fully affect him. Micah was a demon who could vanish from where he stood, drop into hell, then come back to earth.

The problem was he always came back to the same place he stood before vanishing like a cursed loop. It was useless for trying to escape from Lunaris Academy since they'd be stuck in the same place.

Still, Samantha refused to accept that.

She stood opposite Micah now, arms folded over her chest, the wind tugging at her dark hair as though even nature had grown impatient.

Around her stood the other witches Micah had recently come to know far too well.

Liv and Hazel, the two blondes, and Willow, the brunette.

Adele stood off to the side, tense and silent, every muscle in her body wound tight.

Samantha pointed to the ground. Two marks had been made in the earth, several feet apart. One here and the other there.

"That distance," Samantha said. "That is all I'm asking."

Micah gave her a flat stare.

"You're asking me to do something I've never done."

"It doesn't make sense," Samantha snapped. "A demon can teleport to hell but not anywhere on earth? How does that sound to you?"

Willow lifted a shoulder. "Incubi and succubi manipulate and steal sexual energy from any being around them. It speaks to movement. Infiltration. Access. Your kind should be capable of slipping through space better than most."

Micah's mouth twitched with irritation.

"In case you don't remember," he said, "I was not born a demon. I was made into one in my mother's womb."

"Turned or not, you're still one," Liv countered coolly. "You still have demon blood, and it runs strongly."

Hazel tilted her head, studying him with shameless clinical interest. "Or perhaps it's the little werewolf blood in him causing the disability."

Adele winced while Micah's gaze sharpened instantly. He did not even look at Hazel like a person at that moment, but a problem waiting for permission to bleed.

Samantha stepped in before that could go anywhere.

"Disability or not," she said, voice hard as stone, "you'd be amazed what people are capable of when they're pushed to the wall."

Micah did not like the way she said that.

But he stepped into position anyway.

The first mark.

Samantha pointed to the second mark. "Just from here to there." She made it sound so easy.

Micah exhaled slowly and focused. He then vanished. The air snapped.

Adele jerked. She would never get used to that.

A heartbeat later, Micah reappeared exactly where he had started. Not on the second mark. No, he had not come even close. He was right back where he had been and he smelt of sulfur, smoke and burnt metal.

Hell.

Micah bent slightly, his jaw was tight, and eyes dark with fury. He failed.

Hazel muttered, "Again."

So they did it again. And again. And again.

Every single time, Micah disappeared from the first spot only to return to that same first spot moments later, hell clinging to him like a second skin.

He was never near the second marked spot like some cursed pattern. It was almost like his body knew only one door and refused to learn another.

Minutes bled into longer, uglier stretches of time. Everyone was beginning to get tired and clearly frustrated.

A fine sheen of sweat gathered at Micah's temples and his shirt began to cling to his back.

The witches argued over theory while making him repeat the impossible.

"Try to anchor to the second point."

"Feel the earth, not the underworld."

"Break your instinct."

"Override it."

They gave him ideas after the other. Unfortunately, Micah was getting tired in a way that made murder sound pretty reasonable.

Still Samantha did not stop.

Even when Adele softly said, "Maybe he needs a break."

Samantha ignored her.

"Again."

Micah vanished.

Hell.

Returned.

Same place.

His hands clenched into fists.

Again.

Hell.

Returned.

Same place.

By the time he came back the next round, his eyes looked a little too dark. This was beginning to toil on him.

Adele's chest tightened. She could feel it through the bond. He was exhausted.

"This isn't working," Micah growled.

Samantha stared at him. Then something in her changed.

Her face lost what little patience it had left. Her features turned cold in a way Adele had only seen in people right before they chose cruelty and decided to call it necessity.

"You're not trying hard enough," Samantha said.

Micah took one dangerous step forward. "Try me again."

Samantha looked past him, her eyes taking in Adele. She said quietly, "If you don't move to that marker, I'll hurt her."

The world seemed to stop and Micah's head snapped around so fast it looked painful.

Adele froze. Her eyes widening as it dawned on her.

Micah moved immediately but it was too late.

A dome slammed down around Adele in a burst of light, sealing her inside before he could reach her. At the same time, another dome flared around Samantha, Liv, Hazel, and Willow, locking them behind their own protection.

Micah hit Adele's dome with brutal force.

"Adele!"

She barely had time to answer before

Pain tore through her.

It was sudden and vile and deep, like something had reached into her bones and decided to squeeze. Adele screamed, collapsing to her knees inside the dome, arms wrapping around herself as if she could hold her body together through sheer will.

Micah went insane. He slammed both hands against the barrier again, snarling, then spun toward the witches and launched himself at their dome instead.

"Let her go!" he roared.

But the dome held even as he hit it again and again.

The snarls coming out of him no longer sounded entirely human. Or wolf. Or even demon. They sounded like all three. He looked dangerous as hell.

He hated the witch for this and would snap their pretty little necks once this dome drops.

But Samantha did not falter. He'd thank her for this later.

"You know what to do," she said.

Adele screamed again. Micah turned back toward her and something in his face cracked wide open.

There was no thought left there now, only terror, rage and the unbearable instinct to get to his mate.

He vanished in that instant and for one awful second, there was nothing. Then Micah appeared moments later on the second marker.

Everyone froze. Even Adele's cries stuttered.

Micah stared down at the ground beneath him, chest heaving, eyes wide in disbelief.

He had done it.

Samantha dropped Adele's dome immediately, shocked.

He had done it!

Then Micah was moving before the light fully faded. He quickly grabbed Adele and vanished before any of the witches could guess his intentions.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 835: On A Mission[1,131 words]

Chapter 835: On A Mission

Tomorrow was D-day. The Ascension of Death.

In other words, they had only today to put things in order and prepare for the competition.

Violet trained with Asher as usual, pushing every ounce of herself into it, knowing tomorrow held the very real possibility of her blowing up the entire Fae realm if things went wrong. Or more specifically—

if her mother died and Baron won.

Annequin had been around for the first half of training, serving as the unfortunate scapegoat and forcing Violet to fight under pressure without losing control.

But as soon as her session ended, she had practically fled the scene, muttering something about helping Prince Lucen secure the location for tomorrow's competition.

Whatever her obsession with Lucen was, no one was complaining. If anything, it seemed to keep her on her best behavior.

At this point, they could only pray Lucen did not break her heart. No one wanted to know what Annequin looked like during heartbreak.

But that left Violet alone with Asher, who spent the next few hours drilling her harder on control, discipline, and manipulation of her powers. There was no room for mistakes.

And Violet proudly executed every move perfectly, and then some. It was safe to say she was far more aware of her powers now, and it would take much more than pretty distractions and sweet words to make her lose control.

"That is enough training for today," Asher finally said.

He lowered his stance and looked at her with the same unreadable calm he always wore whenever he slipped into strategy mode.

"While learning to control your powers is important, you also need rest. A well-rested mind controls emotions better. And for you, Violet, that is extremely important."

He stepped closer.

"I want you to be as unruffled and unmoving as a mountain from this moment onward until the end of the competition tomorrow."

"Are you sure about that?" Violet asked, anxiously running both hands through her hair. "I think it's better if we just keep training. It keeps my mind busy and I don't have to think about how messed up everything is right now."

She was, of course, referring to Roman and Griffin. They still had not contacted them.

And that was beginning to concern her more than she wanted to admit.

"And that is exactly why you need to still that racing mind," Asher told her. "Working your body to exhaustion will only put more strain on your thoughts."

His eyes softened. "For once, forget about Roman and Griffin. You can feel them through the bond, right?"

Violet nodded. That was the only thing keeping her from completely unraveling.

She could still feel them.

Their souls were tied tightly around hers through the bond, warm and alive, a steady reassurance at the edge of her panic. Still, it wasn't enough.

She threw her hands up.

"But what if they're in trouble?" she blurted. Then her face changed. "What if they didn't return home because the portal threw them into an entirely different realm? What if they're fighting for their lives right now?"

She looked up at Asher with wide, horrified eyes, her thoughts already spiraling into the worst possible scenarios.

"Hey." Asher took her face in both hands, grounding her instantly. "We are called Cardinal Alphas for a reason," he said. "We are powerful, and we've survived dangerous situations long before your arrival, my love."

His thumbs brushed her cheeks. "For all we know, they're caught up in the chaos in Aster City and haven't had the time or...."

He paused, frowning.

"Or they lost the stone."

The possibility landed at the exact same time for both of them.

Violet's eyes narrowed. After all, Roman was sloppy, and Griffin was not exactly the brightest strategic mind when chaos was involved.

She made up her mind almost immediately.

"We'll reach them another way."

"Yes," Asher said. "You're right. So you focus on the competition tomorrow. And you win. It would be devastating if you ended up dying tomorrow, Violet. That would be a far worse fate for your mates."

Violet's eyes flared with power. "That won't happen."

"Good," Asher breathed. "Now go wash up. Then we'll meet Alaric for lunch."

"Huh?" Violet was surprised by the sudden change.

"I'm pretty sure Alaric has been working himself like a machine and hasn't gotten proper food into his system," Asher said. "That way, we can also check on his progress with the device."

Violet brightened immediately.

"That's a nice idea!"

Then, without warning, she launched herself into Asher's arms. She stood on her toes and kissed him briefly on the lips.

"I'm so glad I have you, Asher Nightshade."

"I know, baby girl," he murmured with a smile.

Then he leaned in and kissed her back.

This time longer, deeper and hungrier.

Perhaps it was the danger hanging over them and the very real possibility that one or both of them could die tomorrow, but

Asher was more passionate than usual.

What Violet didn't know was that the larva inside him had begun to lower his inhibitions, subtly affecting his personality.

Hence why Asher, who was usually rigid and painfully disciplined, had been more playful than usual.

So when Asher's hand slid down to her backside and pressed her more firmly against him, Violet had to be the one to break the kiss before things escalated.

She stared into his beautiful slitted eyes, now darkened with lust. Then her gaze dropped to his slightly swollen lips.

Violet couldn't help brushing her thumb across them.

"Soon," she whispered. "Soon, you'll have all of me."

"Can't wait," Asher murmured back.

Then Violet stepped away, smiling.

"I'll be done so fast, you won't even miss me."

And with that, she broke into a sprint.

Asher chuckled softly, watching her hurry into the palace to get ready.

But the second Violet disappeared from sight, the smile that had been on his face vanished completely, replaced by a determined gleam in his eyes.

Like a man on a mission, Asher began to move. Baron's command was still clear in his head.

Find a way to get that device by all means necessary.

He had to obey. He had no choice. Obeying Baron was all that mattered.

So Asher moved through the palace corridors without a destination. Just walking, watching, observing, and waiting for the right opening.

Then finally, a Fae servant caught his attention.

Asher stopped. "You," he said.

The servant turned. Except the second his eyes met Asher's, the compulsion took hold. His body stilled and his expression blanked.

Asher's lips tilted slightly at the side when he realized it worked.

The High Fae might have been impervious to his compulsion. But the common Fae?

Apparently not.

"Come here," Asher commanded.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 836: Not Yet Functional[1,023 words]

Chapter 836: Not Yet Functional

"So this is it?" Violet asked, looking down at the butterfly resting inside the glass case, her brows pulling together with interest.

"Yeah." Alaric scratched the back of his neck, a boyish flush creeping up his face. "I just thought it would be sort of symbolic."

He looked away from Violet and back to the tiny creature. "Like... it flies off to find its target, and when it does, it lands on them. In a way, kind of poetic."

Alaric gave a small shrug, suddenly looking almost embarrassed by his own idea.

When no answer came from Violet, he slowly dared to lift his head, only to find Violet staring at him.

"I like it," she said, beaming at him.

One would think that now they were mated, the intensity of their attraction would settle. But that was not the case.

If anything, it had only heightened. And right now, there were about a million butterflies rioting in Alaric's stomach.

"Ugh." He couldn't help it anymore. He groaned and turned away from her.

"What's wrong?" Violet asked, though if one listened carefully, they would catch the teasing in her voice.

"You know exactly what you're doing, Violet," Alaric muttered, so red now he looked like an overripe tomato.

A chuckle slipped from Violet's lips. Then she moved toward him, and when he turned the other way, she followed.

"Stop it," he told her, even though he clearly did not mean it. He was just so painfully shy.

"No, I want to see your face!" Violet insisted. "You look so cute when you blush."

In her haste, her arm nearly knocked against the glass cover.

"Careful," Alaric said quickly, his expression changing at once. "We'd be doomed if anything happened to it."

"Sorry," Violet said, immediately more careful.

Then the both of them simply stared at each other, the air between them growing warmer, heavier, and far more dangerous.

Violet slowly lifted his hand. Then, like a spider crawling with wicked intent, she used two fingers to trail up his wrist, then his palm, until she finally fitted her hand against his and intertwined their fingers together.

"Thank you," she said to him. "Thank you for fighting so hard for my mother." The teasing in her voice was long gone, replaced by a vulnerable look.

"You don't need to thank me, Violet." Alaric's voice was quiet, but the conviction in it was enough to still the air around them. "You know I would do anything for you, my mate."

And he meant every word of it. Alaric's

voice carried the kind of certainty that said if Violet asked for the world, he would go to war just to lay it at her feet.

Something inside Violet burst wide open at that. Before she could think better of it, she launched herself into his arms and their lips met with urgency. It was a fast, hungry and a little messy kiss.

They quickly moved away from the stand, both of them conscious enough not to accidentally topple over the case in a haze of passion.

Alaric had just pressed Violet against the wall, his lips trailing down the side of her neck and brushing over Griffin's rune in a way that made her shudder— when a whistle cut through the room.

It was Asher.

"It's getting heated in here, isn't it?"

With his face buried in the crook of Violet's neck, Alaric let out a low, deeply frustrated growl.

He really had the worst timing.

"Where have you been?" Violet asked, her voice still slightly breathy as she quickly smoothed down her shirt. "I was waiting for you."

"Sorry," Asher said. "I got carried away studying the palace. By the time I came back, I assumed you'd gone to see Alaric, so I took the time to arrange lunch for us instead. It's ready."

"Oh, okay." Violet said, seemingly satisfied with the answer, yet she couldn't shake the feeling that something was off. Unfortunately, she couldn't explain it.

Then Asher's gaze drifted to the glass case.

"So this is it. A butterfly, huh?" The way he said it suggested he had expected something far more intimidating.

Alaric, however, didn't look offended.

"I know it doesn't look like much," he said, stepping closer to the case, "but since it has a magical tracking system, I figured a butterfly would be the best form. It's small, subtle, and no one would think twice about it landing on them."

Asher lifted a brow. "So it's working now?"

"Yes and no," Alaric answered. "The structure is complete, but the final step requires the Queen's DNA. That would act as the imprint. Sort of like programming it with the exact magical and biological signature it needs to recognize."

"And then?" Asher asked.

"Then when we release it, it'll search for anything carrying that same signature. Once it lands on the target, the signal locks in. Once it does, we'll be able to track exactly where the target is."

Asher asked him, "If it's searching for both magical and biological signatures, wouldn't it just lead us to Violet? She's the Queen's daughter and carries the closest resemblance to her—blood, power, everything. If the system is tracked by those markers, then she should be the strongest match."

"That was the problem at first, the inability of the device to tell the difference between lineage and suitability," Alaric admitted. "But Zuru reconfigured the tracking matrix with her magic. Instead of locking onto blood relation, it now filters for compatibility. A viable host whose body can actually sustain the Queen's soul."

Asher nodded. "I see you've got it all figured out then. In that case, let's go for lunch. You can return and continue your work afterwards. I'm not letting you keep working on an empty stomach."

"Do I have a choice?" Alaric asked wryly.

Violet laughed. "No."

Then she hooked her arm around his and immediately began pulling him toward the entrance.

Together, the both of them moved away, too caught up in the moment to notice the long look Asher gave the device before quietly following after them.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 837: The Device Is Missing[1,027 words]

Chapter 837: The Device Is Missing

"So...." Alaric said in between spoonfuls of his food, "You people seem to think that the reason Griffin and Roman haven't communicated with you guys so far is because they lost the stone?"

Violet nodded. "Don't you think the idea is feasible?"

For a moment, Alaric just stared at her blankly. Then he burst into long, mocking laughter that even drew the attention of passing Fae.

Not that he cared.

Alaric wiped the tear that escaped the corner of his eye. "I mean, it's Roman and Griffin we're talking about here. You left the two brains in the Fae realm and sent the unique...." he paused, choosing his words carefully at the don't you dare say it look on Violet's face, "to the human realm. So yes, the idea of the stone going missing is very feasible."

Violet sighed. At least if Alaric believed that too, that meant they were safe.

"I guess we'd just contact them the same way we did Nancy."

"Yeah," Alaric said. "After the competition tomorrow. You know how much planning and magic it took to pinpoint Ezra and Nancy's location. There's too much at stake right now to allow that kind of distraction. Roman and Griffin will be fine, little minx."

He reached out and squeezed her hand in reassurance.

Violet smiled, nodding in agreement, before her gaze shifted to Asher, who had been eating quietly, his brows slightly drawn.

"Just thinking about how everything will play out," Asher replied. "There's a lot happening all at once."

Violet and Alaric shared a look.

Yeah. That was Asher. Always trying to think ahead and worrying over everything.

"Don't worry, everything will work out," it was Violet's turn to be encouraging, "I'm sure that—" she was still saying when her ears picked up hurried footsteps coming towards them.

All three of them looked up at the same time as two Fae guards rushed into the dining room, their faces tight with worry.

Violet straightened instantly. Something was wrong.

Alaric lowered his spoon, his expression changing, especially upon recognizing them as the guards placed in front of the space where he and Zuru worked.

Asher perked up, studying the Fae who approached them with dark, gloomy looks.

The guards stopped in front of them but addressed Alaric directly. "We have a little problem, Alpha Alaric. It's the Queen's project. It's gone."

The way the color drained from Alaric's face was immediate. He shot to his feet so fast the chair behind him crashed to the floor.

"What did you just say?" His voice was a feral growl.

The Fae guard gulped at the dark look in his eyes. By then, Violet was already on her feet, dread hitting her hard, with Asher rising right after her.

"The Queen's project is—"

Alaric didn't wait for him to finish. He stormed out.

"Alaric, wait!" Violet cried, rushing after him.

Violet could not catch up with Alaric, who had practically vanished, but by the time she made it to Zuru's healing wing, Alaric was already there, standing before the stand with a blank expression.

The glass case had not been broken and did not even look tampered with, except there was no butterfly in it.

"How did this happen?" the Queen entered right at that moment.

Oh great. This couldn't get any worse.

Violet felt for her mate, Alaric, who ran his hand through his hair and licked his lower lip nervously.

"I swear, the butterfly was right there when we left. It had been sealed carefully, and there was no way it could have flown away except—"

"Someone took it," Violet completed.

"Oh my God." She groaned, rubbing her hand down her face as the weight of it hit her.

Of course this would happen now. As if everything wasn't already falling apart.

Taking away the one thing that could save her mother? That was the cruelest blow yet.

"Baron," Asher hissed. "This had to be him. No one else."

"But Baron wouldn't even know what the butterfly is unless—" Violet started.

"He must have found out somehow," Seraphira concluded, the light in her eyes dimming slightly.

She forced calm into her voice. "Not that this could have stayed hidden forever. Baron has spies. He must have noticed the changes around me. It wouldn't take much to piece things together."

"Or someone betrayed us," Asher said suddenly.

Violet stiffened. Not just her, pretty much everyone in the room had the same reaction.

Lila said, "And pray tell, Asher Nightshade, how many amongst us know about the Queen's illness and our plans?"

"It's just us," Violet said, her face tight with thought.

"And a few Fae," Asher added. "Like the lion shifter."

"Lord Taryn?" Lila said, clearly offended.

"Lord Taryn would never do that," Queen Seraphira said firmly. "We go a long way back. Trust me, Taryn is an honorable Fae. He would rather die than side with Baron."

"It's the people we least expect who betray us," Asher said callously.

"You mean people like you, right?" Lila shot back sarcastically, not knowing she had hit the truth.

"Lila," Violet growled a warning. "My mates have done nothing but try to help my mother in every possible way."

"Then we call in the guards who were standing watch when the device went missing. We should start there," Alaric said.

"I'll handle that," Lila said immediately, her eyes flashing with purpose.

Seraphira exhaled slowly.

"You all understand what this means."

No one spoke.

"The possibility that Baron now knows our plan. We can no longer wait." Her voice hardened. "We make our move now."

She turned to Lila.

"Arrest Baron and Celeste immediately. I want them detained before the competition tomorrow. We cannot allow them to execute whatever plans they have against Violet and me."

"As you wish, Your Majesty," Lila said, stepping out immediately.

Then it was just the Queen left with Violet and her mates. Queen Seraphira turned to Asher. "Alpha Asher, work with my guards and coordinate a search for the device."

Then her gaze fell on Alaric.

"Alpha Alaric...." She paused, then said more gently, "Come, have a walk with me."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 838: Rebuild The Device[1,072 words]

Chapter 838: Rebuild The Device

The rest of the palace might not have known exactly what was happening, but even they were not ignorant of the rising tension in the atmosphere.

They were not blind enough to miss the sudden increase in security, the questioning of Fae servants around the palace about a strange butterfly, and the thorough searches being carried out in every corner.

While all of that was going on, Alaric was in the Queen's chambers. It was even more surprising that not even Violet had been permitted inside.

Queen Seraphira said, "I've spelled the room so no one can eavesdrop on our conversation or watch us in secret."

Alaric looked genuinely surprised.

"That happens?"

Queen Seraphira gave him an incredulous look.

"This is the Fae Realm, Alpha Alaric. Everything happens."

Then she gestured toward the table set at the corner of the room.

"Sit."

Alaric obeyed, pulling out a chair and settling down.

The Queen followed right after, adjusting the layers of her long, voluminous gown as she sat across from him.

Then she asked,

"How long would it take you to work on the backup prototype?"

"A few hours," Alaric answered. "That's all I'd need to get it functional."

What the others didn't know was that the butterfly was not the only device they had.

Of course, there had been trial and error during its creation, and in the process, Alaric had preserved a backup prototype in case anything ever happened to the original design.

Queen Seraphira said,

"I want you to keep it from Violet and Asher."

Alaric stared at her like he had heard wrong.

"What?"

His shock was immediate.

"Why? Violet is your daughter. You can't seriously think she's the one who stole the device. And Asher is my Alpha brother. He would never do anything that would hurt Violet—and that means hurting you too."

But Queen Seraphira remained unmoved.

"I know exactly what you mean, Alaric," she said calmly. "But this is the Fae Realm. The walls have ears. I have seen parents turn against children and children turn against parents."

She added, "And surely you do not think it is mere coincidence that the device vanished a day before the competition."

That made Alaric pause. Because when she said it like that, it did not sound like a coincidence at all.

He opened his mouth to speak, but the Queen continued before he could.

"Or if you prefer," she said smoothly, "think of it as me narrowing the circle of suspicion."

Alaric frowned.

"This time around, only you and Zuru know there is a second device," she said. "Not even Lila is aware of it."

The logic became clear to Alaric. If the second device vanished too, then the blame could only fall on two people. Him, or Zuru. There would be no confusion or excuses. No two ways about it. The Queen was not being paranoid, but smart.

Alaric exhaled and rubbed a hand over his face.

"What do I tell Violet then?" he asked. "She's going to want to know what we discussed in here and, I have to admit, I don't know how to lie to her face."

Queen Seraphira answered without hesitation.

"Tell her you're working on a new device."

Alaric narrowed his eyes at once.

"I thought Fae don't lie."

"It is not exactly a lie," The Queen said with elegant calm. "It is hardly your fault if they assume you are starting all over again, when in reality, you are simply working on an already existing prototype."

Alaric stared at her, dumbfounded.

The Queen continued, "It would also serve as a cover. They would naturally presume the reason you are suddenly so busy is because you are racing against time to build me another device before tomorrow all while never realizing we already have one in motion today."

Silence followed.

Alaric couldn't help but stare at Seraphira. It was moments like this that reminded him that beneath all that grace, softness, and polished elegance,

the Fae Queen still had a mean streak buried under her skin.

If only she had been this meaner then perhaps things wouldn't have gotten to this point.

Finally, he sighed.

"Fine," Alaric told her. "I'll do it."

If that meant keeping Violet and Asher far from suspicion, then so be it.

Queen Seraphira reached beneath the folds of her gown and brought out a small glass vial. Inside it was her blood.

She held it out to Alaric. "You needed my blood," she gave it to him.

Alaric took it carefully, his fingers curling around the vial with immediate caution.

The Queen's expression turned serious.

"Once the entire process is complete, do not wait for my approval. Send out the butterfly immediately."

"As you wish, Your Majesty," Alaric answered.

Queen Seraphira gave a small nod.

"You may leave now."

Alaric rose to his feet at once, pushing his chair back carefully.

But just before he could fully turn away, the Queen added, "Send Violet in on your way out. I would speak with her too."

Alaric inclined his head.

Then her voice stopped him again.

"And remember our deal, Alaric."

He looked back.

Queen Seraphira's eyes held his steadily.

"I want to believe I can rely on you. After all, this affects Violet's future too."

That was enough to harden something in him. Alaric straightened fully and answered with firm conviction,

"You can depend on me."

The Queen nodded once.

Alaric turned and walked out.

The moment the chamber doors opened, Violet was already there waiting outside. The second she saw him, she stepped forward, worry all over her face.

"What's going on?" she asked anxiously. "Why did my mother want to speak to you alone?"

Her eyes swept over him quickly as if scanning his body for injuries. "Did she hurt you or anything because of the missing device?"

The thought alone made her eyes darken with anger.

"Calm down," Alaric shook his head. "Nothing like that happened."

Violet still looked unconvinced.

Alaric went on, "She only wanted me to attempt building the device again. I have to race against time now."

That seemed to calm Violet somewhat.

Then Alaric tilted his head toward the door. "You can go in now. She wants to speak with you."

Violet looked at him for one second longer, as though trying to decide if he was truly alright.

"Okay."

Then finally, she turned toward the Queen's chambers.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 839: Her Real Mother[1,345 words]

Chapter 839: Her Real Mother

"Mother."

Violet sighted the Queen already seated, her posture the very picture of elegance.

"Sit, princess." Queen Seraphira gestured toward the seat opposite hers. The one Alaric had sat on.

"I want to make a request of you, Violet," the Queen said.

Violet's heart immediately began to race.

She could already sense where this was headed.

Queen Seraphira began,

"If things do not go as planned—"

"Things will go as planned," Violet cut in at once, refusing to entertain the thought.

"If things do not work out," the Queen insisted, her purple eyes hardening.

The firmness in her tone, coupled with the austere look on her face, made Violet swallow the rest of the argument sitting at the tip of her tongue.

Holding Violet's gaze now, the Queen said,

"If by chance I die tomorrow and Baron takes over, you are to leave this realm. Take your mates, get out, and never come back. Pretend this realm never existed. Do you understand?"

"Really?" Violet stared hard at her. "That's the plan? If everything goes downhill, I'm supposed to run with my tail tucked between my legs?"

"I want you to survive, Violet!" Queen Seraphira cried out.

"How does that keep me safe, mother?!" Violet snapped. "If Baron wins tomorrow, whether I run to the human realm or even to hell, he will search for me until I'm dead because I still threaten him. Or did that not occur to you?!"

"I have a contingency plan," the Queen said quickly, seeing Violet was dangerously close to losing her patience. "I've already made arrangements. Once you and your mates are out, a barrier will be raised over the Free Fae. It would be like before. They would go back to living on their own."

"You're going to isolate them again?" Violet's face twisted in disgust.

"The Free Fae are not strangers to isolation," Queen Seraphira replied. "And this is for you, Violet."

"For fuck's sake, stop saying this is for my sake!" Violet hissed, jerking to her feet. "And you wonder why Baron wants to rule? Because you, mother, are so stifling and controlling."

Queen Seraphira flinched, as if Violet had slapped her across the face.

Violet kept going.

"You always claim to be doing something, but in reality, you keep choosing the safest option and calling it protection."

She shook her head, a bitter laugh slipping out.

"You talk so much about your mother,

Queen Elawon, about how cruel and close-minded she was but you don't even realize how much of her still lives in you."

Her eyes narrowed with intensity. "You didn't break that cycle, mother. You only softened it." She gestured around. "You built this version of peace, this so-called perfect free Fae realm and instead of preparing your people for the reality of what they are capable of, you sheltered them."

Her voice rose in pitch, "Well, guess what? Just like humans, the Fae are capable of greed. Of ambition. Of destruction." She lowered her tone, "Even you."

Queen Seraphira went so still one would have mistaken her for a statue.

But Violet was not done. She stepped closer.

"You wanted to be loved so badly that you forgot what it means to be respected. Because even with everything Queen Elawon was, the Fae still followed her. They feared her, yes, but they respected her enough not to tear her down the moment she showed weakness."

Violet's expression twisted.

"But you?" she said. "You gave them everything. Comfort. Freedom without consequence. And now they want more. Like greedy monsters, they've opened their jaws wide enough to swallow you whole and you want me to do what?"

Violet cocked her head to the side.

"Run?" She waited a second. "Like you did eighteen years ago?"

"Violet." The Queen's voice came out with an edge, carrying a warning not to drag that history into the open.

But Violet was far past caring.

"You had eighteen years to find me."

Seraphira sighed tiredly. "I tried, Violet. I already told you—"

"Did you try enough?" Violet challenged her. "Or perhaps you knew I would shake your grip on this perfect little realm of yours, and so even when Lila found me, you still refused to let her teach me magic."

"It was for your own good!" Queen Seraphira shouted, now rising to her feet. "Angus would have found you and—"

"My life was not yours to control!" Violet shouted back, the room echoing. "If you had given me a chance, I would have been able to stand against Angus with full control of my powers."

Her chest heaved.

"If you had given me a chance, I would already be a recognized heir and would not have to go through this ridiculous trial just to prove my capability."

She told her. "If you had given me a chance, I would already be Princess, and Baron would have no power whatsoever."

Queen Seraphira was left speechless because there was no refuting the truth of that.

Standing face to face with her mother, Violet said coldly, "You did this, mother. So you will clean up this mess."

She held Seraphira's gaze, her voice steady.

"If you had the time to make a contingency plan for your death, surely you have enough power to keep yourself alive."

Then she delivered the final blow.

"So start acting like a Queen and not a coward."

She added immediately, "And when this is over, I'll leave your kingdom and never return."

"What?"

That was the first time Seraphira's face truly cracked.

But Violet had already begun to walk away when the Queen said, "But this is your kingdom too. You cannot deny that."

Violet stopped, then turned slowly.

She sneered. "And yet you would deny me that by locking me away."

Her smile was bitter.

"Yeah. Your hypocrisy is beginning to show, Your Majesty." The title was spoken politely.

Any maternal softness Violet had felt toward the Fae Queen was gone now.

She barely took another step before the Queen called after her again.

"Even if you do not want it, your descendants are still in direct line to my throne. They will have the choice, whether you like it or not."

Violet looked over her shoulder and said coolly, "At least they'd have the choice whether they want it or not."

Then she kept moving.

"Violet?" Queen Seraphira called after her.

But Violet did not stop.

"Violet, we can talk about this," the Queen pleaded. "It doesn't have to be this way. We can work things out. I'm still your mother!"

That was what finally made Violet stop.

But she did not spare the Queen a single, saying from that position, "No, you're not. You only lent me your womb. My real mother is in the human realm, waiting for me."

That truth hit Violet fully only now. Nancy had been the best version of a mother she could have ever had. Nancy, with all her flaws, had bled and fought hard for her.

But Seraphira?

The fae queen had stayed hidden in the safety of her realm, consumed by the very problems she had created for herself, and left Violet to her fate. Her biological mother would not even fight hard enough to stay alive so they could have time together.

No. She would rather die and lose to the enemy than fight to remain and claim her daughter fully.

Perhaps Violet too had been deluded all this time. Thinking that once she found her biological mother, everything would somehow become perfect.

That they would make up for lost time and create some beautiful, impossible version of family. Something better than the hard, ugly, but real life she had shared with Nancy in District One.

Unfortunately, reality slapped her across the face this time. In the end, family was not always blood, but the people willing to go to the ends of the earth for you. The ones who stayed behind when things turned ugly.

With new determination hardening inside her, Violet reached the door and stepped out.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 840: Sisterly Bond[1,211 words]

Chapter 840: Sisterly Bond

"Do you know what is going on?" a Fae asked in a whisper.

"I don't know," another said, "but the Queen and her consort must be having one of their quarrels again."

"If that's the case, then there's no cause for alarm. It's not like this is the first time we've seen their lovers' spat."

"I don't think that's the case. Earlier, there was the Queen's guard asking if any of us sighted a strange butterfly. I can't help but think Consort Baron angered the Queen again by stealing something from her," another one opined.

"Then if that's the case, we better be careful, else we get dragged into this. Who knows what happens when two powerful figures fight? It's the innocent citizens that are often caught in it," the first Fae advised.

"You're right! Right!"

"We'd better mind our business."

Violet stepped out of the corner where she had been eavesdropping on the conversation.

As expected, Consort Baron's arrest had brought about commotion in the palace. The Fae were in utter confusion regarding the Queen's actions.

What had the Queen's consort done to deserve this?

Already, the Fae nobles and councilors had assembled, demanding an explanation for the Queen's actions. In their defense, the Princess's Trial of Ascension was only a few hours away, and such a drastic move was bound to stir civil unrest.

Except, for the first time, the Queen had done something entirely unexpected.

She had them all arrested and locked up.

A small, dangerous thrill stirred in Violet at the sight of it. The Queen was finally acting the way she should. But at what cost?

The Fae Queen had lost whatever filial affection remained between them, and it would be hard to recover.

Not to mention, her reluctance to act earlier had already created another problem.

Celeste was nowhere to be found.

A hunt had been put out for her, but so far there was no sign of her, as if she had vanished from the Free Fae entirely.

Thanks to all that, everyone was busy and bound to get minimal rest tonight. Alaric was already tied up with Zuru, trying to create a second device and launch it tomorrow. Asher was busy investigating the missing butterfly.

According to the report of their conversation, the culprit had created a hole through which he had snuck into the sacred grove and stolen the device.

In one word, Violet was the only one who had been left on her own.

"Get some rest. You have a long day tomorrow. Your mind and your body need to be settled so you can be at your optimum best." Those had been the words Asher had told her.

As if she could simply close her eyes and all her worries would vanish. How could she even sleep in the first place? It felt like everyone was doing something, and she was the only useless one.

So here she was, doing her own version of investigation by spying on the servants in case someone knew something and was not saying anything.

Violet was dressed in all black and had even tied her hair into a tight bun, hiding the purple tips that made her hair so unmistakable. Not that purple hair was rare in the Fae Realm. But none wore the color quite like she did.

So here she was, sneaking around the palace like a thief and coming up with absolutely nothing except petty gossip—servants caught secretly sneaking around with each other while on duty and other juicy bits that came with the job.

It wasn't long before Violet sensed she was being watched. Of course, it wouldn't surprise her that the Queen—that was her title from now on—had placed someone to keep an eye on her prized heir. The woman seemed to enjoy the idea of having an heir that kept the lineage running more than actually performing the role of an ideal mother.

Thanks to that, Violet headed outside to draw her follower out. One could imagine her shock when she found out—

"You." Her eyes widened at the sight of Hannah.

Hannah casually strolled up to her, saying, "If that was your idea of sneaking around, then you have to work on that, Princess Violet." Although there was a bit of sarcasm in the title, Violet could sense the teasing too.

Violet stared at her half-sister. Her gaze took her in from head to toe. This was the first time they were both alone. Violet had been so occupied with her own drama, she hadn't even had the time to try to connect with the sister she shared with her crazy father.

Hannah looked so much plumper and healthier compared to the time she had been all skin and bones.

Even now, that light in her eyes whenever she looked at Violet had not dimmed. If anything, it had only grown stronger, and Violet knew exactly what that look meant.

Hope. Expectation. Something dangerously close to attachment. The girl wanted closeness. Something that looked like family. Sisters.

Violet's jaw tightened almost imperceptibly. She did not know how to be that to someone who was already grown and had formed her own conclusions about the world.

Hannah wasn't a child she could guide, and that made it worse. Because Violet wasn't even sure she fully trusted her yet. There were too many things that could go wrong. Violet had learned the hard way what happened when you gave people too much trust.

She narrowed her eyes at her suspiciously. "Shouldn't you be locked up in your room or something? What are you doing? Collecting information you could send to Angus once you return to the human realm?"

Hannah rolled her eyes dramatically. "You do know I never supported our father in the first place?"

"Your father, not mine," Violet said with disgust. "And yet you worked for him?"

"Excuse me, I didn't have a choice. Some of us girls didn't have the good luck of being sent away to District One where we could have a tough life and hopefully grow into our potential. I grew up knowing nothing but Angus and the many siblings surrounding me."

Violet couldn't say anything, knowing Hannah was right. She couldn't even begin to imagine what her life would have looked like if Angus had raised her. Clearly, it would have been hell, seeing as her beloved mother wouldn't have come for her.

So she cleared her throat awkwardly, saying, "Sorry."

Hannah lifted a brow, clearly surprised she had apologized.

Then she too said, "I'm sorry too."

Violet looked surprised. "For what?"

"You know what it's for," Hannah said. "I tried to set you against Ziva so the both of you would fight each other and I could have my freedom. I was being selfish."

She sighed.

"You were only trying to survive," Violet told her.

"It doesn't change the fact that I was still being selfish."

"Yeah," Violet said. "Aren't we all a little stupid?"

For a moment, silence stretched between the girls.

Then Violet sighed, as if this was somehow a bad idea.

She said, "Tell me what it was like growing up with Angus. On a scale of one to ten, just how bad was it?"

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 841: [Bonus -] A Sister Thing[1,223 words]

Chapter 841: [Bonus Chapter] A Sister Thing

Hannah let out a humorless laugh. The kind that came from someone who had already accepted the absurdity of their own life.

"On a scale of one to ten?" she repeated. "Probably a dead twelve."

Violet snorted before she could stop herself. But that seemed to encourage Hannah a little.

She shifted her weight and looked away, her face turning oddly blank.

"Angus was different with all of us," she said. "Not in a good way. More like he tailored the torture."

Violet's stomach dropped, her expression slowly lost its amusement.

Hannah continued. "If he thought you were weak, he broke you for fun. If he thought you were useful, he worked you until you couldn't stand. "And if he thought you were special..." she trailed off.

Violet frowned.

"What?"

Hannah looked at her then. There was something in her eyes Violet did not like.

"He watched you more."

A chill crept down Violet's spine.

"Me."

Violet couldn't help but think back to all the letters Nancy had once mentioned receiving over the years, only for them to later turn out to be from Angus.

Hannah gave a brittle smile.

"I think that's why Ziva hates your ass," Hannah said. "She wanted to be the one father obsessed over, not you. She wants to be the special one, not just another tool like the rest of us, easily replaceable and disposable."

Violet had no idea whether to feel honored by that or not. She hated Ziva's ass too, and if Angus obsessing over her made Ziva that irritable, then so be it. Except being liked by Angus was not a good thing.

Hannah said, "I know we are all practically experiments in Angus' hunger for power, but I couldn't help feeling like I was meant to be more than the others. Like Angus wanted to test just how powerful his seed was, so he slept with a weak human, expecting I'd come out some powerful wolf and prove his superiority."

Her lips twisted. "Instead, he got a mutt. A disgrace to his line." She laughed, as if her very existence was one giant insult to Angus' face. A self-deprecating laugh.

"I was mostly invisible after that, which honestly was one of the better outcomes. At least until Ziva decided to make herself mistress over the rest of us. I had no choice but to train and become stronger. Otherwise, I would've been dead a long time ago."

The more Violet heard about Ziva, the more anger filled her. It wasn't enough that Angus had made her siblings' lives torturous, Ziva's best contribution had been to add to their suffering. Not that Violet could entirely blame her. She had learned from the best after all—Angus.

"Father made us compete for almost everything. Especially for his attention. Approval. Survival. Sometimes for food."

She listed them off.

"Sometimes to avoid punishment. Sometimes just because he was bored. Or needed somewhere to pour his frustration. Our pain was his amusement. Ziva knew that and learned how to dish it out and serve it to him exactly the way he wanted."

Although Violet had known what she was asking for when she requested the story, the rage still threatened to consume her.

Asher had taught her how to recognize whenever her power was stirring.

And right now, it was.

She calmed herself almost immediately with the thought that, soon enough, Angus and Ziva would get what was coming to them: justice at her hands.

Hannah let out a breath through her nose.

"You know what the sick part is?"

"What?"

"The fact that we still want his approval."

Violet didn't give her a dirty look, not when she understood.

Look at her. She had practically preened for Seraphira's approval the instant she arrived in the Fae Realm— even though it hadn't been worth it in the end.

"When someone spends years making you believe your worth depends on whether they look at you or not, you start rotting from the inside."

She shook her head. "It didn't help that us siblings couldn't depend on each other."

Hannah stated, emotion in her voice, "Rose was practically the best thing that happened to us. She was like the mother I never had. But that self-centered psychopath, Ziva, killed her because she couldn't stand the fact that Angus had a soft spot for her."

"The twins, Laura and Layla, had each other and didn't care about anyone else. Bree was hardly human. Lilian practically competed with me for hierarchy."

Hannah explained, "Being at the bottom meant serving Ziva, and no one wanted to be the witch's—I mean that literally and not in a good way—bitch. So it was either her or me." She smiled wryly. "None of us wanted to lose."

"So yeah," Hannah told her, "there was no bond. Everyone was out for themselves."

Silence settled between them again, with Violet mostly trying to digest what she had just heard. Hannah looked around the palace, admiring its grandeur.

She muttered, "You know when I said you were lucky you were raised in District One, away from him? I'm totally wrong."

"I mean, look at this..." Hannah gestured around them.

Violet followed her gaze, taking in the elegance of the palace, the ancient towering trees, and if she listened carefully, the faint sounds of pixies carrying on with their never-ending parties.

Hannah told her, "You could have had all of this, but instead, you were raised in miserable District One. In the end, Angus really did shape our lives one way or another after all."

"Yeah," Violet breathed. "I could've been the spoiled Fae princess." She gave a little shrug. "But I guess life does have its surprises after all."

She straightened, saying to Hannah, "I know what you expect of me, Hannah, but I cannot give you that. Not until I figure out my own life. But what I can promise you is that I'll make sure Angus and Ziva bleed for all the pain they've caused."

Violet added slowly, "Perhaps then, when all this is over, we can give this sister thing a chance."

A slow smile crossed Hannah's lips. "Sure. Although you should know I don't plan on returning to the human realm ever. I found my mate here."

"What?" Violet was surprised. She didn't know that. "Who is it?"

"It's Lord Taryn." Hannah blushed. "I intend to build my fairytale life here."

Oh. The lion shifter. He wasn't a bad choice. He would treat her well. Violet found herself looking out for her sister without even realizing it.

"Sure. Whatever you say." Violet nodded.

Guess that was it then. She didn't plan on staying in the Fae Realm or returning to it after all this was over—unless convinced otherwise.

Hannah then said, "If you want information..." she winked conspiratorially, "then the kitchen is your best bet. The staff hear things from maids, guards, footfae, stable hands, laundresses, and attendants. And they tend to talk a lot while working."

"However," she added, "I'd advise you to let this go and get some rest. You have a big day tomorrow, and I want you to win. This realm can only be my home if the right people rule, not men like Angus."

Violet was suddenly speechless.

Hannah lowered her head slightly. "Goodnight, sister."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 842: Prepare For The Trial[1,030 words]

Chapter 842: Prepare For The Trial

Violet had no idea how she managed to sleep through the loudness in her head and the unrest in her soul, but somehow, she did.

And now, it was the day of the competition.

Not even Alaric or Asher had returned to their quarters last night, and she had barely lifted her head off the bed when Lila practically barged into her room with a group of Fae in tow.

"Good morning, Princess Violet," Lila said in the polished, overly polite tone she had adopted ever since stepping into the Fae Realm. "The attendants here will make sure you're prim and proper for the trial. We don't have much time left, so move."

As if they were carrying out some military operation, the Fae, all four of them, grabbed her by the arms and hauled her off the bed.

"Wait! Where's—" Violet started to ask about her mates, but she was already cut off as they dragged her straight into the bathroom.

While some poured oils and perfumes she had no idea the purpose of into a tub of steaming water, the others were already stripping her with efficient, urgent hands.

Everything was happening too fast.

"I have hands! I can—!"

All of Violet's protests died the second they dunked her into the water and began scrubbing her like she was a stubborn child being prepared for an important event.

None of them said a word to her.

Their lips stayed pressed thin, their eyes focused with alarming concentration, as if bathing her was a matter of national importance.

It was funny how scenes like this always looked glamorous in movies and books, all elegant hands and royal treatment. In real life? It was awkward as hell.

Violet felt hands reaching and touching places no one other than herself should be touching, but thankfully, they were at least methodical about it and not deriving any sort of perverse delight from the whole thing.

That was the only thing keeping her from kicking someone in the throat.

They shaved and cleaned her so thoroughly there wasn't a single strand of hair left on her body aside from the ones on her head and brows.

Violet couldn't help but wonder if their ancestors had personally declared war on body hair or something.

By the time they were done, Violet was scrubbed, oiled, polished, and preened like a chicken prepared for Thanksgiving.

They dried her off and still didn't give her a robe, marching her naked straight into the next room where Lila was already speaking to another set of Fae who must have arrived while she had been getting scrubbed like a sacrificial goat.

"Commander Lilarin," one of the attendants announced, presenting Violet.

Violet immediately wrapped an arm across her chest, her expression dark and deeply unimpressed.

She felt Lila's eyes drag over her body in a slow, assessing sweep and nearly hissed. The Fae gave a single nod of approval.

As soon as she did, a robe was finally placed over Violet's shoulders and the relief that left her was embarrassingly immediate.

She snatched it shut around herself like she was reclaiming her dignity by force.

"Alright," Violet said sharply, glaring at all of them. "Can someone finally tell me what the hell is going on?"

She added immediately, "And where are my mates?"

Lila answered in that maddeningly calm tone of hers, "It is customary for the princess to be thoroughly cleansed before the trial for good luck. In that sense, your mates cannot be allowed near you so they do not disrupt the energy until we are done here."

Violet stared at her. Then deadpanned, "Yeah, I feel incredibly cleansed."

Her tone dripped with sarcasm.

She shifted in place, resisting the urge to scratch at her own arms. Her skin felt too bare and exposed as if every inch of her body had suddenly become overaware of the air touching it.

It was deeply unsettling.

Honestly, if this was what Fae people considered sacred preparation, then they were all clinically insane.

"What next?" Violet sassed, knowing deep down this wasn't the end of it.

It was another Fae, the one with pointed ears and fiery red hair, who answered in an accented tone, "Princess must wear her outfit. It was specifically requested by Queen Seraphira for Princess."

That was when Violet looked down at the bed and finally saw the costume laid out for her. And just like that, every sarcastic remark died in her throat.

It was a suit. A fitted black combat piece that looked like it had been molded directly for her body, sleek and elegant in a way that made it look like something a dark goddess would wear to war.

Deep violet detailing curved across the chest, waist, and thighs in patterns that caught the light, while the shoulders carried a subtle structure that gave it a regal, commanding feel without looking bulky.

At the back was a clean slit built perfectly into the design for her wings, should there be a need for it.

Violet stepped closer slowly, almost cautiously, as though touching it might somehow make it disappear. She brushed her fingers over the material and stilled.

It was unlike anything she had ever felt before. Smooth, cool and strangely soft beneath her fingertips, yet there was an unmistakable toughness beneath it, as if there was steel hidden under the silk.

The Fae with the accent went on saying, pride in her voice, "It was made from the scales of the toughest merfolk in the eastern waters. Her Majesty had it made in secret. She wanted the princess protected."

Violet looked up at her, suddenly speechless.

The Fae continued, "No weapon from the Fae land should be able to pierce it. You would be protected, princess."

Violet's throat tightened unexpectedly. For the first time her mother had thought of protecting her in a reasonable way.

"It's beautiful." That was all she could say.

Lila, who had been watching from the side, allowed herself the smallest smile.

"Now," she said, clapping her hands with finality. "Dress the princess. It's time the Fae Realm knows what they're up against."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 843: Royally Fucked[1,604 words]

Chapter 843: Royally Fucked

While Violet was being taken care of inside, Alaric and Asher had no choice but to wait for her outside.

"What were you up to last night? Did you finish building the device?" Asher asked, and Alaric tensed at once.

He slowly turned to face Asher, his brows narrowing with sudden suspicion.

"Why are you so interested in that?"

Asher's eyes narrowed at once, his lips pressing into a grim line. "Because you were occupied with Zuru and they wouldn't let me in yesterday when I came to check up on you." His gaze sharpened. "Or is it the fact that you're suddenly staring at me as if I'm the one who stole the device?"

There was solid tension between the boys now as Alaric slowly, cautiously straightened, a darkness suddenly entering his eyes.

He lifted a brow. "Did you?"

Alaric didn't want to believe it, but after the Queen's words yesterday, his mind had been anything but quiet. And now that he thought about it, the device had gone missing right after Asher and Violet's visit to him.

Asher flinched as if the accusation had physically struck him across the face. Then he straightened too, the seriousness of the situation dawning on him.

He asked in a gravelly tone, "Why would I do that?"

Alaric, who had been carefully listening for any change in his heartbeat, frowned.

That was not the answer he had expected.

But it was the question that had plagued him all night. Why would Asher do that?

It didn't make sense.

Out of all of them, if there had been anyone obsessed with Violet's happiness, it was him. Hurting the Queen was equal to hurting Violet, and Asher, in his right mind, would not...

Alaric trailed off. That was it. Asher in his right mind.

What if Asher wasn't in his right mind?

Alaric began to replay every interaction they'd had over the past few days, searching for something—anything—that might hint that something had been off about Asher.

But no matter how hard he thought, nothing clicked except that day at breakfast.

His face changed.

Alaric recalled the casual comment Roman had once made about Asher contracting some kind of parasite that seemed to devour everything in his stomach.

The shock of stumbling onto that memory unfortunately showed on Alaric's face, and Asher noticed.

He asked carefully, "Are you alright?"

"Of course," Alaric answered a little too quickly.

He cleared his throat, then coughed before saying, "I'm just stressed out with the whole thing, and now I'm even suspecting those around me for the missing device. It's driving me crazy." He ran a hand through his hair in frustration.

Two things became painfully clear to Alaric in that moment.

One, he was not a good actor and it was taking everything in him not to get caught.

Secondly, Asher was too smart and observant. All it would take was one wrong move. One slip in body language. One show of fear and his cardinal brother would know exactly what was going through his mind.

At the same time, Alaric subtly tightened the mental walls around his thoughts as he recalled Asher's unique power of manipulation.

It had been easy to forget around Violet, especially since using their powers on one another had long been forbidden.

"I understand," Asher said. "In times like this, suspicion is natural. I did warn Queen Seraphira, though, that her plan was weak. It isn't my fault she underestimated just how far Baron's influence reaches."

He clicked his tongue almost pitifully, yet there was something so strangely lackadaisical about him, as if he couldn't quite bring himself to care.

And just like that, things became even clearer to Alaric. He remembered Annequin warning them about how openly they moved through the Fae Realm with their minds unguarded.

As strong as Asher was mentally, what if he had encountered someone stronger?

Someone like Baron, who could dreamwalk.

Oh fuck.

Alaric cursed internally, swallowing hard.

They were royally fucked.

"Are you sure you're alright?" Asher asked again, pulling Alaric from his spiraling thoughts.

"W-what?" Alaric tried to steady his racing heart. "I already told you. I'm nervous about the whole thing, that's all."

Asher nodded as if he believed him. Instead he pointed downward.

"Then you should get those sparks under control. We wouldn't want to get kicked out of the palace at a critical time as this."

Alaric looked down and saw tendrils of electricity crackling between his fingertips.

That only happened when his emotions became unstable. He quickly closed his fist, forcing the sparks to die.

When he looked back up, Asher was already moving toward him. Alaric jerked away before he could stop himself.

Asher lifted a brow.

"Did I do something wrong, Alaric?" he asked in a low tone. "Why do you suddenly seem scared of me?"

"I'm jumpy, not scared," Alaric retorted, hoping the hardness in his voice would be enough to kill whatever suspicion Asher might be forming. "You know how I get when I'm like this. I don't want to hurt anyone."

"You could never hurt me, brother," Asher said.

And when he reached for him again, it took everything in Alaric not to flinch. But he held his ground. Asher's hand landed on his shoulder, squeezing it comfortingly.

"Everything will work out just fine," Asher said. "What's the worst that can happen?"

Alaric gave a wry chuckle. "Exactly. What's the worst that can happen?"

Aside from the possibility that Asher was being controlled and currently working for Baron.

How that had even happened was beyond Alaric.

Asher was the strongest of them. If there had been any Alpha more likely to fall under a charm or manipulation, it should have been Roman, not Asher.

No wonder they had not caught whoever stole the device. Not when Asher was the one helping organize the search.

Alaric knew then that he had to tell someone. They needed to know what was going on. Unfortunately, he couldn't do that while standing under Asher's scrutiny.

Right at that moment, the door to their quarters opened, and whatever worries had been circling in Alaric's head vanished instantly.

Goddess below. She really did walk amongst them.

That was the only thought that crossed his mind as he stared at Violet.

She looked like the living, breathing embodiment of a goddess in that outfit.

The suit clung to her perfectly, molding to every curve of her body, accentuating a figure he had explored and worshipped more times than he could count—and still could never get enough of.

Violet Purple was not just dressed, she was
armed for war.

Her golden eyes carried an ethereal glow that demanded attention, made worse—in the best way—by the dark kohl lining them, polishing her gaze into something both mesmerizing and dangerous.

As for her hair, it was braided high and intricate, like the warrior women from ancient tales. It framed her face in a way that made her look untouchable, deadly, beautiful and unforgiving. All at once.

His mate didn't look like someone who was about to compete, no, she looked like a Victor already. No way in hell could the so-called ancestors resist a look like this.

Yet that dangerous woman smiled at him like he was her world, and Alaric's heart might as well have exploded from the sheer rush of it.

"You're here," she said, excitement lighting up her face the moment she saw him.

It wasn't until Violet ran toward them and threw her arms around both him and Asher that Alaric seemed to remember the situation at hand.

Asher was not on their side.

Alaric couldn't blame Violet for not seeing it.

Asher had gone through hell for her, and with her, hoping the bond snapped between the both of them, it was quite easy to overlook things.

Violet pulled back, then took both of their hands in hers, gripping them tightly.

"I will win this," she said with firm determination. "Nothing will go wrong. We will get through this."

Things are already wrong. Alaric wanted to say it. But the words refused to leave his throat.

Too many thoughts were crashing through his head at once. What if he electrocuted Asher right now and exposed him?

He would be restrained. Possibly locked up while they figured out what went wrong.

But then, Violet would be worried. She might try to fix it and might go as far as to abandon the competition.

No. That couldn't happen. They had come too far for her to fall apart now.

He had to handle this somehow.

"Alaric? Are you okay?" Violet's voice snapped him out of it.

He had zoned out again.

"What?" he asked.

"Yes, Alaric," Asher added smoothly, "tell us, are you alright? Or is there something you're not telling us?"

Alaric's gaze snapped up to meet Asher's.

And in that faintly amused look, he saw it —

Asher knew.

Fuck.

Alaric's heart slammed violently against his ribs. How had he figured it out?

Fear gripped him tight, quick and suffocating, and for a split second, he almost unleashed his power right then and there, consequences be damned.

But Asher moved first. He reached out, gently tucking a stray tendril of Violet's hair behind her ear.

"He's just worried about you, Violet, love," Asher said softly. "After all, he wouldn't want anything happening to you, right?"

To anyone else, it sounded like concern,

only Alaric heard the threat beneath it. Just like that, the air left his lungs.

No way. Surely, Asher wouldn't dare hurt Violet. They were.... not mated yet.

Shit.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 844: War In The Fae Realm[1,060 words]

Chapter 844: War In The Fae Realm

Something was very wrong. Violet sensed it the moment she stepped out of the room and set eyes on Alaric and Asher.

It wasn't just the strange tension hanging between her men, no, the bond between her and Alaric was threaded with ice-cold dread.

She had never felt this much fear from her mate before. Not like this sharp and deep.

It slithered through the matebond and wrapped around her ribs, making it hard to breathe.

At first, Violet played along, trying to understand the reason for Alaric's fear.

But nothing made sense. It was just him and Asher. So what exactly was he afraid of?

Until...

"He's just worried about you, Violet, love," Asher said, tucking a stray strand of hair behind her ear. "After all, he wouldn't want anything happening to you, right?"

Goosebumps erupted across Violet's skin.

And not in a good way.

It wasn't just Alaric who had sensed the threat beneath those words, she did too.

Her brows slowly pulled together.

"Not we," Violet muttered, her face tightening with concentration as she looked directly at Asher. "Him."

The Asher she knew would never say "he" in a moment like this, but "we". Always we. Especially when it came to her. And certainly not when the sentence itself carried the shape of a threat—one Asher would never make

Everything happened quickly. Lightning cracked through the air as Alaric released a bolt straight at Asher, but the puppet master saw it coming.

Asher shifted at the last second, the strike grazing past him by a hair's breadth, the static snapping violently as it tore through empty space. Every strand of hair on his body stood on end from how close it had been.

The Fae attendants screamed and scattered for safety, their calm composure gone. The strike from Alaric had been too close for their liking.

Asher grabbed Violet from behind, dragging her flush against his chest just as the air around Alaric thickened again, electricity crackling wildly as he prepared another attack.

"Don't do it, Alaric," Asher breathed against Violet's ear, low and dangerous. "Or I'll hurt her."

Alaric froze, the lightning sizzling violently around him, snapping against the air instead of finding a target. For a split second, he hesitated.

But Violet scoffed. "Knock him off his ass, Alaric, he's not going to hurt me."

For a moment Alaric almost believed her until Asher Nightshade produced a dagger out of nowhere and dragged it clean across Violet's face.

Violet hissed sharply in pain.

"Violet!" Alaric shouted, fear breaking through his voice.

"Guards!" Lila barked immediately, her voice cutting through the chaos. She had no idea what was happening, but one thing was clear. Asher Nightshade was not on their side.

Asher let out a harsh, unhinged laugh.

"Do you think that's going to stop us?" he mocked. "It's already too late."

Lila's eyes widened in realization.

"The Queen!"

She turned and sprinted.

"Mother!" Violet's eyes flared at the same time, panic flashing through them.

Then her wings burst open, slamming outward with force, knocking Asher off balance and sending him stumbling back.

That was all the opening Alaric needed but a blast of magic slammed into him from the side. It hit him hard, throwing him across the room.

Alaric crashed violently into the wall, the

breath knocked out of him on impact. He lifted his head just in time to see it had come from a guard.

He was not alone. There was a group of them and they were armed and ready.

Just as they feared. The Queen's guards were compromised.

On the floor, Asher laughed again.

"Told you."

Violet groaned in frustration, rage flaring through her.

Before the guards could reach Alaric, she thrust her hand forward and released a blast of flame that forced them back, heat licking through the air and breaking their formation.

Then she shouted, her voice ringing with command, "Protect him!"

The palace answered with a deep groaning sound that echoed through the walls.

Before anyone could react, a thick root burst from the ground, coiling tightly around Alaric's torso. A space split open in the wall behind him and in the next second, he was dragged inside with a scream. The walls shut close as if it had never opened in the first place.

Violet had commanded the palace. She was the Queen's daughter and the sentient house obeyed royal blood.

With Alaric gone, Asher pushed himself to his feet, dusting off his clothes without a care.

He sneered at her. "What are you going to do now?" he asked. "You can't harm me. We both know that."

Anger surged through Violet's veins. Her fist collided with his face and Asher staggered back from the force, tasting blood in his mouth.

Then Violet grabbed him, and the palace answered again.

The walls shifted and split apart without her needing to speak, opening a path to the outside just as her wings beat once, twice—and then they were airborne.

Once in the air, Violet could clearly see the battle raging below. Fae fought against Fae in brutal flashes of steel, and magic.

She could make out Lord Taryn shifting into his lion form, his massive body tearing through the battlefield as he let out a ferocious roar and sent enemy Fae flying like ragdolls.

Unfortunately, Violet was not the only one airborne.

Prince Lucien was being overwhelmed, outnumbered three to one in the sky. And it didn't help that one of his attackers suddenly turned and locked onto Violet.

His eyes gleamed the moment he recognized her as a target.

"Just put me down, Violet," Asher said from where she held him. "You cannot win this battle. Not without tearing down this realm."

"Shut up!" Violet hissed, trying to concentrate on both his weight and the approaching Fae.

No one had exactly trained her for the possibility of carrying a fully grown man through the air while fighting for her realm.

So she made a split-second decision. She dropped Asher.

Violet spun in midair and thrust out her hand, shooting a blast of darkness straight at the Fae who had gotten close enough to strike.

He disintegrated instantly with no trace.

Then Asher's scream hit her ears and Violet dove straight down, praying to the gods she caught him in time.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 845: Would You Die For Love?[1,119 words]

Chapter 845: Would You Die For Love?

Music Recommendation : Kill For Your Love - Labrinth.

Violet beat her wings faster than she ever had in her life, the powerful strokes slashing through the air as Asher's scream echoed across the sky.

Below, some of the Fae still fighting looked up in alarm at the sight of a body plummeting from the heavens. Panic broke out instantly and several scattered out of the way, not wanting to be flattened by a falling Alpha.

But Violet flew past them in a blur and at the very last second, caught him.

"Got you," Violet breathed, her heart pounding so violently she could feel it in her throat.

She had genuinely not thought she would make it in time.

Asher chuckled. A low, dark sound that did not belong in this moment.

"This is going to be fun," he murmured, looking up at her. "What exactly do you plan to do with me, princess?"

Violet's brows furrowed. That was the problem, she didn't know. Violet barely understood what was happening beyond one terrifying truth: Asher was not himself.

Whatever had gotten into him was dangerous enough to turn him against her, thus she needed him away from here.

As worried as Violet was about Queen Seraphira and the Fae Realm, they could hold their own for now.

Asher needed her.

So Violet flew with Asher in her arms. She shot past the palace with no destination in mind, the wind whipping violently around them as she pushed herself farther and farther from the fight.

She flew for what felt like forever before finally spotting a wide field overflowing with beautiful purple flowers, untouched and far from any settlement.

Perfect.

With a wave of her hand, she cleared a space in the middle of it, the flowers flattening and parting beneath her magic.

Then she dropped Asher as if he was a sack of potatoes. As much as Violet cared about him, she was fucking pissed right now.

He fell the last few meters and hit the ground with a rough grunt before Violet landed a second later.

She straightened and looked around carefully. There were no houses for miles.

Good. If she lost control here, no one else would die for it.

Asher rose to his feet, coughing and spitting out crushed petals and flowers he had accidentally swallowed on impact.

He lifted his head and found Violet standing right in front of him.

Her expression was austere.

"Who are you," she demanded, her voice sharp as steel, "and what are you doing in his body?"

Asher's lips curved slowly to the side in a smile that did not belong to him.

"I thought you would never ask."

Almost immediately, something changed like a shadow slipping over his body. Asher's posture straightened just slightly, and when he looked at her again, those slitted eyes were no longer familiar.

They were cold, hard and empty.

"Princess Violet." The title was spat with such hatred it sent a chill down her spine.

Violet's eyes narrowed as recognition struck.

"Baron."

Her hands balled into fists at her sides.

"You fucking bastard."

Baron—wearing Asher's face—laughed.

"Really?" he drawled. "Bastard? That's all you have to say?"

Violet didn't react, her gaze remained ice cold.

"How are you doing this?" she demanded. "What have you done to Asher?"

Baron tilted his head slightly, studying her like she was something amusing.

"You silly thing," he said, almost lazily. "Sauntering into the Fae Realm like you owned it when you clearly understand nothing."

"But don't worry, by the time I'm done with you, you'll know exactly where you stand."

His eyes darkened, "Both you and your foolish mother."

Violet swallowed hard. Then, despite the terror rising in her throat, she said,

"You can do whatever you want with me, however, return Asher to me."

Baron looked at her through Asher's face and smiled cruelly.

"It's too late."

Violet's heart skipped violently in her chest.

Her voice came out smaller this time, threaded with dread. "What do you mean?"

"You foolish child," Baron said almost fondly, as though he were explaining something simple to someone stupid. "I infected your beast with a mind leecher larva."

Violet had no idea what that meant, yet her heart stopped dead.

"Once infected," Baron continued, "there is nothing you can do for the victim until death."

His lips curved wider.

"Haven't you noticed it? Your beast is no longer himself."

Violet began to shake her head immediately.

"No," she whispered. "No, that's not happening."

But Baron kept going. Somehow, hearing it all come directly out of Asher's mouth was all shades of wrong.

"The leecher lowers inhibition completely," Baron said through him. "Your beast will have no control over himself. All he will want is to please me. The parasite feeds on his life force to function. It will keep taking from him... and taking... until there is nothing left."

His expression darkened.

"So no. I couldn't help him even if I wanted to. Not that I want to."

Tears were slipping down Violet's face now before she even realized she was crying.

"No," she said again, her voice breaking. "No. That's not going to happen. You're lying."

She rushed to Asher and grabbed him hard, shaking him desperately.

"Come back to me," she choked out. "Asher, come back to me."

But in the next second, his hand shot out and clamped around her throat.

Violet gasped. Her hands flew to his wrist immediately as he squeezed.

Then Baron spoke again through Asher's mouth, his voice colder now, edged with annoyance.

"All of this would have been easier if you had simply gone through with the competition."

Violet's breathing turned ragged beneath his grip.

"Celeste had already planned to trap you with magic during the trial," Baron said. "You would have died there, cleanly enough. But now..."

His fingers tightened around her neck.

"...you will die here. At the hands of your beloved beast."

Violet's eyes burned with tears. Her face was already beginning to flush red from the lack of air.

"Or would you?" he mused. "Tell me, Princess Violet..." His eyes gleamed with sick delight. "Would you die for love?"

He tilted Asher's head slightly.

"Or would you murder your beloved... and live? That is quite the difficult choice, isn't it?"

Asher's eyes seemed to darken even further, something unnatural passing through them as Baron's command settled deeper.

With a fiendish curve of his lips, he said,

"Hear me, Asher Nightshade."

Violet's struggling stilled for half a second.

"You will not let Princess Violet Purple leave this ground alive. Make sure of it. At your own cost."

"No..." Violet screamed.

But it was too late.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 846: A Love Written In Stars[1,683 words]

Chapter 846: A Love Written In Stars

Music Recommendation : Always Remember Us This Way - Lady Gaga

Violet knew the exact moment Baron's influence left Asher's body. His eyes went unfocused for the briefest second and then snapped back to her, cold and resolved.

He was going to kill her.

"A-Asher—" Violet tried to speak, but his grip tightened around her neck.

Her breath hitched. He was crushing her throat so hard hot tears sprang into her eyes.

"D-don't..." she gasped, clawing at his arm, hitting him in desperation but it did nothing.

He was Asher fucking Nightshade, for goddess' sake. If there was anyone strong enough to fight this, it was him. Yet, there was not a single flicker of recognition in his gaze.

It was as if he didn't see her at all. She wasn't his Violet anymore, just a problem he had to eliminate. At this rate, Asher was actually going to kill her.

No, not happening!

She twisted suddenly, hooking her leg around his and dropping her weight in one sharp motion— a move he had taught her himself. It didn't break his grip completely, but it shifted his balance just enough for her to wrench herself free.

Violet staggered back, coughing hard, dragging in air as she rubbed her burning throat that would no doubt bruise.

Her eyes snapped back to him just in time to see Asher reach down and pull a dagger from the strap at his boot.

Fuck her life. The love of her life was genuinely trying to delete her from existence.

This was a dilemma. A very deadly one.

Asher was strong, for sure, but not stronger than her powers. A single careless blast of her darkness and she would lose him forever.

But of course, Baron knew that. He couldn't control the others, so he chose Asher, the strongest and the most vulnerable without the bond.

Violet's jaw tightened. No, she refused to accept this. Baron had to be wrong. There had to be a way to remove the leecher without killing him. There had to be.

Asher twirled the dagger lazily in his hand, an excited gleam in his eyes.

"Wolves are vulnerable to silver," he said. "Fae to Iron. Tell me, Princess Violet, what is a hybrid like you vulnerable to?"

Violet didn't hesitate. She met his eyes and answered directly, "You."

For a split second, an unknown emotion flashed through his eyes, and Asher looked almost startled. But it was gone as soon as it came.

"Good," he said, a slow, twisted smile forming. "That makes this easier."

That was when the idea clicked.

Right now, Asher was looking at her like he barely knew her, and that was exactly the problem. She had to make him remember. She had to give him a reason to fight this leech.

Violet barely snapped out of the thought before Asher lunged. She dodged but not fast enough, the blade sliced across her middle.

Violet flinched, expecting pain to follow but nothing of that nature happened. There was no sight of any blood.

"The suit..." she muttered under her breath as realization hit. It protected her as the Fae said it would.

Even Asher paused in surprise, clearly expecting the strike to land. Then pivoted and drove a roundhouse kick straight into him, sending him stumbling back.

Asher spat out blood onto the ground, his chest rising and falling as he steadied himself.

Violet stood a few feet away, her hands raised in a fighting stance, her eyes locked on him even as she said, "We don't have to do this, Asher. You are bigger than this. You cannot let Baron win!"

"He's won already!" Asher lunged at her with a manic smile, but Violet moved the earth beneath his feet and he tripped, falling hard onto his face.

In the next second, she was crouched beside him, leaning in close as she said through gritted teeth, "The Asher I know would fight this, so stop being cozy in there and fight this, my deadly Nightingale."

Those words might have been romantic, but they weren't enough to reach him. Asher moved suddenly, grabbing a handful of sand and throwing it straight into her face.

Violet gasped, stumbling back in shock.

She knew Asher was a strategic fighter. She just never imagined, in her wildest thoughts, that he would fight dirty against her.

Half-blinded and now in immediate danger, she released her powers sporadically — everything except her darkness — hoping to keep him at bay while she recovered her sight.

But with her vision compromised, she couldn't see him weaving through her attacks with ease, dodging every uncoordinated strike until a brutal kick slammed into her.

Violet hit the ground, landing on her stomach. Even with her vision blurred, she could feel him approaching, his presence looming over her like a storm.

Before she could push herself up, Asher was on her, pinning her down. She thrashed wildly, her wings flaring out instinctively, making it difficult for him to land a clean strike on the one place she was most vulnerable right now—her neck.

But the wings only seemed to irritate him and then came the blinding pain. Asher's blade cut into the base of her wing, slicing through the flesh near her shoulder.

Violet screamed, the sound tearing through the empty field. With a surge of strength, she managed to knock him off her and scrambled away, turning just enough to look at her wings.

They were bloodied and hurt like hell. He hurt her. He cut her wings. Asher would never do that. Her Asher would never hurt her.

That was all it took to snap Violet back to reality. Her Asher was gone and if she kept holding back, he was going to kill her.

The hesitation drained out of her eyes, replaced with a resolute look. She pushed herself up to her feet just as Asher surged toward her again, clearly intending to finish what he started while she was still weak.

But Violet was done going easy on him.

Before he could reach her, his body jerked to an abrupt stop. A flicker of confusion crossed Asher's face, quickly replaced by rage as he looked down to see vines.

They had crept from the woods and wrapped tightly around his feet. He tried to move, but the more he struggled, the tighter they coiled. They reacted to Violet's will, creeping upward, twisting and binding around his legs, his waist, his chest.

In seconds, they cocooned around him like a living prison. The dagger slipped from his hand and hit the ground with a dull thud.

The vines continued their climb, tightening and layering until he was completely immobilized up to his shoulders. Only then did Violet carefully move towards him, having learned her lesson.

Violet palmed his cheek, tears in her eyes as she pleaded, "If you can hear me, Asher, come back, please. I cannot fight you. I cannot..." her lips trembled, scared to say the word, "...end you. P-please..."

Her tears poured in torrents now as Violet continued, "We've come this far to end like this, please. You are bigger than this. This godforsaken leecher cannot be the end of our love story. Or have you forgotten, my love? Our bond was written in the stars, and so is the prophecy about us."

Asher had gone so unnaturally still it gave Violet just enough hope to keep going. "I love you. I've always loved you. From the moment I set my eyes on you on the first day of school, even though you annoyed the hell out of me. But I would never trade anything in the world for you, Asher. You are mine, now and ever."

She must have been out of her mind, kissing a man compelled to kill her, especially when he still had too many tricks up his sleeve. But Violet leaned in anyway and pressed her lips against him, pouring every ounce of her affection and desperation into it.

At first, nothing happened. It was just her lips moving against his, one-sided, and fragile.

Then seconds later, he responded.

Asher kissed her back with the same fierce intensity, and hope bloomed in Violet's chest so suddenly it almost hurt. Tears slipped down her cheeks, the salt of them mixing into the kiss, but she didn't care. She had him back. That was all that mattered.

When they broke apart, Violet felt her heart leap in pure, overwhelming relief. Those cold, empty eyes were gone, replaced with those warm, achingly familiar slitted gray eyes.

"You did it," she rasped in disbelief at first. Then louder, breathless, "You did it!" before she threw her arms around him, the vines still wedged awkwardly between their bodies.

But the joy didn't last. She pulled back and froze when she saw the sadness in his eyes.

"What's wrong?" Violet asked immediately, alarm rising in her chest.

Asher gave her a bittersweet smile. "I love you too, Violet," he said softly, "but you don't understand... it's inside me. It controls me. I would hurt you."

"No, no, no, you won't." Violet shook her head stubbornly, refusing to accept it. "You're Asher Nightshade. You can think your way out of anything."

"Not this time," he said quietly, the resignation in his voice cutting deeper than any blade.

A sob clawed its way up Violet's throat, but she forced it back down. She could not give up. Not now.

"But don't worry, my love," Asher said gently. "Or have you forgotten? I would rather rot in hell than hurt you, my purple queen."

Before Violet could process what he meant, his head snapped forward and struck hers hard.

Violet staggered back, pain bursting behind her eyes as fear gripped her instantly. The vines holding Asher loosened, and her heart lurched as panic took over. She thought the leecher had taken control again, that he was about to finish what he started.

But instead, Asher bent, grabbed the fallen dagger, and before she could react, he slit his own throat.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 847: I Won't Let You Go[1,570 words]

Chapter 847: I Won't Let You Go

Music Recommendation: Heartbeat - James Arthur

"No!!!"

Violet let out a blood-curdling scream. The sound ripped from the deepest part of her, tearing through the air with such force it might as well have carried magic with it.

For a moment, the world seemed to pause. Everything collapsed into the singular, horrifying image of blood pouring from Asher's throat.

"No... no, no, no—!"

Violet rushed forward, barely catching him at the last moment, his weight dragging them both to the ground. She moved immediately, her hands shaking violently as she pressed them against his neck as if she could somehow force the blood back inside.

"Stay with me," Violet choked out, her voice breaking with fear. "Asher, stay with me!"

The blood was warm. Asher opened his mouth, trying to say something, but all that came out was a wet gurgle as blood filled his throat.

"Don't speak!" she shouted at him.

Goddess, there was too much blood. It slipped through her fingers no matter how hard she pressed, slick and relentless, staining her hands and soaking into her clothes.

"Why aren't you healing?!" Violet cried in frustration, pressing harder against the wound. Tears blurred her vision as she tried to summon her healing powers.

She had been told that earth wielders often possessed healing abilities. Unfortunately, that part of her power had never been trained. They had been too focused on combat.

After all, what use was minor healing in battle? No one had planned for this. No one had imagined she would be here, trying to save one of her mates from himself.

Moreover, there were healers in the palace.

The palace. Goddess above, this was her fault.

If they had stayed, Zuru could have saved him. She should carry him back, but deep down, Violet already knew that they wouldn't make it.

Asher was dying.

Instead of stabilizing, her power surged wildly beneath her skin, unstable and frantic, reacting to her panic. The ground beneath them trembled, and the flowers around them wilted under the pressure of her grief.

"M-my p-purple queen..." Asher's hand lifted weakly, reaching for her as he called her favorite name, his voice breaking with pain.

His eyes were filled with such quiet wonder as he stared at her, as if she was the only thing that mattered.

Violet shut her eyes, leaning into the touch she desperately wanted to feel, but it never came.

The weight of his hand dropped and her eyes snapped open.

Asher's gaze was still and unmoving.

He was gone.

"No... no... this isn't happening," she rasped, her voice hoarse. "Asher? Asher?!" She shook him, as if this was all a cruel trick and he would wake up.

"Asher!" Violet screamed as cold, suffocating fear settled deep in her chest, reality crashing down on her.

"No! Asher! No! You can't do this to me!" she sobbed. "You can't do this. You can't leave me like this..."

Violet's breath hitched violently as she leaned closer, pressing her forehead to his, her entire body trembling.

"You said... you said you'd never leave me..." Her voice shattered. "I won't let you. I won't!"

Then Violet lifted her gaze to the sky, anger blazing through her grief.

"You cannot take him away! This is not what you promised me! Give him back to me. I command you!"

Nothing answered. The sky did not split open. No goddess came. There was only silence.

Desperation clawed its way through her chest, and her voice broke completely.

"Please... do something," Violet whispered, praying to a goddess who did not answer.

What was the point of being called the goddess's daughter if she couldn't even save him?

Anger coursed through her. If this was what the goddess allowed, then maybe she should burn it all. Asher had always said he would destroy the world for her.

Now she would do it for him.

Power thickened in the air as darkness began to seep from her body, spreading outward. There was no more light inside her, only grief and rage.

The field darkened as the corruption spread, flowers turning to ash the moment the darkness touched them.

But then came his voice. "Control. Discipline."

The memory of his training struck her like a blow.

Asher would never want this. Not if it meant she would carry the weight of every life lost because of it.

Just like that, the darkness vanished.

Violet collapsed, her strength giving out as she slumped over his body, sobs tearing through her.

"I can't do this... please..." she whispered into the emptiness. "Please just take me. I cannot live without him. Just take me too."

Then she remembered. The pixies. Her wish.

"Pixies!" Violet shouted desperately. "If you can hear me, I need your help! Please, help me!"

"Please... don't turn your back on me too," she begged, the words falling from her lips like a broken prayer as she clung to Asher's still body.

For a moment, nothing happened. Then out of nowhere, the pixies blinked into existence, their small wings beating rapidly as they hovered together, speaking over one another in their bright, chirpy voices.

"The princess calls in her favor."

"Yes, the princess wants our help."

"But pixies do not raise the dead."

Violet's heart dropped at once, her last shred of hope shattering with those words.

"Please!" she cried, desperation stripping her bare. "Tell me how to get him back then. I'll go to hell myself if that's what it takes."

"Yes," one of them said, "pixies can show the princess how to get the beast back."

Violet's eyes widened, hope slowly creeping back in.

Another pixie said, "The princess can share her life force with her beast."

"What?" Violet blinked, unsure she heard right. Wasn't soul-sharing the same thing Queen Seraphira and Baron had done? Not that Violet cared about the consequences. She would do anything to get Asher back.

"But the beast is dead," another pixie argued.

"I see the beast," one replied stubbornly. "He's not far gone. He still lingers here. The princess can bring him back if she's strong enough."

"It's too dangerous. The princess can die!"

"I'll do it," Violet said with firm determination. "Show me how." It wasn't a request. It was a command.

The pixies stopped fluttering about, all four of the tiny creatures hovering in place as they exchanged glances.

Then they nodded in silent agreement.

"As the Princess wishes," the one with yellow hair and wings said, flying forward and gently pressing a kiss to Violet's forehead.

For a moment, nothing happened. Violet frowned, confusion flickering across her face and then the knowledge of the ritual flooded her mind all at once.

It wasn't just a memory, but magic. The kind that took hold of her completely.

As if guided by something beyond her control, Violet reached for the dagger and slit her palm. She did the same to Asher, and then pressed their palms together, letting her blood spill over his.

Her lips began to move, unfamiliar words she had no business knowing spilled from her mouth.

"Fuil go fuil. Anáil go hanáil.

Stróicim an brat idir bás agus beatha.

An té a éilíonn thú, diúltaím dó.

An rud a choinníonn thú, brisim é.

Níl d'anam caillte fad is a dhóitear mo cheannsa.

Ceanglaím thú leis an mbeatha. Ceanglaím thú liom."

"Blood to blood. Breath to breath.

I tear open the veil between death and life.

What claims you, I defy.

What holds you, I break.

Your soul is not lost while mine still burns.

I bind you to life. I bind you to me."

Violet felt it at once, like something had clamped onto her heart, knocking the breath out of her lungs.

"Don't give up now, princess!" she heard the pixies encouraging her.

"Fuck!" Violet screamed, breaking character. It hurt like hell, as if someone had physically grabbed her heart and was trying to split it into two, if that even made sense.

Was this what Baron felt when he bound her mother's soul to his? Okay, maybe she understood his anger just a little. This hurt like a bitch.

But she didn't give up.

Violet kept chanting, holding tightly onto Asher's hand even as tremors wracked through her body. She knew the moment she felt that tether, that she had grabbed onto Asher's soul.

However, the pain doubled.

"Aah!" she screamed as blood rushed from her nose, ears, and eyes.

Violet understood the resistance. Death didn't want to let go.

But even death hadn't felt the fury of a princess fighting for her mate.

Above them, the sky began to churn, dark clouds gathering as thunder cracked and lightning split across the heavens. The wind picked up violently, and Violet could hear the shrieks of the pixies, but she was far gone now.

Right now, she was at war with death, and he was not winning. Not today.

"I'm the goddess's daughter!" Violet shouted, her voice booming like thunder as she pulled at Asher's soul from that tight, diabolical vice.

She must have been hallucinating, because she swore she saw herself dragging Asher from a bottomless pit that had been trying to swallow him whole.

Then a sudden, overwhelming calm washed over her.

The last thing she saw was a pair of familiar, slitted gray eyes fluttering open, and a small smile curved her lips. She won.

"Mine," he whispered.

Then the darkness claimed her.

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 848: The Betrayer[1,090 words]

Chapter 848: The Betrayer

"Your Majesty!" Lila screamed, coming to a screeching halt at the entrance of the Queen's quarters. All her guards were slaughtered, and the door stood ajar.

Lila rushed inside, hissing at the strong metallic scent that assaulted her nose.

The Queen's blood.

A pool of it spread across the middle of the room, which could only mean one thing—the Queen was injured.

She was not dead. Not yet.

Lila knew Baron. He was dramatic and would definitely make a spectacle out of the Queen's death. Which meant there was still time. She just had to find her. That was all that mattered.

Lila barely stepped out when she caught sight of two armed Fae. She didn't recognize them, which could only mean they were aligned with Baron. Their eyes widened briefly at the sight of her, then narrowed with intent. It was obvious from the way they had moved that they were rounding up Fae across the palace.

Lila's fist clenched instantly, magic gathering around it.

They lunged at the same time. Lila reacted first, releasing a sharp blast of air that slammed the first to the side. She ducked immediately after, narrowly avoiding the sword aimed at her head.

Iron.

That blade would take her head clean off if it connected.

The second Fae was quite fast and highly trained. Lila was forced to weave around his attacks, her movements precise as she searched for an opening. Every strike she threw was deflected, his sword cutting through her magic with proficient ease.

These were trained assassins. Where had they even come from? They were clearly not from this kingdom. Just how long had Baron been planning this?

The thought struck her hard. And worse, this had all happened right under her watch. Shame burned in her chest.

"You're dead, bitch!" the other Fae snarled as he rose, joining his partner.

This time, they moved together, back to back, perfectly in sync, attacking as one.

Lila's breaths came faster now as she struggled to keep them at bay. Their movements were coordinated, deliberately pushing her step by step toward the corner where they intended to trap and end her.

She needed to break their formation.

Lila released a blast of energy that knocked both of them aside, but one of them drew a dagger at the last second and caught her in the stomach.

"Fuck," she winced. She hadn't seen that coming.

She could feel the iron spreading quickly through her veins, poisoning her blood. Lila yanked the dagger free, groaning at the sharp assault of pain.

But the distraction cost her. One of the Fae kicked her hard, then blasted her with his magic and she stumbled to the floor.

Lila cursed under her breath. Whatever he hit her with, her whole body hurt.

"That was a good fight, but it is time to say your goodbyes," the Fae said, lifting his sword with a menacing grin.

Lila froze for a split second. So this was the end.

But before the sword could come down, a loud crackling of energy ripped through the air.

Lila stared, open-mouthed, as the two Fae began twitching violently, electricity tearing through their bodies. Then they dropped, burnt.

Lila lifted her head slowly and found Alaric Storm standing there.

His white hair was disheveled, his expression dark, a murderous gleam in his eyes as he stared down at the Fae he had just taken out.

Relief crashed into her all at once.

"Come on, let's go!" he snapped when she kept staring.

Lila didn't hesitate this time. She pushed herself to her feet, clutching her side tightly.

Instead of heading down the hall like she expected, the North Pack Alpha walked straight to the wall and said,

"Open sesame."

What the—

Lila's eyes twitched. Did he just say that to their highly respected—

She didn't get to finish that thought.

The wall split open, revealing a hidden set of stairs.

"Go!" he urged, and she moved immediately, slipping inside just as the wall sealed shut behind them.

There were sconces set into the walls, and with each step they took, they lit up one after the other, lighting their path.

"How did you find this place?"

She knew the palace had many hidden passages, but only royalty could command them—or the house would open itself to those it favored.

Alaric answered, "Violet locked me in to protect me. But I threatened to electrocute it, so here we are."

Lila didn't say anything. After all, if he hadn't stepped out, she would probably be dead by now.

They walked for a while before arriving at a room. Her eyes widened at who she saw.

"Lord Taryn?"

The lion shifter was being attended to by Hannah, who was carefully tending his wounds. He was covered in so much blood it was hard to tell what belonged to him and what didn't.

"You're here," he grumbled, fighting back a pained grimace.

"Found her about to be killed and rescued her," Alaric said deliberately.

The lion shifter lifted a brow, surprised by that revelation.

Lila blushed with embarrassment. After all, everyone knew she had looked down on Violet's mates because they were wolves.

"Can we forget about that and focus on what matters right now?" Lila said quickly. "Do any of you know where the Queen is? We need to rescue her."

"You can rescue your Queen. I need to find Violet," Alaric said, his jaw tight.

"Violet was last seen flying out of the palace with Asher in her grasp. Unless you can suddenly fly and know the Fae lands, I don't see you tracking them successfully. Not to mention making it out of this palace without Baron's people hunting you down. The best chance we have at staying alive is staying together, rescuing allies, and finding the Queen. I'm sure Violet can handle herself." Lord Taryn said to him.

Alaric hissed in disapproval, "Asher is not himself, and he might be hurting Violet as we speak."

"Violet has deadly powers. She'll be fine. The Queen, on the other hand, is vulnerable and could be killed at any moment." Lila explained. "We cannot let Baron win, not after everything we've done. And speaking of which, how did Baron get all these Fae on his side?"

"Those are not Fae of our realm. With the barrier down, he must have bought the services of Fae from other kingdoms."

"Not to mention, he had help," Hannah added.

Lila frowned. "Whose help?"

Alaric's voice turned dark.

"Annequin."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 849: Go To War[1,128 words]

Chapter 849: Go To War

Lila's face shifted at once, twisting ugly. "That fucking betrayal!" she cursed. "We shouldn't have let her into this palace in the first place. But Queen Seraphira felt for the little princess, and this is how she pays us back?" Her voice shook, furious.

"There's something weird about her though," Hannah interjected, drawing everyone's attention.

Under their scrutiny, she explained, "I was in the kitchen, talking with the staff when they broke in. They rounded everyone up, but they were careful not to hurt us. I know Annequin recognized me because she pulled me aside and let me go. She told me to find the others."

Hannah paused before adding, "'Don't you dare die. I wouldn't want to be hunted by your sister if anything did happen to you.' That's exactly what she said."

"I don't understand," Lila said, her scowl deepening. "What game is she playing here? Playing both sides?"

"Or pretending to be on Baron's side," Alaric muttered, his eyes narrowing as the thought settled in.

"You think so?" Taryn asked, unconvinced.

"I don't believe it. This is exactly her plan," Lila said sharply. "The bitch is smart. This is her backup. If the Queen wins, she redeems herself by claiming she was helping all along. If Baron wins..." she shrugged, "then she's already on the safe side."

"Annequin swore an oath to us that she'd never hurt us or put this kingdom in jeopardy," Alaric said.

Lila stepped into his space, sneering. "She has demon blood. Guess who the oath breaker is in the end? Her." Her lips curled. "Let her hope I don't get my hands on her. I'll send her back to hell where she belongs." Her eyes gleamed with grim determination.

"We cannot stay here arguing when every minute increases the chances of the Queen dying. So what's the plan?" Taryn said, rising to his full height.

Though the iron-inflicted wounds on his body hadn't fully healed, he was stronger than before.

"The first step is figuring out where they've taken the Queen," Lila said, her brows drawing together in thought.

"The sacred ground," Hannah announced. "I overheard them talking about it. That's where they're taking everyone."

"Of course, a public execution," Lila scoffed. "That's what I thought from the beginning. I wasn't wrong."

"The sacred ground," Alaric rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. "Isn't that where Violet's Ascension Trial was supposed to be held?"

"You're right," Taryn said. "Except instead of Violet's ascension through death and back, it will be the Queen's ascension to death forever if we don't hurry."

"We'll be greatly outnumbered," Hannah pointed out.

Taryn did a double take, lifting a brow. "We?"

Hannah met his gaze without hesitation. "You didn't think I was going to let you walk into that battle alone, did you?"

A low growl rumbled from Taryn as he stepped closer, towering over her in an attempt to intimidate. "You are going nowhere. You'll stay here where it's safe."

Hannah didn't falter. She held her ground, challenge blazing in her eyes, even as she stood like a mouse facing a lion. Literally.

"Says who?"

"Says your mate," he growled in warning.

"Is that so?" Hannah grinned impishly.

Taryn didn't even see it coming.

One moment, he was standing. The next, he was flat on his back, the breath knocked out of him as Hannah pinned him down, straddling him.

He groaned in pain just as his mate pressed a dagger to his throat.

Hannah leaned in, her voice low but firm. "I've been fighting my battles long before I came into this realm, so don't you dare try to stop me now. Take a look at the both of us, you're covered in wounds, I'm not, and I still found you unharmed. So tell me..." she looked him over, "who do you think should stay behind?"

She left the question hanging.

Taryn groaned, throwing his head back in reluctant surrender. "Fine," he muttered. "You're coming along. But promise me, if it comes down to it, you run."

Hannah only nodded.

Taryn narrowed his eyes. "Promise me."

"Fine, I promise," she said quickly.

Satisfied, he finally relaxed.

"If you two lovebirds are done," Lila cut in dryly, "can we get a move on?"

The both of them rose to their feet, Hannah flushing slightly for obvious reasons.

Taryn cleared his throat, subtly adjusting the tent in his trousers. Goddess only knew how he was supposed to wait a year without touching his mate.

Lila turned to Alaric. "Can you command the palace to show us the closest path to the sacred ground? That way we avoid running into Baron's people still roaming the halls."

Alaric smirked, patting the wall. "Don't worry. Sesame and I are very good buddies now."

The palace groaned in response, as if agreeing.

Hannah burst into laughter while Taryn frowned. "You named the Queen's sentient palace Sesame?"

Alaric and Hannah shared a look, both of them barely holding back their amusement. Of course he didn't get the joke. That made it even better.

"Once we're out, it'll be an intense fight," Lila said, her tone turning serious. "We'll be outnumbered."

Alaric's eyes crackled with lightning. "Then we better make it quick, I still need to find Violet."

Hannah glanced back at them, saying, "Can Sesame also take me to a weapon room? I need to stock up."

Lila groaned, dragging a hand down her face in frustration. For a moment, it looked like she might argue, but then she exhaled and waved a hand. "Fine. Make it quick."

Alaric placed his palm flat against the wall. "You heard the lady, Sesame. Weapon room."

The wall shifted with a low groan, stones folding into itself as another narrow set of stairs revealed itself. A golden glow pulsed from below, beckoning them forward. They descended quickly as the passage opened.

The room before them was massive, lined wall to wall with weapons of all kinds, blades, spears, bows, daggers. All of it made of iron.

Hannah walked straight in.

"Finally," she muttered under her breath, already reaching for a pair of daggers, testing their weight. She picks, discards, choosing wisely.

She glanced over her shoulder at them. "Don't just stand there. Pick something. Your magic can give out, or get blocked. You don't want to be helpless when that happens."

With visible reluctance, Lila walked over, her fingers brushing over a sleek blade before finally picking it up.

Taryn followed next, grabbing a heavy weapon more suited to brute force.

Alaric lingered for a second, then grabbed a short blade, flipping it once in his hand before tucking it away.

Hannah slid the last dagger into place and straightened. "I'm done."

She looked at all of them.

"Let's go to war."

Defy The Alpha(s) - Chapter 850: Bonded[1,562 words]

Chapter 850: Bonded

Sesame dropped them at the closest entrance to the sacred grove.

The wall split open silently, forming a narrow doorway, and they slipped out one after the other, immediately lowering themselves into stealth as they took in their surroundings.

The sacred grove was dense with vegetation, ancient trees towering high above, their branches weaving into a natural canopy that dimmed the sunlight.

Lila leaned close to Alaric, her voice barely above a whisper. "This is where the Tree of Life stands. Only royalty are permitted here except for important occasions like the trial."

Alaric gave a short nod as they moved, keeping low, using the thick leaves and roots as cover. Their steps were light, and careful knowing Fae had sharp hearing. One wrong move and they would be discovered.

It was Hannah who broke formation. She slipped away without a sound.

"What is she doing?" Lila whispered, tension lacing her tone.

"Assessing the area," Taryn replied.

Not long after, Hannah returned just as silently, dropping beside them. She was slightly breathless, her eyes wide.

"Baron's men are everywhere," she reported in a hushed voice. "I saw the Queen. She's alive, but I don't know for long. She looks badly injured and Baron's putting on a show, talking about how weak she is and how the Free Fae need a better ruler. He's holding the remaining Fae hostage."

Taryn's gaze hardened. "Then all we have is the element of surprise."

Alaric pressed his lips together. "I'll take down as many as I can."

Lila nodded, her voice firm. "Let's get this over with."

Then they moved.

Alaric stepped out first. Immediately, Baron's men spotted them.

"Hey—!"

It was too late.

Alaric stretched out his arm, closing his eyes as he surrendered to the power thrumming violently beneath his skin. When he opened them again, they were pure white.

The sky above darkened instantly, clouds churning as thunder rolled across the grove.

Lila moved at the same time, her hands turning in controlled motions as the wind responded to her call. A cyclone began to form, tearing through the grove, ripping leaves and bodies alike into chaos.

Taryn made his move as well. One moment he was standing, the next a massive lion tore through the battlefield, claws and fangs ripping into any Fae who dared get close to Alaric.

Even in his beast form, a flicker of pride surged through him at the sight of Hannah.

She was a blur of movement. Her daggers flew with deadly precision, each strike finding its mark as she cut down enemies with ruthless efficiency.

The tide began to shift and some of the captured Fae seized the moment.

Prince Lucien broke free first, twisting out of the grip of the blade held to his throat and striking back with lethal speed.

The common Fae began to scream, scattering in every direction, desperate to escape the chaos.

Thunder cracked violently overhead, lightning tearing through the sky in jagged streaks.

On the elevated platform, Baron stood with Queen Seraphira in his grasp, bound in iron, bloodied, and weak.

Even he felt the sheer power Alaric Storm was summoning.

He turned to Annequin. "What are you standing there for? Deal with them!" he snapped.

Annequin didn't move. Instead, she turned slowly to him, her expression dark. "I don't recall being your servant. The deal was to help you take the palace. I fulfilled my part."

Baron's jaw tightened.

He had secured his army through her. In exchange, she was meant to rule beside him.

The Queen locking him away had been pointless. Asher had freed him, kickstarting their plan.

"Don't you want to be queen?" Baron pressed, his voice rising. "Rule beside me? Take care of these pests and you'll have the Free Fae at your feet."

Annequin lifted a brow.

"Isn't that the same promise you made to Celeste?"

Baron froze.

Annequin's gaze turned cold, and dangerous. "I was once a queen of a powerful kingdom. What makes you think I would share power with you when I can easily take it?"

"You!" Baron face fell when he realized Annequin had been playing him all along. He should have known than to trust her, unfortunately, he couldn't resist the allure of having such powerful ally on his side. Moreover, Annequin would have made a suitable queen.

Static built in the air, buzzing, heavy like a storm about to explode.

Baron's expression darkened. "Your men won't survive this."

"Says who?" Annequin's lips curved to the side. "Those are hired soldiers. I protect my own."

Shadows burst from her body. They moved fast, slipping into her men one after the other, swallowing them whole —and then they vanished.

And so did Queen Seraphira.

"You bitch!" Baron roared, spinning around wildly. "Get back here!"

Nothing answered him.

Then the sky broke.

Lightning came down like roots from the heavens, striking the battlefield in violent succession. Screams tore through the air as Fae were caught in its path, bodies convulsing under the raw force.

Baron barely dodged, dragging a Fae in front of him as a shield.

The lightning twisted, alive, and hunting. Lila's cyclone accompanied it, surging higher, catching those who escaped the strikes and flinging them violently across the grove.

It was quite a terrible sight.

The storm died slowly. Thunder rolled across the sacred grove one last time before fading into a low rumble, and the lightning that had once split the sky began to thin, its violent brilliance dissolving into scattered sparks.

Bodies littered the ground, burnt, and unmoving. The scent of charred flesh and iron hung heavy in the air, mixing with the earthy dampness of the grove.

To their relief, most of Baron's forces were down. The rest were retreating, fleeing blindly into the forest, abandoning the fight entirely. Others backed away more cautiously, dragging their injured comrades along with them, unwilling to face whatever power had just been unleashed upon them.

Still a few remained, loyal to the core or simply too foolish to know when the fight was no longer on their side.

They charged again but this time, the field was equal.

Taryn tore through one of them with brutal efficiency, his massive lion form slamming into the attacker and sending him crashing into the roots of a tree.

Alaric lifted his hand, lightning crackling along his fingertips as he spotted another Fae lunging toward Taryn from behind.

He moved to strike and felt great pain. It hit him like a blow to the chest. Alaric gasped, his body seizing as the lightning fizzled out, his knees buckling beneath him.

He collapsed.

"Alaric!" Lila shouted, rushing to his side, dropping beside him as panic seized him.

"What's going on?" she demanded, grabbing his shoulders, trying to steady him.

But Alaric wasn't looking at her. He wasn't seeing any of them.

His hands clawed at his chest as if something inside him was tearing him apart from the inside.

"Violet..." he rasped.

The name came out broken.

"I can feel it..." he choked, his voice trembling. "She's—she's in pain—"

Lila's brows furrowed in confusion.

"What?"

A shadow moved behind her as a Fae lunged but before the blade could reach her, it dropped.

Hannah had taken care of the sneaky bastard. She didn't even look at the body, eyes on Lila.

"This is seriously not the time for this," she said, exhausted.

"Something is wrong with Violet!" Lila snapped back. "It's affecting him!"

"Well then get him the fuck out of here!" Taryn roared, slamming another attacker aside as he shifted back partially, placing himself between them and the remaining enemies.

"The Queen and Baron?" Lila shot back, her voice tight.

"They're gone!" Hannah snapped. "Both of them!"

"Fuck," Lila hissed under her breath, frustration and urgency colliding. This wasn't the plan but Alaric was losing his mind.

"Violet..." he whispered again.

Lila froze for half a second as something else catch her attention.

The Tree of Life. Her eyes locked onto it.

"Taryn!" she snapped instantly. "Cover us!"

Without waiting for a reply, she grabbed Alaric, hauling him up with effort as his body fought her every step of the way.

He cried out but she didn't stop. She ran across the battlefield, straight to the tree.

By the time she reached it, her breath was ragged, her arms burning as she lowered him carefully to the base of its massive roots.

This was a sacred tree. Only royal Fae were permitted to use it. But Alaric was bound to Violet.

Lila swallowed.

"Please," she whispered, clasping her hands together as she bowed her head. "Great Mother, take over."

For a moment, nothing happened, only for the roots to move. Luminous vines crept out from the base of the tree, wrapping around Alaric's body, pulling him in, cocooning him completely in their light.

The tree came alive, its branches and trunk shimmering with ancient and powerful energy.

Lila stepped back, watching with bated breath. She could no longer hear him and hoped to the gods, she made the right decision.

Time stretched. Then the roots began to

loosen, slowly releasing him. Alaric's body dropped back onto the ground, still as a statue.

Then his eyes snapped open, and for a brief, terrifying moment, they flashed purple.

His lips parted, and when he spoke,

his voice was not his own.

"It's done."