

Defy The Alpha(s) 2: Rebel Beast

Chapter 176: [Bonus -] Like Alpha, Like Beta

Aria remained sprawled across the bed for several moments afterward, her body still warm and unbearably sensitive, the lingering tremors making her reluctant to move.

Maverick, on the other hand, lay beside her looking quite pleased with himself, and she might have happily stayed there a little longer if the morning light pouring through the window hadn't suddenly caught her attention.

Her eyes widened.

"Shit!" Aria pushed herself upright so quickly her head reeled. "It's morning. You're supposed to leave."

Maverick didn't appear nearly as alarmed. He merely climbed off the bed and began gathering his discarded clothes with an irritating amount of leisure, unconcerned by the fact that an entire academy was waking up around them.

Aria, meanwhile, scrambled to make herself presentable. She pulled on her clothes, straightened her top, then hurried toward the mirror and immediately regretted looking.

Her hair was a mess, her cheeks were flushed, and her lips looked thoroughly kissed. Worse, there was something about her face that made it painfully obvious she had spent the morning doing something other than sleeping.

"Great," she muttered, dragging her fingers through her hair. "Absolutely inconspicuous."

Maverick appeared behind her in the mirror, fully dressed now and looking unfairly normal. The amusement in his eyes told her he had heard that.

"Don't," she warned him.

"I didn't even say anything."

"You were thinking it."

He smirked. "Didn't know you were a mind reader now."

"I don't need your ability, Maverick. Not when I can read that stupid look on your face."

Maverick chuckled and came up behind her, slipping an arm around her waist before she could protest. He pulled her back against him and pressed a kiss to her cheek, then another dangerously close to the corner of her mouth.

Aria immediately turned her face away when he tried for a third.

"Don't start." She sighed. "We have already established that neither of us knows how to stop once we start touching each other, and I am not spending the rest of the morning trapped in this room because you kissed me again."

"I merely kissed your cheek, little tamer."

"Your mouth was migrating, Professor."

A laugh escaped him, but he reluctantly loosened his arm around her waist. "Fine."

Aria stepped out of his reach before he could change his mind, although the look he gave her made it obvious he would remain attached to her waist all day if he could.

"What time is it?" he asked.

Aria reached for her phone and checked the screen. Her stomach sank.

"Seven thirty. On the dot."

This time Maverick's amusement disappeared.

"What? We've spent that much time already?" Maverick glanced toward the window and grimaced. "Then I'm definitely not leaving that way. Half the academy will be outside by now."

His attention returned to her. "Unless you want tomorrow's Roost Report announcing that Professor Maverick Nightshade was caught sneaking out of student Aria Aspen's bedroom at seven thirty in the morning."

The thought alone was enough to make Aria's blood run cold. She could already see the headline. With the dining hall destroyed, Lord Plumage and Lady Mimic would probably announce that Professor Maverick Nightshade had found somewhere else to enjoy a ravishing breakfast—and Aria Aspen had been on the menu.

Aria stared at the entrance to her room. There really wasn't another option. Climbing out of her bedroom window would be considerably harder to explain than walking through the door.

"Fine. Front door, then." She blew out a breath. "It's not like my roommates haven't already heard you in here."

The words had barely left her mouth before heat rushed into her cheeks.

Oh, God. What exactly had they heard?

Aria suddenly remembered how desperately she'd tried to keep quiet, followed by all the moments she had failed spectacularly. Brittney, Alek, and Trisha had been right outside these walls the entire time.

She covered her face with both hands. "You can go. I'm never leaving this room. I'm staying here until graduation."

Maverick caught her wrists and gently pulled her hands away from her face.

"Come on, Aria."

Aria resisted when he tried to lead her toward the door. "Easy for you to say. They're not going to interrogate you for the next three hours."

"Then we face them together."

Her attention dropped to where his hand slid into hers, their fingers threading naturally together. Something about the simple gesture settled the worst of her embarrassment.

Moreover, she had told Maverick only moments ago that keeping their mate bond private didn't mean pretending there was nothing between them whenever someone was watching. Throwing him out alone now would make that promise rather pointless.

Aria nodded with sudden confidence. "Fine. Together."

With a click of the door, they stepped into the living room.

Aria had expected the girls to be awake. What she hadn't expected was to find all three of them seated there as if they had been waiting for a show to begin.

Worse, they weren't alone.

Dimitri sat beside Alek with a guilty expression on his face that immediately told Aria she and Maverick weren't the only ones who had some explaining to do before this disciplinary committee.

"Finally, you're out." Brittney wore the brightest smile of them all, staring pointedly at Aria and Maverick's joined hands. "I was beginning to think you two planned on staying in there all day."

Aria's face burned. "I can explain—"

"You mean the same way Alek and Dimitri explained?" Brittney interrupted with a knowing smirk.

Aria slowly turned toward them. Dimitri raised one hand and gave her a sheepish little wave.

"Morning."

Aria was speechless. Her gaze moved to Alek, but her friend wouldn't even look at her, too embarrassed to try.

Then, very slowly, she lifted her eyes toward Maverick. Except he looked away.

Nonetheless, the judgment in Aria's stare followed him.

Like Alpha, like Beta.

While Maverick had been occupying her bedroom, his Beta had been making equally questionable decisions involving one of her roommates.

Trisha, who had remained remarkably unconcerned throughout the entire exchange, took another leisurely sip of her coffee, pinkie extended as she watched them over the rim of her mug.

"Well, this has been educational. Apparently, none of our bedroom doors are particularly secure."

Chapter 177: One For The Nephew, One For The Uncle

"Actually, the doors are secure. They're just not very effective at keeping us away," Maverick declared.

The look Trisha gave him made it perfectly clear what she thought of his shameless admission.

Aria quickly intervened. "Actually..." She pursed her lips. "He came through my balcony."

"How reassuring," Trisha murmured.

Alek cleared her throat before making her own confession. "Dimitri came through the front door. I let him in."

Brittney nodded solemnly. "Different entrances. Same purpose."

Aria wished the ground would open up and swallow her. She had known this was how things would be the moment she stepped out of that room.

"Cut my mate some slack." Maverick stepped defensively in front of Aria. "If there's anyone you need to come after, it's me. I'm the one who snuck in here and climbed into her bed. I deserve the berating."

Aria covered her face immediately. He had absolutely done that on purpose. What was it with these wolves and their compulsive need to announce their bedroom activities as though they deserved public recognition for them?

Her roommates' reactions were about what she expected. Brittney's mouth formed a small O before her eyes lit up, visibly impressed by Maverick's shameless defense of his mate and looking seconds away from squealing.

Trisha managed to keep her expression composed, although the slight tightening of her lips around the rim of her mug betrayed how hard she was fighting a reaction.

Alek, however, turned bright red, undoubtedly remembering her own night with a certain Beta.

"If there's anyone you should be questioning, it should be my Beta right there..."
Maverick's eyes shot toward Dimitri. "I told you the girls were off-limits, Uncle."

"Oh, wow," Brittney muttered under her breath. "One gets the nephew. The other gets the uncle. Good work, girls. This friendship really does stay within the family."

Aria and Alek were rendered speechless.

Dimitri merely faced Maverick, completely unbothered by the accusation. "You're not the only one with a mate, Alpha." There was obvious pride in his voice.

Maverick's brow lifted in disbelief. "No way."

But Dimitri's smirk remained firmly in place. "Every fucking way."

A startled laugh burst out of Maverick before a wide grin took over his face, and just like that, the women were forgotten. He stepped forward and caught his uncle by the shoulder, Dimitri doing the same to him as they knocked shoulders together in a rough, jubilant embrace.

Both men laughed with the unrestrained excitement only two wolves who had found their mates at the same time could understand.

"Fucking hell, Uncle." Maverick pulled back, looking at Dimitri as though he needed to make certain he wasn't joking. "You actually found her."

"I found her," Dimitri confirmed, his smile broadening as his attention strayed toward Alek. There was something different in his face when he looked at her, a possessive tenderness Aria hadn't noticed before.

"Or perhaps she found me. Doesn't matter. She's mine."

Alek's already flushed cheeks turned an even deeper shade of red.

"Could you two stop talking about us as if you've just won something?"

"We did," Maverick and Dimitri answered at the same time.

Brittney slapped a hand over her mouth, barely containing a laugh, while Trisha simply lifted her cup. "Cheers to that."

Maverick turned back to his uncle. "Why the hell didn't you tell me?"

"You were having enough problems with your own mate." Dimitri's eyes slid deliberately toward Aria. "It didn't seem right to tell you I'd found mine when she accepted me right away."

Aria gave him a dry look. "Ha-ha. Very funny. I could still convince Alek you're a horrible choice, you know. There are finer men out there."

"I'd love to see you try." Dimitri didn't look remotely threatened. "The mate bond already gives me an unfair advantage, and I'll rip out the throat of any man who dares come close to her."

And just like that, the laughter in the room died.

Dimitri glanced around at the suddenly silent faces before adding, "I'm joking."

The laughter returned, somewhat awkwardly this time, with Brittney muttering, "That's so toxically hot."

Except while Aria laughed with them, she couldn't quite dismiss what she'd seen in Dimitri's eyes when he'd made the threat. He might have called it a joke, but there hadn't been a single trace of humor in his face when he'd said it.

With the subtle tension still lingering in the air, Dimitri knew it was time they left.

"We should go," he told Maverick.

It was only then that Aria realized their situation had turned out to be something of a blessing. If anyone saw Maverick and Dimitri leaving the girls' quarters together, there was a good chance they would assume the Alpha and his Beta had come by on Therion business. At least it would buy her some breathing space until the party tonight when the gossip would start.

As if Maverick had read her mind, he came closer. "About the party tonight..."

Aria perked up immediately. They hadn't had a chance to discuss it yet, much less the fight that would follow afterward.

"Dimitri will come and get you before the party," Maverick told her. "He'll stay with you and keep an eye on the rest of the girls too. I know I can't stop any of you from coming to the arena when you've already made up your minds, but the least I can do is make sure you're safe."

"Rhydian already gave his word that none of the humans would be harmed," Aria reminded him.

"I still don't trust him," Maverick replied. "And Caelis will be there too. Better safe than sorry."

Aria sighed. "If you say so."

"Also..." Maverick paused, and for the first time since he'd started speaking, some of the certainty left his voice. "I know I don't get to decide what you do, but could you please stay indoors until the party? I'll be busy most of the day, and with everyone already worked up over what might happen tonight..." His jaw tightened slightly. "I'd feel better knowing you're somewhere safe while I can't be around."

Aria reached out and cupped his face. She could hardly argue when he had gone out of his way to ask instead of deciding for her. "Fine. I'll stay indoors with the girls. We need to prepare for tonight anyway, and trust me when I say we're going to need the entire day."

Trisha immediately added, "And since we'll be cooped up in here, I'll be sending you a list of everything we need."

Maverick chuckled, more than willing to meet her demands. "Dimitri will take care of every single thing on it."

"Sure," Dimitri sighed, already sounding tired of a list he hadn't even seen yet. Somehow, he was always the one who ended up doing the hard work.

Then Maverick and Aria looked at each other, neither of them quite ready to say goodbye. Maverick eventually leaned down and, much to Aria's surprise, placed a chaste kiss on her cheek.

"See you later, my lovely mate."

Aria's heart did a ridiculous little dance at the endearment.

"See you later, my Alpha."

Brittney and Trisha exchanged a look but, for once, said absolutely nothing. Their silence was worse.

Then it was Dimitri's turn. Unlike Maverick's surprisingly innocent goodbye, he caught Alek by the waist and planted a brief kiss directly on her lips.

"I'll come for you later, my love."

"I can't wait, my handsome mate," Alek replied shyly, looking ridiculously smitten.

Then the two men looked at each other, satisfied that their mates had been properly seen to, before heading for the door together.

Except the moment that door closed behind them, whatever restraint Brittney and Trisha had been exercising disappeared with it, and the room broke into absolute chaos.

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Chapter 178: Her Bitch

"Ahhhh!!!!!"

If there was ever a moment Aria could have gone deaf, this would surely be it. Brittney had to be part banshee because that pitch could wake the dead and shatter every window in the room.

"What the hell, Aria?!" she shouted, looking completely beside herself. "You actually took our advice and went beyond our expectations?!"

Then she whirled around in search of Alek, and before the poor girl could even brace herself, Brittney grabbed her and lifted her clean off her feet.

"Brittney Thorne! I swear to God I'll murder you if you don't put me down right now!" Alek screamed, clinging to her shoulders for dear life.

Brittney eventually put her down, delirious with laughter and excitement. She simply couldn't believe it. Two of her roommates were now mated to two fucking wolves. One to an Alpha and the other to his Beta. And as if that wasn't enough, the men were nephew and uncle. At this point, could their friendship possibly get any closer?

"The saying was right after all," Trisha gave Aria a knowing look. "It's always the quiet ones who get up to the most trouble." Her eyes narrowed with interest. "So tell us, then. How was the first night?"

"There was no first night!" Aria blurted out, heat rushing straight into her cheeks.

"What?" Brittney and Trisha exclaimed together, their disappointment almost insulting.

Their heads immediately swung toward Alek instead, having decided if Aria failed them, there was still another source of juicy information in the room.

Alek bit down on her lip. "We haven't done it either."

"Whoa, wait." Brittney stared between them, struggling to make sense of what she was hearing. "Didn't they say fated mates can barely resist each other? That once they find each other, all they want to do is fuck?"

Trisha nodded as though Brittney had just cited a reliable academic source. "They're basically rabbits."

Aria and Alek could only stare at them, too dumbfounded by the seriousness of the discussion to even take offense. Obviously, their roommates had spent enough time researching werewolf mating habits to develop expectations, and somehow Aria and Alek were now disappointing them by failing to live up to those expectations.

"So all that talk about werewolf males being ridiculously virile was a lie?" Brittney pouted, looking genuinely betrayed by the discovery. Or at least, what she believed was a discovery.

"Actually..." Alek scratched the side of her head nervously. "I think what you're talking about is mating fever. It hasn't hit us yet. Not that Dimitri and I plan on sitting around waiting for some instinct to turn us into horny messes, but he wants our first time to be special."

She paused before adding far too casually, "Probably after Aria and Maverick finally do it."

"Excuse me?" Aria's head snapped in Alek's direction so fast she nearly gave herself whiplash.

"What do you mean, after Maverick and I do it? We're not stopping you from having sex!"

"Well," Alek began, looking slightly uncomfortable now that she actually had to explain it, "Maverick is Dimitri's Alpha, and Dimitri is his Beta. That bond comes with its own set of problems. Whenever you and Maverick are fighting or things aren't right between you, Dimitri feels it because Maverick isn't settled. He becomes restless, keeps worrying about him, and can't completely focus on anything else."

Her lips twitched. "Including me. So until the two of you stop fighting your mate bond long enough to properly accept each other, I'm apparently sharing my mate with an Alpha who needs constant supervision."

"Ouch," Trisha drawled, her voice sounding far too amused for someone who was supposed to be sympathetic. "I can't imagine being unable to have sex with my mate because my best friend refuses to let her garden get plowed."

"Fuck you," Aria told her.

"You mean Maverick?" Trisha returned shamelessly.

Aria was rendered speechless. Unfortunately for her, that wasn't even the end of it.

Brittney came over to her with a wicked smile. "So basically, for Alek to be properly ravished, Aria needs to go to her Alpha..." She deliberately emphasized the title, mimicking the breathy way Aria had bid Maverick goodbye only moments ago.

Then she wrapped her arms around Aria and began grinding against her dramatically.

"Take me, Alpha Professor. Make me yours tonight. Fuck me hard until I see stars, Daddy..." Brittney accompanied the ridiculous performance with increasingly obscene moans, thrusting against her, playing both Aria and Maverick in a reenactment nobody had asked to see.

It was safe to say Alek was grateful that Brittney's attention had shifted entirely to Aria because she would have melted into the floor if even half of that teasing had been directed at her. Instead, Aria stared at Brittney in absolute horror for all of two seconds before shoving her away.

"Get the fuck off me!"

Brittney stumbled backward, howling with laughter, and that only made the heat burning across Aria's face worse. She couldn't even look at Alek because this entire conversation had gone from discussing mating fever to placing the responsibility for Alek's sex life directly between her legs.

"I'm done," she announced, throwing both hands into the air. "I'm actually done with all of you."

"Aria—" Brittney tried between laughs.

"No! Don't Aria me. Not long ago, you were screaming because I had a mate. Now I have to fuck him as some sort of public service so Alek can get laid too?"

That sent Brittney into another fit of laughter, while even Trisha lost whatever composure she had left.

Aria pointed accusingly at Alek. "And you! Tell your mate to learn how to manage his Alpha issues without involving my vagina."

Alek's mouth fell open. "Why are you shouting at me? I didn't make the rules!"

"I don't care who made them!" Aria snapped, already retreating toward her bedroom. Her face was so hot she was certain she could fry an egg on it.

"Nobody says another word about me, Maverick, sex, gardens, plowing, mating fever, or anything else involving what I do with my body for the rest of the day."

Brittney's laughter followed her across the room. "What about Daddy?"

Aria stopped and turned around very slowly. Brittney should have taken the warning for what it was, but the daredevilish gleam in her eyes said she had every intention of pushing her luck.

"Why don't you let Daddy Maverick take that precious virginity tonight?"

And that did it.

Aria charged at her, and perhaps it was the murderous look on her face that finally convinced Brittney she had pushed things a little too far.

With a shriek, Brittney took off, suddenly running for her life. Unfortunately, the living room wasn't exactly a field, so she did the only thing she could think of and darted behind Trisha, grabbing her by the shoulders and using her as a human shield.

"No, no..." Trisha immediately protested, trying to wrench herself free. "Leave me out of this!" But there was no escaping it now. Aria was already coming for them.

"Aria..." Alek called worriedly, beginning to suspect that things might actually have gotten out of hand as she reached for her.

Trisha reached for Alek at the same moment, hoping to save herself while Brittney continued clinging to her from behind. It was a terrible decision.

Aria crashed into Trisha, Trisha dragged Alek down with her, Brittney refused to let go, and within seconds all four of them went tumbling to the floor in a tangled heap of limbs and shrieks.

Aria immediately went searching for Brittney through the mess, and when she finally found her, everyone seemed to expect violence. Instead, Aria attacked the one place she knew would cause considerably more suffering and dug her fingers mercilessly into Brittney's sides.

"Oh, no! No, not the tickling!" Brittney screamed, already twisting helplessly beneath her. But Aria showed absolutely no mercy, following every attempt to escape until Brittney was laughing so hysterically she could barely breathe.

"Fine! I'm sorry!" Brittney finally gasped, tears streaming from her eyes from the overstimulation. "You win. You don't have to fuck Maverick yet. Go at your own pace. Dimitri can suffer a little longer while Alek keeps her precious V-card."

Hearing that, Aria could only stare at her. Brittney had just been tickled to the point of tears and somehow still hadn't learned a damn thing.

But that was Brittney. She wasn't putting on an act or trying to be outrageous for attention. She was simply brazen through and through, and suddenly Aria couldn't even remember why she'd gotten so worked up in the first place.

She collapsed onto her back, and before she knew it, a laugh escaped her. Another followed, and Brittney joined in almost immediately. Then Trisha started laughing, followed by Alek, until whatever remained of the argument disappeared beneath the sound.

The four of them lay tangled across the floor, laughing so hard and for so long that eventually none of them seemed to remember what was so funny anymore.

"God, my stomach hurts," Brittney complained when they finally began to calm down, rolling onto her side to meet Aria's eyes.

"That's what you get for being a shameless bitch."

"But I'm your bitch, girl." Brittney smiled at her.

Aria smiled back. Yes, she was her bitch.

Chapter 179: Meet Tragic Ends At Bestaris

"Increase the security around the dorm," Maverick instructed Dimitri as soon as they were out of the room.

The jovial air he'd maintained around Aria disappeared the moment the door closed behind them, and in its place was the Alpha responsible for every member of Therion.

"Make sure not even a mosquito can squeeze in, much less a snake. Just because Caelis gave his word doesn't mean I trust him or anyone from Ophidian."

"As you wish, Alpha." Dimitri nodded, committing the instruction to memory.

There was no need to ask whether Maverick was being excessive. He was merely doing what any responsible Alpha would do when his mate's safety was at stake.

They were just about to enter the elevator when someone shouted, "Alpha Maverick!"

Both men turned at once, and Maverick watched a female shifter hurry toward them.

At an academy filled with beasts, it wasn't unusual for students to walk around displaying some of their animal features. Claws, fangs, unusual eyes and even patches of fur hardly earned a second glance anymore. Still, the amount this particular student had allowed to surface was enough to make Maverick lift a brow.

The girl had blonde hair streaked with black, while darker stripes swept across the golden-brown skin of her arms and disappeared beneath the sleeves of her uniform, making her species unmistakable.

Tigress.

Her nails had lengthened into curved claws, each one wickedly sharp despite the ridiculous pink polish coating them, while her golden eyes carried the predatory gleam common to the great cats of Therion. Yet the moment those eyes settled on Maverick, the predatory edge vanished beneath unmistakable excitement.

Maverick might not have remembered her otherwise, but unfortunately for her, he hadn't forgotten the little rat stunt she'd pulled on Aria and her roommates.

"Professor Maverick..." she said this time when she finally stopped in front of him.

At least she had enough sense to leave several feet between them. Everyone in Therion knew the unwritten rule surrounding their Alpha: you did not touch Maverick Nightshade without permission unless you were particularly attached to the hand doing the touching.

It had never stopped some of the more persistent females from trying, but most had enough survival instinct to keep their distance.

"What do you want?" Maverick asked impatiently.

"I wanted to talk to you."

"He's standing right here. Talk," Dimitri said with equal impatience. He recognized her too, and judging by the look on his face, he hadn't forgotten what she'd done either.

Felicity gave Dimitri an irritated look before she could stop herself. She clearly hadn't expected him to interfere, but there was very little she could do about it.

Dimitri wasn't just Maverick's uncle or Beta. As second-in-command of Therion, he carried enough power and influence within the House to make an enemy of him a particularly stupid decision. And if she wanted any chance of getting closer to Maverick, antagonizing the male closest to him would accomplish the exact opposite.

So Felicity quickly smoothed away her irritation and replaced it with a sweet smile. "It's about the humans you brought into Therion."

At the mention of the humans, Maverick's attention was piqued.

"What about them?"

"Ever since they arrived at House Therion, none of us have really had the chance to bond with them," Felicity explained. "I've tried visiting their dorm a few times, but the guards refuse to let me through. They said it was your order, which is why I've come directly to you."

"Is that so?" Maverick asked, amusement creeping into his voice. Felicity mistook it for interest because her smile grew.

"Yes. I mean, we're all females." She gave a small shrug, as if what she was proposing should have been obvious.

"No matter what species we are, girls need other girls. They're human, Professor. They're surrounded by beasts every day in an academy where half the students could probably kill

them without much effort. They must be terrified, even if they don't show it. I just thought it would be nice if the Therion females made an effort to welcome them properly."

Felicity paused before adding with convincing concern, "Besides, if they can't rely on the females of their own House, then who are they supposed to rely on when the other Houses come after them?"

Maverick slowly nodded, appearing to consider everything she'd said. For a moment, it almost seemed as if Felicity had won him over.

"Is that all?"

"Well..." Felicity laughed softly, encouraged by his reaction. "Who knows? If we spend enough time together, the girls and I might even become like sisters."

"Sisters, huh?" Maverick chuckled.

"Yeah, sisters." Felicity laughed along with him, although she wasn't entirely sure what he found so amusing. Still, if Maverick was laughing, she saw no reason not to join him.

Then Maverick's laughter stopped so abruptly that Felicity's own died with it.

"Just how fucking stupid do you think I am?"

The friendliness vanished from the conversation so quickly that Felicity's smile remained frozen on her face for another second before slowly fading.

"What are you talking about?" she asked, forcing herself to hold his stare despite the uneasiness beginning to crawl through her.

"I'm talking about you standing here and lying to my face." Maverick's voice had dropped, the darkness in it making Felicity instinctively straighten.

"You cleared your thoughts before approaching me and put up a mental wall because you knew exactly what I would find if I looked inside your head. Did you really think that would be enough?" His eyes traveled over her slowly, not with attraction, but with the cold assessment of a predator deciding how much of a threat stood before him.

"I don't need to hear your thoughts to smell the malicious intent behind all this supposed 'bonding' you suddenly want to do."

Felicity's confidence faltered, but only for a moment. "I think you're mistaken here and jumping to conclusions," she rushed out, forcing another smile despite the tension creeping into her face.

"But I'll just pretend this conversation never happened..." She turned to leave, only to discover that her feet wouldn't move.

Her brows drew together as she looked down, and her stomach dropped. Ice had formed around both her feet, trapping them against the floor.

"What is the meaning of this, Professor?" Felicity demanded, raising her voice. She made no attempt to hide how loud she was being, clearly hoping the passing students would notice what Maverick was doing to her.

But if she expected someone to intervene, she had badly miscalculated. Students slowed down and stared, while others stopped altogether. A few even pulled out their phones and began recording. No one stepped forward to help her. None of them were stupid enough to interfere when Alpha Maverick was angry.

Maverick stepped closer to Felicity, careful to leave enough distance between them that she couldn't touch him, but close enough that she had no choice but to look him directly in the eyes.

"I moved you out of the room, yes, but I compensated you far more than I should have. As your Alpha, I have the right to reassign rooms within my own House however the fuck I see fit. You don't have to like it, but you will accept it."

A faint purple gleam suddenly bled into Maverick's gray eyes, and the air around them tightened beneath the weight of his power. Felicity felt it immediately. Goosebumps rose across her skin while beads of sweat gathered along her forehead despite the ice encasing her feet.

Even the students watching from a distance reacted to the suffocating force rolling from their Alpha. Their conversations died, and several students instinctively backed away as their beasts recognized a power they had no desire to challenge.

"I'll consider the rat stunt nothing more than a female throwing a tantrum because she didn't get her way," Maverick told her.

"But if you try anything against Aria or any of the other girls again, rest assured, I'll freeze your ass..."

As he spoke, the ice around Felicity's feet began climbing. It swept over her ankles and raced toward her knees with frightening speed, and Felicity's eyes widened in horror as the cold sank painfully into her flesh.

"...and then I'll blow you into so many fucking pieces there won't be enough left of you to give a proper burial."

Felicity swallowed hard as the threat painted a gory image in her mind she desperately wished it hadn't.

Maverick offered her no further explanation. He simply turned and entered the elevator with his Beta. Felicity remained trapped where she stood, staring after him as he faced her one last time. There was a coldness in his eyes she had never seen before, and he held her stare until the elevator doors slid shut between them.

Almost immediately, the ice imprisoning her melted away. Felicity stumbled forward with a gasp, shivering violently as the lingering cold burrowed deep beneath her skin. All around her, students were still watching, whispers already beginning to spread through the hallway.

"What the fuck are you looking at?!" she roared, startling several of them.

That was enough to break whatever spell had held the crowd. The students turned away, and within moments everyone was suddenly very interested in continuing whatever they had been doing before.

Felicity's claws dug painfully into her palms. Those pathetic humans must believe they had protection now. Aria especially.

The tigress scoffed beneath her breath. The Alpha had forgotten one very important thing. There were countless ways for weak little humans to meet tragic ends at Bestiaris Academy, and not all of them could be traced back to the person responsible.

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Female beasts could be vindictive. Think of how far the average female might go when she wanted to teach a bitch a lesson, then add teeth, claws, heightened strength and a beast with its own temper to the equation.

Yeah, Maverick knew his kind well enough. However far a human female was willing to go, a beast could take it twice as far. Which was why the moment the elevator doors opened, he was already telling Dimitri, "Keep an eye on that girl. My gut tells me she might try something stupid to defend her wounded pride."

He had grown up hearing enough stories about his mother's adventures in high school to know exactly how vicious girls could be when they decided they hated someone. He had attended one himself for a while before the incident forced him to leave and finish the rest of his education from home.

Different generation, different school, same lesson: women were troublesome creatures.

His mate, however, would be fighting no stupid battles. Aria was under his House and under his protection, and he intended to keep it that way.

If Felicity or any other female thought she could drag Aria into some ridiculous feud simply because they didn't like a human occupying space in Therion, they were about to discover just how troublesome Maverick Nightshade could be in return.

They made it back to his place when Maverick picked up the sound of his ringing phone. With Feral having taken possession of his body and gone straight to Aria, his phone had been left behind, and it hadn't crossed his mind until now. Judging by how insistently it was ringing, the damn thing had probably been blowing up with calls all morning.

He hurried into his bedroom and headed straight for the bedside table where he'd left it. The moment he picked it up and saw the name flashing across the screen, however, his eyes widened.

"Holy shit," he blurted, immediately drawing his Beta's attention.

"What is it?" Dimitri asked.

Maverick didn't bother answering. He simply turned the phone around and showed him the screen. Dimitri took one look at the caller and his eyes widened too. "Oh, shit."

Across the screen were the words, **World's Most Beautiful Queen.**

It was his mother, Violet Purple.

Maverick immediately cleared his throat and straightened himself as if Violet could somehow see him through the phone. "How do I sound? Normal, right?"

"Just pick up the damn phone," Dimitri urged. "The longer you wait, the more suspicious she'll become."

Maverick braced himself and answered the call. "Hello, Mom—"

"My sweet boy..."

And there it was. The first voice Maverick had ever loved.

It didn't matter that he was a grown man now, an Alpha with an entire House under his command and enough power to make beasts scatter from his path. The moment he heard that familiar endearment spoken in his mother's voice, some part of him slipped effortlessly back into the little boy who had spent his childhood basking in Violet Purple's love.

"Mama." He didn't even realize he'd blurted out the title he'd used for the better part of his life until it was already out. Most people accused him of being a mama's boy, and Maverick didn't deny it one bit. He loved his mother. And his fathers. His family was awesome. Case closed.

"What is going on? I've been calling for a while. I was even about to call Dimitri if you didn't answer this time."

With a wolf's superior hearing, Dimitri caught every word, and his brows immediately rose at the mention of his name. Maverick had better settle whatever was going on with his mother because he wanted absolutely no part of it.

He wasn't about to face Violet Purple's questioning, especially when there was no hiding a secret from that woman once she decided there was one to uncover.

"I was busy, Mama. That's all."

"Busy even at this time of the morning?" Violet sighed. "Never did I think I would reach the point where I'd actually long to hear some scandal about my own son climbing out the window of a girl's room after spending the night with her."

Maverick swallowed. Why the hell did her wish have to come so dangerously close to the truth?

"Never say never, Mama."

And that was the moment Maverick knew he'd fucked up.

He could practically feel Violet's attention sharpen through the phone. There was a brief silence, and when she spoke again, all the disappointment had disappeared from her voice.

"Ricky..." Hope had crept into it now, enough to make Maverick close his eyes in regret. "Are you saying there's a—"

"I'm saying I'll try my best to make it happen," Maverick cut in immediately, desperate to shut down whatever conclusion his mother was already sprinting toward.

There was a small sigh from the other end of the phone, quiet enough that Violet probably hadn't intended for him to hear it, but Maverick caught it anyway.

"You don't have to force yourself, Maverick. In fact, if you don't ever want to touch a woman for the rest of your life, I'm fine with that—"

"Mom..." Maverick called, already knowing where her thoughts were headed. She was going to start blaming herself for what had happened to him again.

But Violet continued.

"It's all my fault. I should have focused more on my family. I should have been there more, and maybe if I had—"

"Mom—" Maverick tried again, but she kept talking.

"I'll never forgive myself for what happened to you. I should have protected you with everything I had. I should have—"

"Mother!" Maverick's voice boomed through the room this time, carrying enough Alpha authority that even through the phone, the command in it was impossible to miss.

Dimitri had witnessed enough of these conversations over the years to recognize when it was time to leave. They never became easier to listen to, no matter how much time passed. Without a word, he quietly left the room, giving Maverick the privacy he needed with his mother.

"It is not your fault, Mother. How many times do I have to tell you that before you finally believe me? I don't blame you for what happened. Not even a little." Maverick dragged a hand over his face, wishing she were standing in front of him so he could make her look at him and understand.

"You're the Alpha Queen and have responsibilities to the people. How could you possibly have known that crazy woman would do something like that?"

"I know..." Violet whispered, her voice beginning to break. "But knowing that doesn't erase the scars you carry now. I think about all the love I swore my children would grow up surrounded by, and then I think about you... about what she took from you, and I—"

Maverick never heard the rest because her words dissolved into sobs.

"Are you crying?" Maverick asked, hardly believing his ears. His mother wasn't incapable of crying, but Violet Purple crying this easily over the phone was strange enough to immediately concern him.

"I'm sorry." Violet sniffled, trying to compose herself. "My hormones have just been all over the place these days, and everything keeps making me emotional—"

Maverick didn't hear another word. His entire body had gone rigid at one particular word.

"Mom..." A terrible suspicion began creeping over him. "Please don't tell me you're pregnant."