Defy The Alpha(s) 2: Rebel Beast - Chapter 191: Ready For The Party[1,720 words]

No sooner had Valerie left to get the suspicious "solution" she refused to tell Aria about than Trisha returned with the boots and immediately had her put them on.

And they were beautiful.

They were made of sleek black leather and rose almost to her knees, fitting closely around her calves before ending in low, solid block heels. The boots gave Aria enough height to sharpen the outfit without making it difficult for her to move normally. Or run. Or kick someone—preferably in the groin.

"Damn, girl. You look hot." Even Trisha couldn't help but comment as she stepped back to admire the finished look.

"Thank you," Aria said sincerely. "I don't know what I did to deserve your kindness..." Her eyes moved around the room, settling briefly on each of them. "All of your kindness."

As the eldest child, Aria had always been the one expected to look after everyone else. She had practically raised Davina while trying to raise herself, because Quinn could barely manage being a mother to her youngest daughter, much less spare enough attention to care for Aria too. Her mother was always busy chasing after the next man she believed would finally make her feel complete.

So being taken care of like this by a group of strangers who had somehow become sisters in such a short time still felt strange to Aria. She didn't know what she had done to deserve them, but somewhere between surviving Bestiaris together and refusing to leave one another behind, they had become hers.

"Oh, come on. Stop the nonsense already." Brittney waved her off before Aria could get emotional. "You're the one who told us we're in this together, remember? You don't get to say something like that and then act surprised when we actually take it seriously."

Aria smiled at her, affection warming her chest.

"Aww," Variant cooed. "Look at you all. Some people spend their entire lives searching for a bond like this. I believe the Goddess brought you four together."

Aria, Brittney, Alek and Trisha exchanged glances. None of them were particularly devoted followers of the Moon Goddess, but wolf culture had spread so deeply into the human world over the years that she was hardly an unfamiliar figure anymore. Even humans who didn't worship her knew the stories, adopted expressions associated with

her and sometimes invoked her name without thinking much about it. Apparently, Variant had decided the Goddess deserved credit for their friendship too.

Then Valerie returned.

"Here it is..." she announced, finally revealing what she had been hiding behind her back, and the girls gasped.

The coat was out of this world. Thick, pale-grey fur spilled over Valerie's arms, so soft and luxurious that Aria could tell from across the room it was expensive. It was long too, clearly meant to fall well past the hips, with enough weight to actually keep someone warm rather than merely look pretty.

Brittney was the first to hurry over and run her fingers through the fur. "Is this—"

"Yeah, it's real," Variant answered. Then, before any of the humans could look horrified, she quickly added, "They didn't kill the wolf, though. It's made from naturally shed fur. And it's expensive as hell because collecting enough of it and turning it into something like this takes a ridiculous amount of work and time. Her parents practically broke the bank getting it for her."

Valerie held the coat toward Aria. "And now I'm giving it to you."

"Oh, no. No, I couldn't possibly take that." Aria immediately shook her head. "It's a gift from your parents."

"A gift I never liked," Valerie corrected. "Now that I've finally found someone who'll actually make good use of it, I'm over it already. Take it."

But no matter how casually Valerie said it, Aria remained hesitant. What if the coat had some sentimental value Valerie wasn't admitting to? Worse, what if her parents eventually asked about something that expensive and Valerie ended up in trouble because she'd handed it over to a girl she'd barely known for long?

"No, I really couldn't." Aria shook her head again.

"Aria—"

Variant placed a hand on Valerie's shoulder, stopping her before she could argue. "Then don't take it permanently. Wear it tonight, and if you like it enough to keep it afterward, you can. If you don't, give it back. Problem solved."

At that, Aria finally nodded. "Okay."

"Good." Variant smiled. "Now put it on. Let's see."

Aria took the coat, still a little awed by how soft it felt beneath her fingers, before slipping her arms inside. The thick pale-grey fur surrounded her from her shoulders almost to mid-thigh, oversized enough to soften the harder edges of the black outfit beneath it without swallowing her completely. She could easily pull both sides closed if the wind picked up tonight, and against the lighter shade, the blue of her eyes seemed even brighter.

Brittney gave an appreciative whistle. "If Maverick doesn't get you pregnant tonight, I will."

Everyone turned to stare at her.

"Obviously, I can't," Brittney added with a laugh. "But I feel like my point was very clear."

The others sighed and shook their heads. That was simply Brittney being Brittney.

Aria knew without a doubt that she looked good. What she didn't know was that the fur had not been an entirely innocent choice.

Valerie and Variant had suspected Maverick was interested in one of the humans from the moment he personally sent them to look out for Aria and her roommates. Then he'd saved Aria when the dining hall collapsed, and there hadn't been much left to figure out. Of all the women who had arrived at Bestiaris, she was clearly the one who had captured his attention.

As long as Valerie and Variant had known Maverick at the academy, he had never shown any interest in women. Add that to his well-known aversion to being touched by them, and plenty of students had eventually concluded that perhaps women simply weren't his preference. Valerie and Variant had believed it too—until Aria.

The fur only made their little scheme more entertaining. Valerie and Variant knew wolves. They knew what fur could stir in them—the warmth, the scent, the softness of it, all feeding into something primitive and possessive when wrapped around a woman they considered theirs. With Maverick already interested in Aria, they were curious to see how much of the Alpha's famous control would survive the combination.

In conclusion, they were merely giving Maverick a little push. Whatever he did afterward was entirely his responsibility, and they would accept absolutely no blame for the consequences.

Besides, Valerie had her own reasons for wanting the coat gone. Her parents had originally bought it hoping she could use it to catch the attention of a male wolf. As a squirrel who ranked nowhere near the top of the beast hierarchy, Valerie had grown up hearing what an achievement it would be to attract a more powerful beast.

To some families, marrying upward meant status, security and stronger offspring. But to Valerie, the whole idea had always sounded like telling a human girl to put on her prettiest dress and hope a prince noticed her.

Yeah, it was what it was—a dream.

And Valerie hated that her parents expected her to chase that dream simply because they thought being chosen by a powerful male would somehow make her life more valuable. So watching Aria stand there in the coat, completely oblivious to the effect it might have on the wolf she actually wanted, Valerie couldn't have been happier to finally see the damn thing go.

With Aria's outfit finally settled, attention naturally shifted to everyone else. Not that the other girls needed nearly as much help as she did.

Trisha had gone for black and something that showed quite a lot of skin. Not that it was surprising. Her top was a fitted crop top, sleeveless and high around her neck, leaving her stomach completely bare before the patterned maxi skirt began low on her hips. The skirt reached her ankles, but the sheer cutout design offered plenty of glimpses of her legs whenever she moved.

Instead of risking her life in heels at an outdoor party, she too went for ankle boots with thick, sturdy heels. By the time she was done, everything suited her far too well. Trisha looked stylish and sexy as hell.

Alek, on the other hand, went for something more subtle. She chose a fitted black strapless midi dress that followed the shape of her body without clinging obscenely to it.

The neckline ran cleanly across her chest while the hem fell below her knees, interrupted only by a slit climbing one side of her thigh. There were no sequins or glitter, nothing dramatic enough to demand attention. Just a flattering dress and enough exposed skin to remind everyone that Alek knew how to be sexy too.

They knew her red hair would do most of the work, and she also flat-out refused to wear heels, settling for leather ankle boots with a low block heel.

The result was very much Alek. Pretty without advertising it and comfortable without looking underdressed. The girl could probably disappear into the crowd if she wanted to, although Aria had a feeling Dimitri would make that impossible the moment he saw her.

Finally, there was Brittney. Unsurprisingly, Brittney had taken the party as an opportunity.

A deep burgundy halter top wrapped around her upper body, the gathered fabric flattering her chest before narrowing around her waist. Her shoulders and most of her back remained bare, and she'd paired it with a long light-blue denim skirt that should have

made the outfit more casual if Brittney hadn't chosen one that looked as though someone had attacked it with a pair of scissors.

The denim was heavily distressed down the front, ripped open high along one thigh before continuing in frayed sections toward her ankles. Every time Brittney walked, the torn pieces shifted enough to reveal flashes of her leg.

For once, she listened to them and abandoned the knee-high burgundy stilettos she'd originally considered for leather boots in the same shade with sturdy block heels.

And with their outfits finally settled, they were ready for one hell of a party tonight.

Defy The Alpha(s) 2: Rebel Beast - Chapter 192: Karen, The Slut[1,050 words]

Ding Dong.

Karen's heart skipped a beat as the doorbell rang. She glanced down at her phone. It was eight on the dot.

Caelis. He really was a timekeeper.

"I don't need to tell you guys to behave, right?" Karen warned the girls, who had all gone rigid at the sound of the bell. Liv, however, looked worse than the rest. She was about to face the beast who had nearly stolen her eyesight and put her in the hospital for days.

Sweat had already begun to gather along Liv's forehead, something Fatima noticed immediately. She reached out and squeezed her hand in reassurance, and Liv released a shaky breath before managing a small smile.

And yes, Liv was going to that party against her will.

After the Basilisk Prince had called Karen earlier that day, she'd returned to the room and announced that they were all attending the party. No exceptions. As far as Karen was concerned, if the Basilisk Prince himself had given the order, nobody was staying behind.

Hence, as much as Liv would have preferred to crawl beneath her bedsheets and remain there for the rest of the night, she had little choice.

The girls were dressed well, of course, but never better than Karen. It was practically an unwritten rule among them that no one outshined the queen bee, Karen Donovan. So each of them had settled for something more subtle while Karen wore the leather skirt Olivia had picked out for her that morning, paired with a fitted long-sleeved top, matching

leather jacket and knee-high boots. Most surprising of all, she'd dyed her blonde hair black.

It was a completely different look for someone who usually preferred the soft, expensive rich-girl aesthetic, and the others had certainly noticed.

What none of them knew was that Karen had taken her inspiration from Aria Aspen.

The girl was almost always dressed in black or something rugged, and somehow, she'd managed to attract the attention of practically every powerful beast around her. Perhaps that was what they liked. Maybe sweet and fragile wasn't enough to hold their interest. Either way, Karen intended to prove she could be just as tough when she wanted to be.

With her newfound confidence firmly in place, Karen crossed the room and opened the door, a greeting already waiting on her lips.

"Hello, Caelis."

And there he was.

If Caelis was surprised by her appearance, Karen couldn't tell. A pair of dark square sunglasses concealed his eyes completely, and judging by how perfectly they sat on his face, she wouldn't have been surprised if they were custom-made.

He wore a long midnight-blue overcoat that fell almost to his ankles over a fitted navy turtleneck, paired with charcoal trousers and dark leather boots. The colors were simple, but on him, they looked ridiculously expensive.

His silver hair had been left down tonight, hiding the tattoo Karen knew was behind his ear, while a single silver serpent ring curled around one finger. Caelis Cobryn didn't look like someone attending an academy party. He looked more like a man who had arrived to quietly take ownership of it.

Cold, unapproachable and ruthlessly beautiful. Very much the Basilisk Prince.

"What's with the glasses?" The question slipped from Karen's lips before she could stop herself.

Surprisingly, he answered. "To limit casualties. I'm about to spend the night surrounded by animals who are bound to provoke me. Unless, of course, you'd prefer to see me leaving statues around campus."

Karen was tempted to tell him she wouldn't mind. It would be exciting to see his power in action. Not to mention, there were a few girls she considered competition whom she wouldn't mind seeing permanently turned to stone.

Instead she said, "Good choice." Then she added, "Let me get my purse."

Karen returned to the room to retrieve her purse, lifting her gaze to the girls whose fear was written boldly across their faces. But Karen didn't care. She knew Caelis was dangerous. That was part of the appeal. There was something exhilarating about being beside a man everyone else feared, knowing she could prove that his danger wasn't meant for her. Tonight, she would be the exception. The one he'd chosen.

Without looking back to see if the others were following, Karen stepped out and returned to Caelis. As agreed, she would be on his arm tonight. He extended it slightly toward her, and Karen immediately slipped hers through it before they started down the hallway.

The simple gesture filled Karen with such exhilaration that she lifted her head with pride and put a little more sway into her steps. It wasn't long before the other serpents preparing for the party began to notice them, and whispers followed almost immediately.

"What is going on?"

"Why is that human hanging on the Prince's arm?"

The whispers grew louder as more heads turned in their direction. Yes, let them look. Karen could already imagine how many of the women envied her, wishing they were the ones occupying the place at Caelis's side. For once since arriving at Bestiaris, she felt like she was exactly where she belonged.

But then the nasty whispers began too.

"Such a slut. I knew it was only a matter of time before one of the humans tried to spread her legs for the Prince."

It was Nadia, that deranged cobra who had nearly bitten Karen the day she'd first come to House Ophidian.

Nadia stood off to the side with her usual trio, watching them pass with that annoying smirk Karen already wanted to slap off her face.

"Let her enjoy herself," Nagin added. "She probably thinks being on his arm makes her special. Someone should tell her serpent men are simply very good at keeping women entertained."

They laughed at her.

Karen's nails dug into Caelis's arm so tightly there was no way he couldn't have felt it, but he gave no indication. His face might as well have been carved from marble. He didn't slow down, or glance at Nadia and certainly didn't come to Karen's defense.

What Karen didn’t know was that Caelis had no intention of fighting this battle for her. If she wanted to remain at his side tonight, she would have to prove she could fight it herself.

Defy The Alpha(s) 2: Rebel Beast - Chapter 193: The Arena[1,042 words]

Karen did not confront Nadia and her girls. Neither did Caelis, and that left her furious as hell.

So when they stepped outside and she saw the ridiculously long luxury sedan waiting for them, with a male serpent shifter already holding the door open as their chauffeur, Karen didn’t waste any time. She pulled her arm free from Caelis’s and strode toward the car, climbing inside before shutting the door behind her.

Even the chauffeur raised a brow, visibly taken aback by the human’s audacity. How dare she behave that way toward their prince? A mere human?

The serpent shifter let out a hiss of disapproval, only for a deeper, far more commanding one to come from Caelis. The male immediately stiffened, although another quieter hiss escaped him in protest.

This time, Caelis spoke.

"Stand down, Onyx."

Reluctantly, the chauffeur straightened, but the look he gave Karen made it clear she might want to watch her back.

Karen caught it and rolled her eyes. Let them try. Her daddy was paying for her safety at this academy, and they’d have to be incredibly stupid to lay a hand on her.

Caelis climbed into the car without sparing Karen a glance. He knew exactly what she was doing and had no intention of giving her the satisfaction. If he’d spent his life entertaining feminine tantrums whenever a woman didn’t get the reaction she wanted from him, he certainly wouldn’t have gotten to where he was now.

Except they weren’t alone. Olivia, Fatima and Liv had followed them outside. Just as the girls were about to climb into the car, Karen, whose mood had only worsened, snapped, "No. I don’t want any of them riding with us."

Caelis lifted a brow.

Karen continued, "You can send them in another car. I don’t want to see their faces."

The girls froze. Humiliation settled over their faces as they stood there in front of Caelis and his chauffeur, publicly discarded by the same person who had ordered them to come in the first place.

As usual, Caelis did not challenge her decision. It was none of his business. Karen was the only human he’d wanted in House Ophidian; she’d brought the others along with her. In other words, they were her baggage. If she wanted to mistreat the only humans who could have been her support system in a place this dangerous, then Caelis would gladly let her dig that grave herself.

He shifted his attention to Onyx. "Send them to Venus." Then he pressed the button beside him, raising the tinted window and effectively shutting everyone else out.

The chauffeur, whom Karen now knew as Onyx, remained outside trying to reach Venus, leaving her and Caelis alone inside. However, the Basilisk Prince didn’t say a word to her. He simply pulled out his phone and began responding to the messages waiting for him.

Karen couldn’t take it anymore and snapped, "You did nothing while Nadia and the others called me a slut!"

Calm as water, Caelis asked, "Did we sleep together?"

Startled by the question, Karen stammered, "N-no."

"Are you a slut?" Caelis asked this time, turning to face her. The dark glasses made it impossible to see his eyes, yet somehow, Karen still felt pinned beneath his attention.

"No!" she blurted out, her cheeks burning with embarrassment.

Caelis didn’t need to say anything else. If neither accusation was true, then as far as he was concerned, there was nothing worth responding to. He returned his attention to his phone, dismissing the matter entirely.

But Karen wasn’t satisfied. "But you still—"

Caelis turned toward her again, so abruptly that the rest of the words died in her throat. His expression had hardened, whatever patience he’d been extending to her clearly reaching its limit.

"I said you could hang on my arm tonight. That gesture did not include listening to you whine."

It was the way Caelis said it that sent a chill down Karen's spine. His voice never rose, nor did he need it to. The warning was clear enough without the volume.

Karen swallowed, and that was it. She said nothing more.

Right at that moment, Onyx climbed into the driver's seat. His eyes briefly met Karen's through the rearview mirror, and from the slight narrowing of them, he'd clearly sensed the tension waiting inside. He said nothing, started the car and pulled away.

The journey to the arena was easily the most tense ride Karen had ever endured. Caelis's attention remained fixed on his phone, and he didn't spare her so much as a glance. Determined to pretend his attitude wasn't getting to her, Karen pulled out her own phone and began scrolling. Unfortunately, nothing on the screen could hold her attention for more than a few seconds.

Karen just couldn't understand him. She was pretty as hell, came from money and knew exactly what she had to offer. Caelis should have been all over her by now, yet for some reason, he insisted on playing hard to get. All her life, men had done the chasing. She had never needed to work this hard for anyone's attention before.

In Karen's mind, even if she hadn't gotten her hands on Maverick yet, Caelis should at least have been worshipping the ground she walked on. He was a prince, yes, and dangerously powerful, but that didn't suddenly make her any less of a catch.

The arena was quite a distance from House Ophidian. At one point, Karen even caught a glimpse of the old human residence through the tinted window before it disappeared behind them. They continued farther across the academy grounds until the sedan finally began to slow, and when Karen looked ahead to see where they had arrived, her irritation with Caelis was momentarily forgotten.

The arena looked like something dragged straight out of the ancient world and abandoned to time. Massive stone columns surrounded the open structure, several cracked or partially broken, while wide tiers of stone seating rose around a sunken ground at its center. Parts of the outer walls had crumbled away, giving it the appearance of an ancient Greek temple mixed with a gladiatorial arena. Except Karen suspected very little of the damage was actually due to age.

Defy The Alpha(s) 2: Rebel Beast - Chapter 194: Have The Final Word[1,590 words]

If there was anything the beasts loved as much as violence, it was partying. Maverick Nightshade walked through the arena, taking note of the changes that had been made to the place for tonight.

The surface, or the **Outer Ring** as the students popularly called it, looked nothing like it usually did. Torches had been mounted along the sides of the massive stone columns, while shallow fire bowls burned atop several of them, their flames bright against the night sky.

More braziers had been positioned strategically throughout the ruins, illuminating the pathways, seating areas and the wide center without a single electrical light being used. Caelis had apparently wanted the illusion of another era without sacrificing modern conveniences entirely, because speakers had been concealed throughout the ruins, music pouring from them without anything obvious to betray where it was coming from. The effect made the entire place resemble some ancient temple brought back to life for one night.

What Caelis lacked in empathy, he certainly made up for in creativity and taste. Maverick knew the old saying that monsters thrived in the dark, and judging by the atmosphere the basilick prince had created tonight, he wouldn't be surprised if the bastard had thought of that too.

Three enormous emblems representing Aetheris, Ophidian and Therion had been displayed side by side along one section of the wall, but there was little doubt which House ruled supreme here. Stone serpents were scattered throughout the arena, some coiled around pillars while others rose from pedestals with their fangs exposed. Ophidian had left its mark everywhere, which wasn't surprising considering Caelis had been the one to oversee the arena's construction.

Although this was the first time Maverick had actively participated in one of these parties, he knew the real fighting ring was underground. Beneath all the music, alcohol and festivities was the place where he and Rhydian would eventually find out which of them was the stronger predator.

As he continued through the Outer Ring, Maverick spotted several female beasts dressed in outfits that left practically nothing to the imagination, and he barely gave them a second glance. Humans tended to have far more reservations when it came to nudity, but beasts grew up differently.

Shifting alone made modesty difficult to cling to when one's clothes could tear apart within seconds. They didn't treat their bodies as something sexual or shameful, and sex itself wasn't considered something that needed to be whispered about behind closed doors.

That didn't mean beast shifters fucked anything that moved or lacked boundaries. Attraction, preference, loyalty and consent mattered just as much as they did to anyone else. They simply weren't taught to be embarrassed by desire.

Maverick didn't care if his Aria was nothing like them. If she was shy about her body or became flustered whenever things between them grew too intimate, he liked that about

her too. He liked the way her cheeks warmed when he complimented her and how easily he could make her blush with a kiss.

Left entirely to him, he wouldn't have brought her to a party like this in the first place. He knew how beasts celebrated when they were given enough alcohol and freedom to indulge their primitive sides, and some gatherings eventually descended into public sex, group encounters and whatever else consenting participants decided to get up to before the night was over.

Hopefully, with an actual fight waiting for them beneath their feet, everyone would be more interested in seeing blood spilled tonight than taking their clothes off.

It wasn't difficult to tell the moment Caelis arrived. Aside from the expensive-looking car pulling up outside the arena, Maverick could sense him. It was a predator's response to another predator, an instinct that had already made Maverick unconsciously gauge the power of every beast present tonight. So far, there wasn't a single one he doubted he could put down without breaking much of a sweat.

But then there was Caelis Cobryn.

If there was one opponent Maverick knew deep down would give him a deadly fight, it was the Basilisk Prince.

Maverick watched as Caelis casually stepped out of the car, already surveying his surroundings before his silver eyes found Maverick's across the distance and stayed there.

Strangely enough, it wasn't Caelis's ability to turn someone to stone that concerned Maverick most. It was how little emotion the bastard showed. That cold control reminded him of someone Maverick knew better than most. His own father, Asher Nightshade.

He could see far too much of his father in Caelis, and that alone made the Basilisk Prince dangerous. Men like them rarely acted on impulse. They watched, calculated and kept everything buried beneath an unsettling amount of control, which only made it worse when that control finally snapped.

Caelis was brilliant too. Maverick preferred staying two steps ahead of everyone around him, but with Caelis, he could never comfortably assume the bastard wasn't already planning three steps of his own.

In one word, Caelis Cobryn was a scary competitor.

From the corner of his eye, Maverick caught movement from the other side of the car and finally broke eye contact, his brows drawing together slightly when he saw Karen Donovan step out.

At first, Maverick didn’t think much of it. Karen was part of House Ophidian, after all, so perhaps Caelis had simply given her a ride to the arena. Since when did Caelis have a heart?

But then Maverick noticed there was no sign of the other girls, and a suspicion began to form in his mind.

Nah. It couldn’t be.

Yet he watched Caelis walk around to Karen’s side and offer her his arm. Karen smiled sweetly before slipping hers through it, looking entirely too pleased with herself as they started toward the arena together.

Maverick was dumbfounded. This was impossible. House Therion was the only House that had shown any real tolerance toward the humans so far. The serpents certainly hadn’t, and neither had the dragons.

Still, his eyes weren’t deceiving him.

And Maverick wasn’t the only one who had noticed. Gasps and shocked whispers rippled through the arena as more heads turned toward the unlikely pair. Since when did serpents get chummy with humans? They were known for poisoning and killing them, not offering them an arm to hold. Had Prince Caelis finally lost his damn mind?

But no matter how shocked everyone was, none of them confronted the basilick prince. Instead, they stood and watched the unlikely pair descend up the stairs, their mind blown away.

However, the longer everyone stared, the more obvious it became that if one ignored the fact that Karen was human, the two of them oddly looked perfect together. Like some kind of power couple—the Basilisk Prince of the serpent kind and the daughter of an influential politician.

Not to mention, Karen didn’t exactly look like Karen tonight. Gone was the polished, delicate rich girl they were accustomed to seeing. Dressed in black with her newly darkened hair, for once, she actually looked like she had a backbone.

Instead of minding his business and continuing into the party, Caelis led Karen directly toward Maverick. Of course he did. The bastard stopped a few feet away, Karen still holding his arm as the two princes regarded each other.

"Alpha Maverick," he greeted, briefly taking in Maverick’s appearance. "I hope you’re here to have fun and not police my attendees. Class is over, Professor."

Maverick angled his head slightly, accepting the challenge for exactly what it was. "Who says I can’t do both?"

"Oh, you won’t have to lift a finger at all, Professor," Caelis assured him. "Everyone here has promised to be on their best behavior."

"Except that’s the problem." Maverick rubbed his jaw as he studied him. "Promises are easily broken."

For once, Caelis smiled, and Maverick immediately disliked it. "I can assure you, the promises made tonight will be kept. If there’s anything you should be worried about, it’s your fight with Rhydian."

His smile widened just enough to become mocking. "It would be rather embarrassing if the Alpha of House Therion were defeated tonight, wouldn’t it? You’ve kept the beasts in this academy under remarkably tight control so far. One public defeat and some of them might start questioning whether that control was ever yours to begin with....."

He paused, letting the words settle before adding, "They might even begin to wonder whether the Nightshade heir has anything behind that name besides his family’s reputation."

Oh, he was good. Maverick had to give him that. Caelis knew exactly where to stick the knife and how slowly to twist it.

"Thank you for your concern, Caelis Cobryn. But I can assure you I’m a hundred percent capable of taking care of myself and any threat that comes my way." Maverick’s attention remained on him. "If anything, you should be more concerned with making sure every member of your House sticks to their promise not to harm any human tonight."

He straightened. "Now, if you’ll excuse me."

Maverick turned, intending to leave, only to stop after a step.

"Oh, and just a warning." This time, his eyes settled on Karen, who had been staring at him throughout the entire exchange. "This one has a habit of putting other people between herself and danger. So if trouble comes flying your way tonight, you might want to watch your back. May the Goddess be with you."

Then Maverick walked away, satisfied that he’d gotten the final word and leaving behind a thoroughly embarrassed Karen.

Defy The Alpha(s) 2: Rebel Beast - Chapter 195: Ophidian Sticks With Ophidian[1,300 words]

Charlotte Greenwood was still nowhere to be found, and her roommates were ready to leave for the party.

"Let's go." It was Evelina, one of the dragonesses aligned with Tamara and among those who had dragged them down to the basement earlier that day.

Zainab, Indigo and Meredith had no choice but to climb into the dragoness's car, nervous as hell. At this point, all three could only pray that by some miracle Charlotte was already dead somewhere and they wouldn't have to go through with what Tamara had ordered them to do tonight.

Even though Evelina blasted music through the speakers and sang along in her horribly crooked voice without a care in the world, none of the girls felt safe. They sat pressed close together in the back seat, drawing what little comfort they could from one another's presence.

It didn't help that the road to the arena was surrounded by nothing but tall trees and thick bushes. They were deep enough in the woods that Evelina could easily pull over, kill all three of them and leave behind nothing but ashes for someone to find.

The paved road beneath them and the distant thump of music ahead were the only assurances that Evelina was actually taking them to the party. Even then, neither did much to ease the tension inside the car. Every minute trapped with the dragoness felt longer than the last.

Finally, they reached the arena, and for a moment, even their fear was forgotten. Their eyes widened and mouths fell open as the massive structure came into view, illuminated almost entirely by fire against the darkness of the night.

"Amazing, right?" Evelina said cockily, clearly enjoying their gobsmacked expressions.

"At least that snake is good for one thing," the dragoness muttered as she drove farther into the crowded parking area, searching for an empty space among the fleet of cars.

Once she'd finally parked, Evelina twisted around in her seat to face the still-nervous girls. "Don't expect me to drive you home. I'm not your servant. You're ours. This ride was a favor to Tamara, so you'll have to find your own way back." A condescending smile curled her lips. "If I were you, I'd find a beast or two with a taste for humans."

It was the way she said it that sent a shiver down their spines, as if getting stranded tonight was the least threatening thing she had meant by those words.

Then the beam disappeared from Evelina's face completely. "That's your cue to get the fuck out of my car."

The girls looked at one another, and as if someone had shouted *Jack Robinson*, all three scrambled out at once. Relief came the moment their feet hit the ground, but none of them allowed themselves to linger. They quickly put as much distance as possible between themselves and the dragoness before Evelina decided she wasn't finished tormenting them after all.

The smell of smoke, spices and dozens of different beast scents saturated the air. This was a party unlike anything the girls had ever attended. Quite a number of the male beasts walked around bare-chested, displaying bodies that looked almost deliberately sculpted for attention. Some flexed whenever a female passed, while others stood around in groups as if silently competing to see who could attract the most interested looks.

Some of them even had elaborate markings painted across their bodies and faces, the colors forming strange symbols and patterns the girls didn't recognize. Combined with the firelight, pounding music and beasts prowling around half-dressed, it almost felt like they'd wandered into one of those movies where a group of clueless tourists ended up stranded on some remote island, only to discover the locals were preparing them for a ritual sacrifice.

The females weren't dressed much differently. Pieces of fabric covered so little that Meredith couldn't help wondering why they'd bothered covering themselves at all. Others had decorated their exposed skin with body paint designed to emphasize features belonging to their beasts— a feline female had painted black stripes down the sides of her body to match those already marking her face, while another woman with small scales along her shoulders had outlined each one in shiny gold, making them gleam whenever she passed close to the flames.

It was simply wild.

And then there was the other part of the crowd, dressed exactly as one might expect at a normal human party, still the girls didn't feel any more comfortable. Standing there among predators drinking, laughing and openly displaying parts of themselves humans usually kept hidden, the reality of where they were finally sank in. They were three human girls surrounded by beasts, carrying poison meant for their own roommate, with Tamara's threat hanging over their heads. They were way over their heads.

Right at that moment, another car arrived and pulled into one of the remaining spaces. When the doors opened and Zainab, Indigo and Meredith saw Fatima, Olivia and Liv stepping out, relief immediately washed over them. At least there were more humans now. They weren't going to be completely alone in a party filled with beasts.

They watched the three girls take in the scene around them, their expressions changing as they probably came to the same realization Zainab, Indigo and Meredith had only moments ago. Then their eyes met across the distance, and for several seconds, both groups simply stared at one another.

It seemed both sides remembered at the same time that before Karen and Charlotte had fallen out, they had all been able to get along. Whatever disagreement had divided them suddenly seemed ridiculous in a place like this. Tonight, they needed one another.

Meredith especially wanted desperately to speak to them because she felt like she was losing her mind. She needed to know whether the Ophidian girls had been treated any better than they had, and if they knew anything that might help them survive whatever Tamara had dragged them into.

The serpent beast who had driven Fatima, Olivia and Liv said something to them before walking away. The girls nodded, then started toward them. Zainab, Indigo and Meredith moved too, intending to close the remaining distance and meet them halfway.

Except someone suddenly stepped between both groups. "Excuse me."

It was Karen Donovan.

"Ah-ah," she warned, stopping Zainab, Indigo and Meredith before they could take another step. Karen planted herself directly between them and the other girls, who were now only a few feet away.

Karen looked different tonight, but the smile she gave them was painfully familiar.

"I don’t know what you’re thinking, but I’m sorry, it’s not going to happen. Charlotte made that decision for all of you, so now you get to live with it."

Her grin sharpened as she added, "Ophidian sticks with Ophidian. Aetheris sticks with Aetheris. So go find Charlotte wherever the hell she is and stay away from my girls."

Then she glanced over her shoulder at Olivia, Fatima and Liv. "Let’s go."

However, none of them moved. For the first time, they remained exactly where they were instead of immediately falling in behind her. Karen’s eyes narrowed.

"I said let’s go."

None of the girls even twitched.

For a moment, Karen looked ready to explode. Then, almost as quickly, she forced the anger from her face and replaced it with a sweet smile.

"You guys do know Caelis won’t be happy when he finds out you disobeyed my orders, right?"

Liv was the first to flinch. The reaction spread quickly, uneasiness appearing on Olivia’s face before Fatima’s confidence faltered too. Karen saw every bit of it.

"Thought as much," she said coldly. "Move. Now."

Karen started up the steps toward the center of the arena, and this time, the three girls reluctantly followed.

Defy The Alpha(s) 2: Rebel Beast - Chapter 196: Forget About The Party[1,226 words]

"Just a minute!" Brittney shouted when the doorbell rang for the second time.

Dimitri was here.

"How did we even end up this late?" she demanded, looking around at the disaster they had made of the room like the answer wasn't scattered across every surface.

And yeah, they were late because somewhere along the way, getting ready for the party had turned into a party of its own. Valerie and Variant had even brought their outfits along so they could change with everyone else when the time came.

There had been drinks too, although Aria and the other humans had chosen soft drinks instead. Showing up drunk to a party filled with predators seemed like a spectacularly stupid idea, especially when the beasts could drink twice as much and burn through the alcohol far quicker than any human could. Valerie and Variant, on the other hand, had been knocking theirs back without the slightest concern.

And of course, there had been gossip. Lots of it.

Valerie and Variant had spent a good portion of the day telling them who was fucking who, who had been caught fucking someone they definitely shouldn't have been fucking, and which relationships were currently hanging by a thread because of it.

Apparently, the beast world wasn't so different from the human one after all. There were cheaters here too, although things seemed considerably messier when powerful predators naturally attracted more attention and most females were more than willing to compete for it.

It turned out the women fought over men too. Except in a world where an argument could involve claws, venom, fire or a mouthful of very sharp teeth, those fights had a tendency to become far more brutal than pulling hair in a nightclub bathroom. Aria supposed it didn't matter what species they were or what kind of skin they wore. Men were still men, and women were still willing to fight over them.

For a moment, Aria had been tempted to tell Valerie and Variant about her mate bond with Maverick and perhaps ask some of the questions that had been circling her mind

since she’d agreed to give him a chance. But as much as she liked the girls, she’d only known them for a short time, and after hearing just how much gossip they knew about everyone else, telling them her biggest secret suddenly seemed like a terrible idea. Maybe later.

And now here they were.

"We’re done!" Valerie and Variant announced almost simultaneously as they dusted the last bit of powder across their faces and tossed their brushes onto the vanity.

And yes, they were dressed identically as usual.

Both wore matching strapless bandeau tops in deep forest green that barely covered their breasts, paired with ridiculously short black pleated skirts sitting low on their hips. The only obvious difference was in their accessories: Valerie had chosen gold hoops and stacked bracelets, while Variant wore silver rings and a thin chain around her waist.

Aria glanced down at her own mini skirt and almost laughed. Standing beside those two, she looked downright conservative.

They must have been impervious to the cold because neither of them had bothered with so much as a jacket.

"All right, this is how we’re going to do it." Aria lowered her voice, painfully aware that shifters had ridiculously good hearing and Dimitri was already standing on the other side of the door.

She quickly laid out the plan.

"Brittney will open the door while Alek hides in my room. The rest of you will stay in here and act as if nothing unusual is happening. Dimitri will inevitably start looking around for Alek, and once he’s sufficiently confused about where his mate is, Alek will make her grand entrance."

Aria smiled, already picturing it. "She’ll step out in that black strapless dress, and I’m willing to bet Dimitri will be left speechless."

"Oh, he will," Brittney whispered, practically vibrating with excitement.

The others snickered at the thought, while even Alek couldn’t hide her smile. She ran her hands down the sides of her dress one last time, trying to act unaffected, but the anticipation written across her face gave her away completely.

Then they moved.

Brittney hurried to the door while the other girls scattered around the living room and did their best to look innocent. Alek slipped into Aria's bedroom and quietly closed the door behind her.

Brittney opened the front door with a bright smile. "Sorry we're late. But we're done now. Come on in."

Dimitri nodded as he stepped inside, his eyes briefly sweeping over Brittney.

"You look good."

"Well, thank you," Brittney replied politely, although the innocent act almost slipped when she noticed his attention immediately dart toward Alek's bedroom door before sweeping across the living room.

Dimitri took in Aria, Trisha, Valerie and Variant, then glanced around again, this time more deliberately. Brittney had to bite the inside of her cheek to keep from smiling. He had been inside for barely five seconds, and already he was looking for his mate.

In his haste to find Alek, Dimitri hadn't paid much attention to what Aria was wearing. But when his eyes eventually strayed back to her, he paused, one brow slowly lifting as he took in the short black skirt, fitted top and pale-grey fur wrapped around her.

"You are definitely asking for trouble with that outfit, Aria," he said with amusement. He could already imagine Maverick's reaction when he saw his mate dressed like that. The poor bastard had been struggling to keep his hands off her as it was. Tonight, he wouldn't stand a chance.

Aria shrugged, completely unfazed. "I can handle that kind of trouble."

Dimitri scoffed. Easy for her to say when she had absolutely no idea what it took to keep up with a werewolf in bed. If Maverick ever stopped restraining himself long enough to show her, she might reconsider that confidence.

Then his thoughts returned to the person he'd come here for in the first place. "Where is my girl?"

"About that..." Brittney trailed off, managing to hold his attention for another second.

Then Aria's bedroom door opened, and Dimitri's head turned toward the sound. His eyes found Alek and stayed there.

Alek walked toward him with all the confidence she'd managed to gather before stepping out of the room, but Dimitri wasn't making it easy. His eyes moved slowly over her, taking in the dress fitted to her body before returning to her face. The intensity of his stare made

her heart race, and despite her determination to remain composed, her breathing became shallower with every step she took toward him.

It was by sheer luck that Alek made it all the way to him without stumbling over her own feet. She stopped directly in front of Dimitri, lifted her chin and gave him a smile that was far more confident than the pounding of her heart suggested.

"I'm here now, handsome."

For several seconds, Dimitri didn't say a word. He simply gawked at her, his eyes roaming over the black dress again before settling on her face. Then, without taking his eyes off his mate, he addressed the others.

"Would any of you mind if I forgot about this party and took Alek back to my room instead?"

At once, every girl screamed in unison.

"No!"

Defy The Alpha(s) 2: Rebel Beast - Chapter 197: Beasts With Soul Mates[1,009 words]

As much as Dimitri wanted to sweep Alek off her feet, carry her straight to his room and peel that dress off her body—carefully, because he genuinely liked it too much to risk ruining it—he was needed at that party. Duty didn't give a damn what his body wanted.

Moreover, he wouldn't deny his girl the chance to have fun tonight, although he could think of several other ways to entertain her himself.

So instead, Dimitri leaned down and kissed her.

It was soft at first, nothing more than the warm press of his lips against hers. Then he tasted the faint sweetness of apple cider on her mouth and realized she'd been drinking and having fun all day while she and her friends had tormented him with thirty-seven fucking errands.

Now he wanted more of that taste. He deserved some compensation after everything they'd put him through.

His mouth moved against hers slowly, deliberately, coaxing rather than demanding, although there was nothing uncertain about it. Dimitri kissed her like a man who intended to savor every second, one hand cradling the side of her jaw as he tilted her face exactly where he wanted it.

Alek’s lips parted for him without hesitation, and when his tongue met hers, unhurried and sure, a soft moan slipped from her throat. Dimitri swallowed the sound greedily, as though he’d been waiting all day just to hear it.

Her fingers curled into the front of his shirt as he deepened the kiss, gentle but insistent enough to leave her thinking about nothing except him. She melted against him, her body leaning fully into his, and Dimitri caught her easily. One arm wrapped around her waist while his other hand drifted lower, settling over the curve of her ass through the black fabric of her dress. He squeezed slowly, possessively, feeling the little hitch in her breathing against his mouth.

Somewhere behind them, someone let out a low, teasing whistle. Neither of them paid it any attention. Alek’s fingers slid into his hair and tugged lightly, drawing a rough groan from Dimitri as he pulled her even closer.

When he finally dragged his mouth away from hers, neither of them looked quite as composed as they had before. Alek’s lips were swollen from his kisses, her chest rising and falling rapidly against him while Dimitri stared down at her as though he was seriously reconsidering every reason he’d just given himself for attending that damn party.

"Later," Dimitri murmured against her lips, the word sounding far more like a promise than a farewell. "I’m not done with you tonight."

"Oh, thank God," Trisha commented. "While that was an amazing performance, I don’t think I want the sight of my best friend making out with her boyfriend seared into my head."

"I don’t mind, though," Brittney said.

Trisha gave her a look.

Brittney immediately became defensive. "What? I could learn a thing or two..."

Trisha rolled her eyes. That pervert.

Except Dimitri seemed to hear only one word. His attention immediately returned to Alek, one brow lifting with unmistakable interest.

"Boyfriend, huh?"

A blush crept up Alek’s cheeks. She bit down on her lower lip shyly before asking, "You don’t want to be?"

Dimitri gave her an are you kidding me? look. "Yeah, because I’d be crazy enough not to want to be the boyfriend of the most beautiful woman standing right in front of me."

Alek’s face felt like it was on fire. She wasn’t used to a man showering her with compliments so freely, much less looking at her like he meant every single word.

"Although, I wish I’d taken you somewhere special and asked you properly." His expression softened. "You deserve to be asked to be my girlfriend, not just told you’re my mate."

Except both of them had forgotten about a certain chipmunk and squirrel shifter who didn’t know that particular piece of news yet.

"Blessed Bond..." Variant gasped, staring between them as though someone had just dropped the biggest piece of gossip she’d heard all day.

"Did you just say mates?" Valerie asked in disbelief.

Alek looked at them apologetically. "Sorry. I planned to tell you later. Everything was happening too fast." Then her eyes found Aria’s, and the question in them was obvious. If they were telling secrets now, perhaps it was time Aria told hers too.

Aria’s eyes narrowed immediately, silently warning her not to even think about it. Alek understood and quickly looked away. Thankfully, Brittney—the biggest loudmouth among them—and Trisha seemed to understand the warning too, because neither said a word.

"It’s all right." Valerie waved her off. "And congratulations to you and Beta Dimitri. Mate bonds are sacred. I can already see the two of you having a good life together."

"Except not every beast is going to be happy about this," Variant pointed out. "That’s one of the reasons some of them don’t want humans here in the first place. They’re afraid something exactly like this might happen."

"I thought mate bonds only happened among wolves," Aria suddenly asked. "So why would the others be scared?"

It was Dimitri who answered. "Wolves have the clearest records of mate bonds, but that doesn’t necessarily mean we’re the only beasts who have them. The general theory is that mate bonds are universal. It’s how they manifest that’s different."

"With wolves, it’s obvious because our beasts recognize their mates instinctively, and most of us are raised knowing what that feeling means. Other beasts might experience the same bond completely differently. Some could spend years mistaking that same pull for attraction, obsession or simple compatibility. They can as well feel it and refuse to acknowledge it altogether."

He took Alek’s hand and intertwined their fingers, his expression becoming more thoughtful as he looked down at her.

"Even humans have spent generations talking about soul mates without having a beast inside them to confirm it. So I find it difficult to believe wolves are the only creatures in the world born with another soul meant to complement theirs."

Defy The Alpha(s) 2: Rebel Beast - Chapter 198: Don’t Wander Off[1,076 words]

Dimitri lifted the back of Alek’s hand to his lips and kissed it.

For a moment, silence fell.

There was something unexpectedly reverent about the way he held Alek’s hand, like being her mate wasn’t merely something nature had decided for him, but something he would have chosen for himself anyway.

Then, just like that, the seriousness disappeared from his face.

"Anyway, if you have any more questions, you can always ask Professor Maverick. I’m sure he’d be more than happy to give you a very thorough lesson on mate bonds." The sly curl at the corner of Dimitri’s mouth made it perfectly clear he wasn’t talking about an ordinary lecture anymore.

Aria lifted a brow, seeing straight through him. "We’d see about that, Dimitri."

Then Brittney clapped her hands together. "All right, enough mate-bond lectures. Let’s get to this party!"

"Yes!" Variant and Valerie shouted excitedly at the same time. "Time to party!"

Just like that, they were finally on their way. Dimitri led them out of the dorm with Alek’s hand firmly intertwined with his, and the moment they stepped outside, the girls stopped.

A long black limousine was parked directly in front of the building.

"Ohhh," Trisha breathed, impressed. "Surprise. Surprise."

Aria stared at the limousine before turning slowly toward Dimitri. "Seriously?"

"What?" Dimitri asked innocently. "There are six of you. Did you expect me to pile everyone into the back of a regular car?"

"I could get used to this kind of treatment," Brittney announced, already making her way toward the vehicle.

The chauffeur stepped forward to open the rear door for them. He was another beast from House Therion, a large man dressed who greeted Dimitri with a respectful nod before waiting patiently while everyone climbed inside.

The interior earned another round of appreciative noises. Cream leather seats stretched along both sides, leaving more than enough room for all of them. Soft lights glowed overhead, and built into one side was a small refrigerated compartment stocked with wine, bottled water, soft drinks and neatly arranged containers of sliced fruit.

Brittney immediately reached for a bottle of wine before catching the look Aria gave her.

"What? I'm only looking."

"Look with your eyes."

Just like that, Brittney reluctantly put it back.

Dimitri climbed in last, settling beside Alek while the chauffeur closed the door. Moments later, the limousine pulled away from the dorm. Alek had barely gotten comfortable before Dimitri slipped an arm around her waist and drew her against his side because that was where she belonged.

"All right, ladies, listen up." The playfulness left his voice enough to get everyone's attention. "Once we get there, I want the humans sticking close to me, Valerie or Variant. Don't wander off alone, and don't leave the arena with anyone you don't know."

Brittney frowned. "Didn't Caelis and Rhydian give their word that none of the humans would be harmed tonight?"

"They did," Dimitri replied.

"Then why are you acting like we're entering a war zone?"

"Because Maverick and I aren't willing to stake your safety on someone else's promise." His tone remained calm, but there was no mistaking the seriousness behind it. "This is only a precaution. Stay where one of us can reach you and there shouldn't be a problem."

Brittney bit down lightly on her lower lip and looked away. That could be a problem. She had every intention of finding a certain serpent tonight, and she doubted Dimitri would approve of her sneaking away to do it.

The conversation eventually drifted to easier things as the limousine continued deeper into the academy grounds. The crescent moon hung high above the trees, occasionally appearing between the branches before disappearing again.

For most of the drive, there was nothing outside the tinted windows except thick woods stretching along both sides of the road. Then the distant thump of music began to reach them. It grew louder with every turn until they started passing groups of beast students making their way through the woods, laughing and shouting among themselves. Soon, the trees thinned, firelight appeared through the branches, and the arena finally came into view.

"Oh my God," Alek whispered.

"Holy shit," Brittney breathed, immediately leaning toward the window.

Even Trisha moved closer for a better look while Valerie and Variant grinned at their reactions. Aria could hardly blame them. This wasn't anything like the party venue she'd imagined. It looked like they had somehow driven into another world.

They were still staring when the limousine slowed and joined the line of vehicles pulling up outside the arena. Dimitri waited until they had come to a complete stop before speaking again.

"One more thing." His voice was serious enough that everyone turned toward him. "Members of House Therion have been told to keep an eye out for you tonight. If we somehow get separated and you can't find me, Valerie or Variant, find a Therion beast. Look for the Therion emblem if you don't recognize anyone. Tell them you're with me, and they'll help you."

His eyes moved across the human girls one by one. "And if something feels wrong, don't wait around to find out whether you're imagining it. You leave. Understood?"

A chorus of agreement followed before the door opened.

They stepped out one after another, their boots meeting the ground as music and laughter immediately surrounded them. Dimitri emerged beside Alek, followed by Valerie and Variant, while Aria pulled her fur coat more securely around herself and took in the sheer number of beasts filling the Outer Ring.

At first, it seemed as if nobody particularly cared about their arrival. Then Aria noticed one of the males nearby stop talking. His companion followed his stare. A female turned next, then another group farther ahead, until the attention spread through the crowd like a ripple. Conversations faltered as more heads turned toward the newcomers, taking in the group of human girls who had just climbed out of the limousine with the Beta of House Therion.

But above all those curious stares, one pair of slitted gray eyes found Aria with frightening precision.

Her heart nearly skipped out of her chest.

Maverick stood some distance away among the firelit ruins, and judging by the way his eyes slowly traveled from the pale-grey fur wrapped around her shoulders to the black skirt exposing most of her thighs before returning to her face, Dimitri had been right.

She had definitely asked for trouble.

Defy The Alpha(s) 2: Rebel Beast - Chapter 199: Start A Fire[1,536 words]

All through the night, Feral had ignored him. Maverick had felt nothing from his wolf since Feral had given him back control that morning, not a growl, a thought or even the faintest stirring in the back of his mind. Yet the instant Maverick set his eyes on Aria, there he was, surging to the forefront of his consciousness with such force that Maverick almost stumbled.

Fur.

No one really understood why fur had such an effect on male werewolves when worn by their women. Perhaps it was the resemblance to a pelt, something deeply ingrained in the wolf interpreting all that softness wrapped around a female as though she were covered in fur of her own.

Or perhaps wolves were simply primitive bastards who liked the sight of their women looking a little more like them. Whatever the reason, it awakened such possessiveness in them that even Feral's stubborn silence couldn't survive the sight of his mate wrapped in it.

And fuck, did Aria wear it well.

The fur surrounded her from her shoulders to her thighs, making the black beneath it look even darker and her blue eyes impossibly brighter. It was wild and soft at the same time, almost as if she had finally stopped trying to separate herself from everything beasts represented and had wrapped herself in a piece of their world instead.

Feral loved it. No, the bastard had gone absolutely ballistic.

The wolf was practically salivating inside his head, tongue hanging out like some lovesick animal as one possessive thought tore through the silence he'd maintained all night.

Mate.

Maverick found his feet moving before he'd made the conscious decision to follow them, carrying him straight toward Aria. For once, he and Feral were in complete agreement. He

needed his mate. Needed to touch her, to bury his fingers in that fur while it was still warm from her skin.

More than that, the deeply possessive side of him needed every beast staring at her tonight to see him walk straight to her and understand exactly who she belonged with. Because whether Aria understood what she'd done or not, she'd wrapped herself in fur and walked into a den full of predators looking like every primitive fantasy a wolf had ever had about his female.

Maverick Nightshade walked toward her like a possessed man. His slitted gray eyes never left hers, the intensity burning through them so fierce that it was a miracle he didn't lose his footing over the uneven stone beneath his boots. He didn't look to either side. Didn't acknowledge the beasts forced to move out of his path. The entire arena could have gone up in flames around him and Maverick doubted he would have noticed.

Her roommates must have realized exactly what was happening, because one by one, they began backing away. Dimitri was the first, easily pulling his mate along with him, before Brittney grabbed Trisha by the arm with a grin she didn't even attempt to hide. Valerie and Variant, on the other hand, looked far too pleased with themselves as they retreated, their little experiment clearly producing better results than either of them had anticipated.

Within seconds, they had abandoned Aria in the middle of the firelit courtyard like a sacrifice deliberately left behind for the approaching wolf.

They weren't the only ones who noticed, conversations faltered as Maverick passed. He could feel the weight of countless eyes following him, watching their professor cross the Outer Ring with all the subtlety of a predator who had spotted exactly what he wanted and saw no reason to pretend otherwise.

Maverick didn't give a damn.

There was only Aria. Aria in his head like a melody he couldn't silence, Aria burning through his blood like poison, Aria beneath his skin until even his bones seemed to ache with the need to reach her.

She tried to be brave. He had to give his little wolf-tamer that much. Aria held his stare as he approached, chin lifting slightly, and never once stepped back. But Maverick could hear everything her pride tried to hide from him.

Her breathing had gone shallow, making her chest rise and fall beneath the black top. Her pulse had quickened until the frantic rhythm of her heart reached his ears even through the pounding music, fast and wild like drums building toward the most riotous part of a dance.

And that beautiful heartbeat only grew faster the closer he came.

Aria knew.

Perhaps she didn't understand exactly what she'd awakened by wearing that fur, but she understood the look in his eyes. She knew she was standing directly in the path of the big bad wolf, and judging by the hunger with which Maverick was closing the remaining distance between them, there would be no pretending tonight that he didn't have teeth.

The moment he reached her, Aria opened her mouth. "I think you should calm—"

Calm down? Not a fucking chance. His little wolf-tamer should have known better than to start a fire and expect him not to burn.

Maverick cupped her face in one hand and crushed his mouth to hers.

There was nothing gentle about it. His lips moved against hers with hungry, demanding force, and Aria's mind went completely blank the second his tongue swept past her parted lips. She didn't have time to brace herself, didn't even have time to remember where she was or who might be watching. All she could do was feel.

His tongue tangled with hers in a battle neither of them seemed willing to lose, stroking deep and insistent as he swallowed the broken moan that escaped her throat. Maverick growled against her, low and feral, the sound vibrating straight through her chest, and Aria's fingers found the front of his shirt, fisting the fabric as her knees threatened to give out beneath her.

He angled his head, deepening the kiss further, his teeth catching her bottom lip and tugging just hard enough to sting before soothing the spot with his tongue. The bond between them surged violently, roaring louder with every passing second until there was nothing left in her head except him. His taste. His heat. The hard body pressed against hers and that possessive rumble in his chest every time she made another helpless sound for him.

Aria's fingers abandoned his shirt and slid into his hair instead, gripping hard and pulling him impossibly closer as she finally gave up any pretense of resisting what he was doing to her. She kissed him back with every bit of the ferocity he'd brought to her, meeting him stroke for stroke, their teeth occasionally scraping in the reckless hunger of it, neither willing to surrender control to the other.

She literally forgot everything. The arena, the music, the roommates who had abandoned her minutes ago, Rhydian, the fight waiting beneath their feet—none of it existed anymore. There was only Maverick and the relentless hunger of his kiss, the heat of his body surrounding hers and the answering ache gathering low and hot between her thighs.

His hand splayed wide against her lower back, crushing her flush against him. Aria moaned shamelessly into his mouth as her hips rolled forward on pure instinct, grinding against the hard, unmistakable evidence of exactly what she was doing to him.

Maverick's answering growl came from somewhere deep in his chest, rough enough to send a shiver racing down her spine. His fingers tightened even more against her back, encouraging her to do it again. And Aria did, the bond screaming the same maddening command through every nerve in her body.

Closer.

They only broke apart when their lungs finally demanded it, their mouths separating on a shared, ragged gasp. Aria's chest heaved violently, air refusing to fill her lungs fast enough, her entire body trembling as if she'd just sprinted for miles rather than simply kissed the man in front of her.

Maverick didn't release her. His hand remained firm against her back, holding her against him while he stared down at her with eyes that looked far too much like Feral's for comfort.

It took several long seconds for the haze to clear enough for coherent thought to return.

Then Aria registered the silence.

The music had stopped. So had the laughter, conversations and drunken shouting that had filled the Outer Ring only moments ago. An entire arena packed with beasts had fallen completely silent around them.

Slowly, Aria turned her head, and whatever remained of the heat in her face became pure mortification. Every eye in the arena was locked onto her. Beasts stood frozen mid-conversation, drinks suspended halfway to their mouths, expressions full of disbelief.

Not everyone looked shocked, though. A boy and girl with rainbow-colored hair watched them with such open fascination that they were practically grinning. They looked as though they'd just witnessed the greatest scandal Bestiaris had produced all year.

Her heart dropped.

Oh, fuck.

Except while Aria was internally panicking, Maverick didn't seem the least bit bothered. His arm remained possessively locked around her waist, holding her firmly against his side as he faced the staring crowd without an ounce of shame.

He didn't regret a single second of it.

Defy The Alpha(s) 2: Rebel Beast - Chapter 200: Enough Privacy[1,049 words]

First came the awkward silence, and then conversation broke out like a storm.

"What the fuck just happened?!"

"I think my eyes are deceiving me right now!"

"Did Professor Maverick just kiss that human girl? I thought he couldn't stand women touching him!"

"That cannot be! Professor Maverick is mine!"

"Look at her wearing fur. She did this on purpose. She seduced him!"

The voices multiplied until Aria couldn't distinguish one conversation from another. Within seconds, the entire arena was buzzing like a marketplace, questions and accusations flying from every direction as beasts tried to make sense of what they'd just witnessed.

Aria could hear enough of it to become painfully self-conscious beneath all that attention. This was exactly why she hadn't wanted their relationship known yet. She wasn't ready for the questions, the gossip or whatever drama came with an entire academy discovering that Maverick Nightshade, an Alpha who had spent years refusing the attention of women, had decided to devour a human girl in front of everyone.

Her eyes moved through the crowd until they somehow connected with Karen's. She looked horrified, staring at Aria and Maverick, unable to believe what she'd just witnessed.

The shock lasted only until she realized Aria was looking back. Then her eyes narrowed with such immediate fury that Aria could practically hear the insult forming inside her head. *That fucking ghetto bitch.* How dare she go after what was hers?

Aria looked away. She had no time for Karen's drama tonight. Except Karen wasn't standing alone. Caelis Cobryn was beside her, and the moment Aria's attention shifted, her eyes collided with his instead. Perhaps it was simply knowing what those beautiful silver eyes were capable of doing to a person, but her heart missed a beat.

It didn't help that Caelis was already staring at her. There was something strange about the scrutiny in his silver gaze, as if he were trying to figure her out. He didn't look shocked like everyone else. He didn't look amused either.

Caelis simply watched her from behind those dark glasses with an intensity Aria couldn't understand, and for some reason, that was far more unsettling. Before she could make anything of it, Karen moved closer to him, practically pressing herself against his side in a gesture that communicated one thing perfectly.

Mine.

Aria's brows drew together immediately. Wait a minute. Karen and Caelis?

Blah. Aria wanted to throw up.

She'd thought the Basilisk Prince was smart, but it seemed even brilliant men occasionally let whatever was between their legs do the thinking for them.

More surprising was the fact that Caelis seemed willing to entertain a human at all. Ophidian had hardly rolled out the welcome mat for the Concordia girls, and Caelis himself wasn't known for his warm and welcoming personality. Yet there Karen stood at his side, looking like she'd managed to accomplish the impossible.

Aria almost had to applaud her.

Almost.

Then Maverick caught her chin and gently turned her face back toward him until she met his eyes. "Let's get out of here."

Aria didn't even object. She nodded, more than ready to escape the hundreds of eyes still following her every move.

Maverick intertwined his fingers with hers and led her away through the rising confusion and conversations surrounding them. Thankfully, the music came back on, filling the awkward silence with another heavy beat, and slowly, the party seemed to remember itself. Aria was perfectly happy to let it continue without her.

Except Maverick didn't take her back the way she'd come. Instead, he led her away from the arena and into the surrounding woods. With every step, the music grew fainter and the firelight disappeared farther behind them until the crescent moon became their only source of light.

It wasn't nearly enough for Aria to see where she was going, but Maverick seemed perfectly at home in the darkness. He kept her hand firmly in his, slowing whenever the ground became uneven and guiding her around roots and low branches she couldn't make out until they were practically beneath her feet. When her boot caught against a stone, his arm immediately circled her waist, steadying her before she could even stumble.

Aria would never have followed some other man into the woods in the middle of the night. No, that was probably one of the stupidest things a woman could do if she had any interest in remaining alive, especially when said man happened to be a beast. But this was Maverick. Her lover. Her mate. The man whose hand she trusted enough to let him lead her deeper into the darkness without once wondering whether she should turn around.

Eventually, Maverick stopped in a small clearing where the trees opened just enough for pale moonlight to spill through the branches. The arena had become little more than a distant thump behind them, far enough away that the voices were gone completely.

"This should be enough privacy," he said.

"Yeah," Aria breathed.

But as she stood alone with him beneath the trees, still painfully aware of the kiss they'd shared only minutes ago and the way his eyes had yet to leave her, another question occurred to her.

Enough privacy to do what?

Except Aria already knew the answer, and that knowledge made her swallow as the air between them suddenly tightened. Maverick began walking toward her, forcing her backward one slow step at a time until her back finally met the rough trunk of a large tree. There was nowhere else to go.

Maverick towered over her, effectively trapping her between his body and the tree, yet her heart raced with anticipation rather than fear. He leaned in without saying a word, his nose brushing slowly along her cheek before traveling lower.

Aria shivered at the barely-there contact. Maverick breathed her in as he went, following the familiar scent of lavender and mint until his face settled into the crook of her neck. His nose grazed the sensitive skin there, before he pressed closer and inhaled deeply like he'd been deprived of her scent for far too long.

A strained sound left Maverick's throat, somewhere between a groan and a growl, and then Aria felt it—the sharp point of a fang pressing against the side of her neck.