

Alpha-less 381

Chapter 381

A Night for Wolves

Yardley had returned to the Sinclair family home.

He felt deeply ashamed-but life outside hadn't been kind either.

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When he finally got a moment alone with Tessa, his tone softened. "Tessa, I really know I was wrong. If you want Sinclair Corp, it's yours. I'll stay home and take care of your grandfather from now on."

Tessa gave no response.

No matter what, he was still her father. But not a single word that came out of his mouth could be trusted.

"You don't need to say all this to me," she replied. Words meant nothing compared to actions.

"Tessa, I truly regret everything. All I want now is for the family to be peaceful. That's all."

Tessa nodded faintly, acknowledging she heard him, then turned and headed upstairs.

It was Avery's first time at the Sinclair home. He wasn't much of a talker, and he had little to say to the rest of the family, so he stayed downstairs and played chess with the old man.

The old man chatted with him idly. "So, Avery, how did you and our Tessa meet?" He'd just done a quick search-turns out this Avery was a big celebrity.

"When Tessa came to Falindale, we started a band together. She was our drummer! Grandpa, you've probably never seen her behind a drum kit, huh? She's incredible-really badass."

The old man frowned.

Tessa knew how to play the drums? He had no idea. But then again, whatever she did, she always did it

best.

Because it was Christmas Eve, Lila, as the female alpha, had been busy in the kitchen with the staff all afternoon. At exactly six o'clock, the Sinclair family sat down for dinner.

The servants poured each person a cup of mulled wine-steeped with laurel leaves, it was a wolf clan tradition believed to ward off winter's chill and strengthen the bonds of the pack.

Cedric, as alpha, raised his glass and stood.

"It's Christmas Eve, and it's been a long time since our family has come together like this. A lot has happened these past few years, but I believe things will get better. Let's protect each other, from now on- cheers to Christmas Eve!"

He drained his wine, and Yardley followed suit, clearing his throat as he stood.

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"The family's been through a lot in recent years, but there will be no more distance from now on." He glanced briefly at Tessa, something uneasy flashing in his eyes. "Wishing everyone peace and joy."

The old man looked around at the family gathered at the long table, smile lines deepening at the corners of his eyes. For wolf clans, Christmas Eve was more than a holiday-it was a sacred opportunity to repair broken ties.

Even though Yardley had made more than his share of mistakes, as a father, he still hoped that the people

bound by blood might find harmony again under the Moon Goddess's gaze,

"Alright, let's eat. The turkey's getting cold." The old man sliced into the golden roasted bird with a silver knife. The skin cracked with a satisfying crunch. Plates of honey-roasted squash and garlic potatoes steamed invitingly and a platter of blood sausage garnished with mint leaves sat at the center of the table, filling the room with a rich, homey aroma..

"Avery, try the blood sausage," Tessa said, using her silver fork to pass him a piece. "Don't be shy-pretend it's your own home."

Avery took a bite. The richness of the meat exploded on his tongue, chased by a cool hint of mint. It wasn't refined like restaurant fare-but it had the unmistakable flavor of a real home. For the first time in years, he felt warmth in someone else's house. A real sense of belonging.

After the hearty dinner, right at eight o'clock, the crystal chandelier dimmed and a giant projection screen lit up in the living room-this was the wolves' special "Star and Moon Night Broadcast," hosted by the Montedra Werewolf Alliance and watched by wolf families all over the world.

Onscreen, Landon-Alpha King of Montedra-gave his opening remarks, offering blessings to all wolves across the land. Then a priest clad in silver ceremonial robes led the full moon ritual. In the background, the howling of distant wolves blended seamlessly with a jazz rendition of "Silent Night," creating a holiday atmosphere that was uniquely wolf.

Lila brought in a silver tray piled with crushed ice, blood oranges, blueberries, and cotton candy dusted with wolf mint powder.

Just then, Tessa's phone began to vibrate.

It was a call from Landon.

Chapter 382 The One Who Stayed

Tessa let her grandfather know she was stepping away, then headed upstairs to take the call.

"Why are you calling me now? I just saw you in the live broadcast," she said, kicking off her shoes and lying back on the bed with the phone in hand.

"I'm done with my speech. Nothing else to do for now. I missed you-couldn't help it. What are you up to?"

He wished he could see her right now, but in just a bit, he'd have to lead the Nightshade Pack in their offering to the Moon Goddess.

It was his duty as alpha.

"Watching the Star and Moon Night broadcast with Grandpa. It's Christmas Eve- everyone's home, and he's really happy."

"Are you happy?"

"I guess. If Grandpa's happy, then I'm happy."

At that moment, someone knocked on Landon's door.

"Uncle, Grandpa says it's time to prepare for the ritual."

Tessa heard Luyao's voice in the background and said, "Alright, go do your thing. I should head back down too-Avery's here at our place."

It was Avery's first time visiting. Leaving him alone downstairs didn't feel right. "What? Avery's at your house?" Landon frowned.

"Yeah."

"Tessa, aren't you being a little biased? You didn't even invite me to spend

Christmas Eve at your house," Landon said, clearly jealous.

Christmas Eve was a sacred night for both clans and families.

Avery spending it at the Sinclair home meant he was considered part of the family, didn't it?

Landon wasn't having it. Even he hadn't been given that kind of welcome-so why Avery?

Picking up on his tone, Tessa rolled her eyes. "Mr. Landon, don't overthink it. Avery didn't go home. He was all alone in that big villa, so I just invited him over for dinner. That's it."

"Fine."

But Landon still didn't sound convinced.

Only when Luyao knocked again did he finally hang up, silently vowing that the moment Christmas was over, he was going to find Tessa.

Tessa returned downstairs to join her grandfather.

As the night went on, only Tessa and Avery stayed to watch the live broadcast with the old man. One by one, the rest of the family slipped away, each with some excuse or another.

The old man sighed.

People like Yardley were full of promises about being dutiful and spending time with him-but in the end, only Tessa and her friend actually stayed.

In the Sinclair family, it seemed like the only one who truly

Close to midnight, Avery stood up to leave.

red for him was his Tessa.

"Avery, it's so late already. Why don't you just stay here tonight?" the old man suggested.

"No need, Grandpa. I should head back," Avery said, not wanting to impose.

"It's really no trouble. We've got plenty of rooms. And you'll just be alone if you go back. Why not stay till after Christmas?" Tessa added.

Avery did find himself reluctant to leave. He wanted to enjoy more time with Tessa and the old man.

After a moment of hesitation, he agreed to stay.

The next morning, the family gathered around the Christmas tree to open gifts.

The old man was the first to bring out the presents he had prepared, handing them out one by one- Winona received a bracelet inlaid with moonstone, Cedric got a newly engraved clan badge.

When it was Tessa's turn, the old man held out a long wooden box. He unlatched the bronze clasp to reveal a pair of drumsticks-crafted from cedar wood, engraved with a snow-moon wolf head biting a silver bell. The base was embedded with a gleaming sapphire, and the wood grain bore a celestial map of the stars on the night she was born.

Compared to Winona's mass-produced bracelet and Cedric's standard badge, this pair of drumsticks had clearly been made with extraordinary care and thought.

Winona couldn't help but whisper to Cedric, "Did you see that? Grandpa's totally playing favorites again. I saw him have someone swap out her gift last night."

Chapter 383 A Real Christmas

"Alright, enough. It's Christmas-don't go looking for trouble," Cedric muttered, scolding Winona under his breath.

Tessa hadn't had it easy these past few years. If he were in her shoes, he'd be doing everything he could to make it up to her too-especially after learning she'd awakened as a high-rank wolf and that her boyfriend was none other than Alpha Landon.

Winona scowled and looked away, the moonstone bracelet on her wrist suddenly feeling more like a shackle than a gift.

After handing out presents to the rest of the family, the old man turned to Avery with a final gift-a leather music folio.

"I heard musicians like you need something like this. Makes it casier to carry your sheet music."

Avery was stunned. He had never once expected to receive a Christmas gift from someone else's family. Inside the folio, a tiny snow-moon wolf totem was delicately.embroidered. The stitching was fine and precise-clearly handsewn with

care.

It was the first time in years he'd received a Christmas gift in someone else's home, and it moved him more than he expected. "Thank you, Grandpa..." he said, voice catching in his throat. Then, flustered, he fumbled through his backpack and pulled out a USB stick.

"I recorded this track on my phone last night. Added some bass overtones and coyote howl samples... I heard good music can resonate with the wolf soul- maybe even soothe its beastly nature..."

He scratched his head awkwardly. "I slowed the tempo so it mimics a heartbeat. Should help you sleep better. Even your wolf soul might relax a little."

Avery hadn't expected to be part of this family's Christmas. So he'd thrown this together at the last minute, hoping it would be enough.

Yardley let out a quiet, scornful chuckle, clearly unimpressed by such a meager gift.

But the old man shot him a glare and took the USB with both hands. "Thank you, my boy. I really like this gift-and I really need it."

Seeing the genuine appreciation on the old man's face, Avery finally let out a breath of relief.

Once the rest of the family exchanged their gifts, it was Tessa's turn.

She hadn't gone out of her way for most of the family. She'd just grabbed some things they might need- cigars, wine, necklaces-generic but polite. But for her grandfather, she'd made something by hand.

She handed him a delicately wrapped cloth pouch. "Grandpa, you always say you can't sleep at night, so I made you a lavender pillow. I added calming herbs used by wolf clans. With Avery's music, I'm sure you'll sleep better."

She'd even consulted Samuel for the herbal recipe.

"Wonderful, wonderful." The old man clearly adored the gift, hugging the pillow to his chest like a treasure.

Tessa's gift to Avery was a new piece she'd composed herself-one that matched his musical taste perfectly.

After the gift exchange, everyone gathered by the fireplace. They sipped hot cocoa while warming themselves by the fire. Yardley cranked up the volume on a rock version of a Christmas song. Avery casually picked up a guitar and joined in with an impromptu jam session. The old man tapped his knees to the rhythm. Snowlight flickered through the windows, mixing with the warm glow inside. The star-shaped lights on the tree shimmered like pieces of quiet joy.

For once, the Sinclair family had a rare moment of peace-no being together. rguments, no drama, just the warmth of

Later that evening, Avery said his goodbyes and returned to his villa.

Tessa stayed with her grandfather until he fell asleep, then finally returned to her room.

As soon as she got in, she called Samuel.

He picked up instantly. "Tessa? Calling me today? Don't tell me you miss me already."

Shouldn't she be with her grandfather right now?

"I've got a question for you. How's Nathan doing?"

Tessa hadn't forgotten that she'd forcibly sent Nathan back to Yalvaria.

At the mention of Nathan, Samuel immediately frowned. "Funny, I was about to

ask you what happened. Do you have any idea how insane that guy is right now..."

Chapter 384 Obsession Unleashed

"He went completely berserk the moment he got back to Yalvaria," Samuel ranted over the phone. "He tore through the Frostmoon Pack forest like a madman, turned the entire wolf territory into a battlefield. His claws shredded century-old trees, and his howling shattered glass within a three-kilometer radius."

"He even forced the Yalvaria Council of Elders to initiate a forbidden ritual, trying to summon the power of the ancient wolf souls. The entire Yalvaria pack's been in chaos-no one's been able to enjoy Christmas in peace."

Samuel's complaints came rapid-fire. It was obvious-Nathan had suffered a major blow at Tessa's hands, and now he was taking it out on everyone else.

Tessa, however, was entirely unfazed by Nathan's madness. She simply warned, "It was just a little lesson. Keep your distance. If he can't get to me, he'll definitely come for you."

Nathan knew Samuel was her friend. If he couldn't reach her, he'd settle for the next closest target.

Fortunately, Samuel was a top member of the werewolf medical guild, and under Michael's protection. Nathan wouldn't dare move on him so easily.

Still, when a man loses it, he stops thinking straight. Better to be cautious.

"So what did you do to him?" Samuel asked, incredulous. "He was already a psycho, but now he's worse."

"I've got nothing else to say. I'm hanging up."

"Alright, fine—but after your college entrance exam, you'd better come to Yalvaria.

I want to show you my

world."

"We'll see." Tessa still wasn't sure what her future looked like.

"Don't give me that. You promised! And Michael's been bugging me about you nonstop. You think we can just let a medical prodigy like you slip away?"

"I didn't say I wouldn't go. There's still time before the entrance exam. We'll talk after that." It wasn't like the exam mattered all that much to her—but it was something she owed to her grandfather.

"Alright. I really thought you were gonna ditch us. Tessa, seriously—you'd make a great doctor. You won't regret it."

"Bye."

Tessa cut him off and ended the call.

Meanwhile, at Nathan's villa...

Ever since he'd been forcibly teleported back in disgrace, he'd been teetering on the edge of a breakdown

Dark energy radiated from him in thick waves-an aura of rage and resentment so dense that it distorted the very air. The sound of a beast's low growl echoed faintly through the room.

Every time he thought about what Tessa had done to him, his claws sprang out involuntarily, sinking deep

into the armrest of the sofa. The solid wood split like tofu, splinters flying in every direction.

He wanted nothing more than to storm back to New York and drag her home-to punish her, to own her

"Alpha," his beta said cautiously, "the old Alpha is already furious about your unauthorized trip to New York. Maybe... don't stir things up for now?"

Nathan's clawed palm lashed out, striking the beta with a wave of alpha force that slammed him into the wall.

The beta coughed up blood but didn't protest. He simply dropped to his knees and stayed there, motionless. In front of a rampaging alpha, the wrong move could cost him his life.

"You dare bring that up again?" Nathan snarled, his voice laced with the deep, guttural growl of a werewolf. "If you hadn't told him, he never would've known I went to New York!"

"I only followed orders, Alpha," the beta said, keeping his head low. "Besides... Ms. Tessa didn't want to come back. Even if you did drag her here by force... she still wouldn't-" he hesitated, "-she wouldn't love you."

The last few words barely made it out of his mouth.

A twisted, shadowed smile tugged at Nathan's lips. "Once she's back at my side,

I'll make her fall for me. I'll make her love me."

The beta said nothing.

Maybe years ago, Tessa could've been manipulated by someone like Nathan. But not anymore.

The way she'd humiliated him in New York? That should've made things clear. Tessa now might already be stronger than this alpha.

But Nathan didn't care.

"I don't care how you do it. Just get her back hère," he growled.

The dark energy swirling around him thickened like a storm cloud. His eyes gleamed with a manic, blood- red light.

This was his life's greatest obsession. If he couldn't have Tessa, he would never find peace.

Not until she belonged to him.

Chapter 385 A Place Beside You

The morning after Christmas, Tessa was already back to work-coding a new firewall for Wings of Light. Landon's call came in just as she was finalizing the code. She put him on speaker and continued typing.

"Morning."

"I'm outside your house."

Tessa froze, fingers pausing above the keys. She sealing the firewall before picking up her phone and walking to the floor-to-ceiling window. Sure enough, a black Bentley was parked beneath the cedar tree, dusted with a thin layer of frost, gleaming coldly in the morning light.

"Mr. Landon, what are you doing?" she asked with a light laugh into the receiver.

"Are you coming out, or should I come in?" His voice was gentle, but there was no mistaking the quiet force behind it.

Not much of a choice there.

Tessa ended the call, changed into a camel-colored coat, and headed downstairs.

As she stepped out the front door, she saw Landon standing there. He was dressed casually today- white sweater, double-faced black wool coat-but still looked every bit the leading man, like he'd just stepped out of a film.

The moment she saw him, Tessa realized how much she'd missed him in just two days.

Landon strode toward her, pine-scented pheromones curling around the chill in the air. The next second, she was swept into his coat, wrapped in his warmth.

"I missed you," he said plainly, planting a kiss on her forehead. "What's the plan for today?"

"I'm going to visit my grandmother." She looked up at him, lashes still frosted. "The day after Christmas is the anniversary of her death."

Landon's gaze softened. He gently brushed the loose strands of hair from her nape. "Can I come with you?"

"What for?"

"As your boyfriend, I want to meet the people you've chosen to remember. And I want her to know... you're not alone anymore. I'll always be by your side- protecting you."

"...Alright." How could she say no to that?

As soon as she agreed, Landon couldn't help but kiss her.

He hadn't formally confessed yet, but Tessa had just acknowledged him as her boyfriend-and even invited him to visit a loved one's grave.

Their relationship had taken a clear, unmistakable step forward,

Landon held her tighter, deepening the kiss. Tessa wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him back with matching warmth.

They got so lost in the moment, they completely forgot they were still standing in front of the Sinclair

family gates.

Until Louis coughed awkwardly nearby. "Ms. Tessa, the old master is calling for you."

Startled, Tessa pushed Landon away. Her ears flushed bright red.

Landon, however, was utterly unbothered. He calmly smoothed her hair, brushing his thumb across her swollen lips, smugness gleaming in his eyes.

"...Got it." she murmured.

A minute later, Tessa walked into the house-perfectly composed-with Landon beside her.

The old man brightened immediately upon seeing him.

"Landon, perfect timing. We're going to visit Tessa's grandmother's grave. Come with us." In the old man's heart, Landon was already Tessa's future mate. He wanted his late wife to see the man their granddaughter had chosen.

"Yes, Grandpa."

Cedric watched Landon's respectful and mild manner and found it hard to reconcile with the powerful, imposing Alpha King who ruled over Montedra. After breakfast, the family split into two cars and drove to the cemetery. The old man and Louis rode with Landon-who insisted on driving personally. On the way, he stopped at a flower shop.

"What flowers did she like?"

"Lilies."

Tessa didn't have many memories of her grandmother. But every year, when her grandfather visited the grave, he always brought lilies. She figured her grandmother must've loved them.

Landon returned with a huge bouquet of lilies and handed them to her. As Tessa sat in the passenger seat with the flowers in her arms, the old man's eyes grew misty.

"Grandpa, we're going to see Grandma," Tessa said softly, gently taking his hand. Wolves love fiercely. Once they choose someone, it's for life.

She wondered-if she ever met her true fated mate, would she feel the same way?

Tessa turned slightly, her gaze drifting toward Landon beside her.

In just one week, she would turn eighteen.

For once, the birthday she never used to care about... was something she truly looked forward to.

Chapter 386 A Promise for This Life

The road to the cemetery was quiet-unsurprising, given that it was the day after Christmas. Most people wouldn't choose today to visit a grave.

By the time Tessa and the others arrived, Yardley's group was already there.

The chill in Navoris still clung to the air. As Tessa stepped out of the car, she pulled out a scarf and gently wrapped it around her grandfather's neck.

The old man leaned on his cane, slowly making his way toward his wife's grave.

Tessa followed close behind, arms full with the bouquet of lilies.

The moment they reached the headstone, the old man's eyes turned red.

"Heyl," he said softly, voice trembling, "it's been a while. I hope you won't blame me for not coming sooner. Not taking good care of you... that's the biggest regret of my life."

"In the next life-if there really is such a thing... I used to think it was nonsense, but now I hope it's real. Because if it is, I'll come find you. And when I do, you're not allowed to hide from me, okay? I'll show up with a huge bouquet of lilies and propose to you all over again. Next time, I'll be more romantic, I swear."

Louis silently handed him a tissue.

"What for? I'm not crying." The old man gave a soft chuckle. "I don't have much time left anyway. Soon, I'll be able to see her again."

Louis, who'd been by his side for decades, knew all about his deep, unwavering love.

"Yeah," Louis murmured. "It won't be long. We're all getting old."

Landon stood quietly behind them, his heart stirred deeply by what he saw and heard.

No one could say for sure if there was a next life! So in this one, having met a girl like Tessa, he knew-he had to hold on to her with everything he had. No matter what, he would never let her

1. go.

As he gently took her hand, warmth spread through Tessa's chest.

Having him here, in this moment, meant everything.

After a while, the old man grew tired. Louis helped him to visit the nearby graves of a few old friends.

Left alone with Tessa, Landon suddenly released her hand and stepped forward. He bowed deeply in front of the tombstone.

"Grandma," he said with heartfelt sincerity, "I'm Landon. From now on, I'll take care of Tessa and Grandpa. You don't have to worry."

Tessa's heart gave a sudden jolt.

Landon stood there for a few more moments, speaking softly to her grandmother. Then he turned and

came back to her.

"Want to stay a little longer?" he asked. The others had already gone back to the car. The air up on the hill

May

was biting cold-but Landon had stayed by her side the entire time.

"No. Let's go."

Her grandfather had already been out long enough. It was time to head back.

"Alright."

way down together.

Landon took her hand again, and they made their way

The whole drive home, the old man was quiet and introspective.

Once they got back to the Sinclair estate, Tess.

and Landon accompanied him to his bedroom.

"Take a nap, Grandpa. I'll have Louis check on

later."

"Mhm. Go on now. You young people should go enjoy yourselves-don't waste your t

like me."

"Grandpa..." Tessa hesitated, wanting to stay a little longer.

on an old man

"Go. Grandpa's tired."

"...Alright. You get some good rest." Tessa left the room with Landon.

Every year after visiting her grandmother's grave, her grandfather would always fall into a while.

slump

for a

Tessa knew Landon had to return to his pack for work later in the afternoon, so she planned to see him off.

As they were heading toward the door, Yardley quickly called after them, all smiles. "Alpha Landon, why don't you stay for lunch? The kitchen's already preparing."

"No need," Landon replied coolly. He had never planned to stay for a meal. With that, he kept walking with Tessa toward the door.

Yardley stood there awkwardly, displeased but powerless to show it.

It was, after all, Alpha Landon. He didn't dare say much.

Cedric, watching from nearby, wasn't surprised. He'd long known that Landon was not someone easily appeased.

In the entire Sinclair family, Landon only showed warmth toward Tessa and the old

man. As for the rest he didn't even try to hide his indifference.

But Cedric hadn't given up yet. He still hoped Landon would help him.

If he could leverage Landon's power, he might just get control of that meteorite

iron ore vein...

Chapter 387 Not for Sale

Tessa walked Landon out, accompanying him all the way to his car.

Just before getting in, Landon asked, "The physics competition is right after New Year's, isn't it? When does it start exactly?"

He remembered she had to travel to Simonville after the holidays, but wasn't sure about the date. He hoped it wouldn't overlap with her eighteenth birthday.

"January 10th," Tessa replied.

Landon let out a silent breath of relief.

Good. Her birthday was on January 2nd-he could still celebrate her coming-of- age with her.

But then Tessa added, "We'll leave for Simonville five days early for training."

After all, it was a national physics competition, and their teacher Mr. Chen wanted to be sure they were well- prepared.

Landon's expression darkened. "With Nico?"

He hadn't forgotten-that kid liked his Tessa.

"Yeah," she nodded. "Navoris First High got two entries. Nico and I were both selected."

"...Oh." Landon's mood visibly soured.

"What's with that face?" she asked. "It's just a physics competition."

"Nothing. I just won't be able to go with you," he muttered.

After her birthday, the Lu Corporation would be back in full operation. He had a major strategic campaign launching that needed his direct oversight-he couldn't leave the pack at that time.

"It's just a week, including training. You don't have to come."

"...Only a week?" he repeated in disbelief. "Do you know how long a week is?"

"If I were your age, maybe it wouldn't be so bad," he added quietly. "Then I could be with you more, do all the same things."

Tessa raised an eyebrow suspiciously. "Mr. Landon, what's that supposed to mean? You're not old. And for the record-I like guys a little older."

"...Really?" Landon instantly lit up like a kid at Christmas.

Well then. If she liked older, he had nothing to complain about.

"Mm." Seeing how happy he looked, Tessa couldn't help but laugh too.

Montedra's fierce, domineering Alpha King-showing her his softest, silliest side.

Landon slipped his arms around her waist and kissed her forehead.

pter 387 Not for Sale

"Alright. Go back inside."

"Drive safe."

She watched him leave, warmth lingering in her chest-until her phone rang.

It was Sharon.

Tessa almost hung up without a word.

"Tessa, it's just a meeting. I'm not that terrifying, am I?" came Sharon's smooth voice.

Tessa didn't respond. Whether Sharon was terrifying or not had nothing to do with her.

Still, she agreed to meet.

Finjore:

She knew Sharon well enough-when she wanted something, she wouldn't stop until she got it. Better to get it over with now than be harassed later.

They met at an upscale café. Sharon was already seated when Tessa arrived, and barely looked up when she walked in.

Tessa sat across from her. "Is there something you need, Madam Sharon?"

She didn't see any reason the two of them should be having coffee together.

Sharon slid a black card onto the table.

"Back out of the physics competition. There's five million in here-call it pocket money?"

Tessa stared at the card, momentarily speechless. She'd never been bribed with money before.

"Madam Sharon," she said slowly, "are you under the impression that I need five million? Or are you just worried your son can't beat me?"

First, she'd sent someone to cripple her hand. Now she was throwing money at her.

How pathetic.

Sharon's face darkened. "Not enough? I can double it-another five million. Just stay out of the competition, and stop seeing Nico altogether."

She made no effort to hide her contempt. It was clear: she didn't like Tessa, not one bit.

"There's nothing to talk about." Tessa stood up.

The moment she did, a dozen armed werewolf mercenaries stormed into the café.

Sharon slammed her palm on the table. The serpent-shaped scar on her wrist writhed grotesquely as her voice turned cold and sharp.

"I gave you a choice. You didn't take it. So don't expect to walk out of here."

Her right hand, once crippled by Landon, still bore the scar of that humiliation-but clearly, she hadn't learned a damn thing.

Chapter 388 I Dare You to Pull the Trigger

Tessa took in the scene before her and let out a cold laugh. "Sorry, but I've always

been the rebellious type. I'd really love to see what you think you can do to me."

"You..." Sharon was shaking with rage.

"Do it," she snapped, determined to get her way by any means necessary.

One of the werewolf mercenaries cocked his gun and aimed it straight at Tessa. We are all professional mercenaries, since this girl has some skill, wouldn't it be faster to just use weapons? But wasn't this one a little too calm? Rumor had it she hadn't even awakened her wolf yet. Why wasn't she afraid? Maybe she's too scared to even think straight.

A girl who'd never experienced real bloodshed would usually freeze in terror at the sight of a gun.

"Waving a gun around in broad daylight?" Tessa glanced toward the corner of the cafe. "Aren't you worried about getting caught on the security cameras for attempted murder?" Every cafe should have cameras, right?

"How naive. I already had the surveillance taken down. Now take the money and leave, or I have plenty of ways to make sure you never get to compete in that contest."

With the cameras out of the picture, Tessa didn't bother being polite.

In a flash, she moved-disarming the gunman and seizing the loaded weapon.

Her movement was quick and slick; no one else even had time to react before the gun was already in her hand.

She toyed with it casually.

"And here I was expecting something impressive. This piece of junk? You really thought this was enough to scare me?"

"You-" The mercenary who had just been pointing the gun at her stood frozen, completely stunned.

He was a high-level merc, and he hadn't even seen what happened. How had she managed to grab the gun? Who was this woman?

Tessa flicked the safety off and pointed the gun at Sharon's head.

"Madam Dawson. So this is your idea of fun? You should've told me sooner-I'm all in."

Sharon trembled from head to toe. It was the first time in her life someone had held a gun to her head.

"Tessa, don't do anything crazy!" Her voice shook, fingers gripping the edge of the tablecloth without realizing it.

She'd had the gun loaded with silver bullets, specifically meant to deal with werewolves. Even if Tessa refused to quit the competition for money, Sharon was ready to use force to break her will.

After all, ensuring her son's victory in the physics contest-and keeping him far from this so-called jinx- was worth a little bloodshed.

And since Tessa had already cost her an arm, this was the perfect opportunity for revenge.

But she never expected that Tessa, who supposedly hadn't even awakened her wolf, would turn the gun around and point it back at her!

With the silver barrel pressed against her skin, Sharon could hear her own heartbeat pounding in her ears. J she pulls the trigger... if that silver bullet goes through my head, I'm dead. Dead for sure! No, I can't die! I haven't seen my son succeed yet. I still have more to accomplish...

"Crazy?" Tessa scoffed. "You're the one who started this. Don't back down now."

"Miss-"The mercenaries didn't dare make a move, not with a gun aimed at their employer.

"If

f you pull that trigger, I swear-The Sinclair family and the entire Frostmoon Pack will be -Ah!"

Sharon didn't even get to finish her threat before Tessa pulled the trigger and shot her right in the foot. The bullet tore through the top of her foot, and blood instantly pooled on the floor.

Sharon's face turned ghostly pale.

"Well? Still think I won't do it?"

"You-" Sharon had seen plenty in her time, always the one doing the threatening. She never imagined she'd be on the receiving end like this.

"Miss, what do we do now?"

"Useless," Sharon snapped. She was the one with a gun pointed at her-how was she supposed to know what to do?

"Well? Still feeling bold?" Tessa smirked, a wicked curve to her lips.

And just then, the door to the cafe slammed open once more...

Chapter 389 You Call That Parenting

Nico rushed inside, panic written all over his face. The moment he heard that his mother had brought mercenaries to confront Tessa, he'd hurried over immediately.

He was terrified that he might be too late-that something might happen to Tessa...

"Tessa, don't be afraid; I'm here now. No one's going to hurt you."

Nico stepped in front of her, standing tall and rigid like a beast guarding its cub.

Seeing her son's eyes locked solely on Tessa made Sharon's expression even darker.

"Nico, can't you see I'm the one who's hurt?" Sharon glared at her son, her fingernails digging deep into her palms. "Tessa isn't the harmless little thing you think she is-she shot me just now!"

"Enough!" Nico's eyes were bloodshot. "Tessa is just a student; what right do you have to bring mercenaries after her? If you hadn't been trying to hurt her, you wouldn't have gotten hurt at all."

He glanced briefly at Sharon's injured foot, then looked away

She had brought all of this on herself. Whether it was her ruined arm or her bleeding foot-it was all just retaliation for trying to harm Tessa.

Nico was deeply disappointed in his mother. "If you hadn't gone out of your way to bully Tessa, you wouldn't be in this state. I begged you so many times, but you just wouldn't let her go. Honestly, I wish I had never had a mother so blind to right and wrong."

"Nico!"

Sharon was nearly hysterical with rage.

But Nico just looked at Tessa with a pained expression. "Tessa, I'm sorry. If it weren't for me, none of this would've happened to you."

He felt awful; she was the girl he liked most in the world, and yet she had been dragged through all this because of him.

"Come on; I'll take you out of here." Nico took her hand and began walking toward the exit.

"Nico, stop right there!"

But no matter how much Sharon screamed, Nico never looked back.

"Damn it! How dare he! For Tessa, he dares to treat me like this?"

Furious, Sharon's high-level wolf aura burst out of her; the cafe windows shattered from the force of it.

"Miss, what now?" one of the werewolf mercenaries asked, trembling.

"Take me to the hospital!" Sharon snapped.

Sharon pondered. Couldn't they see I'd been hit with a silver bullet? The wound wasn't healing, and they still had the nerve to ask me what to do? Did they have no initiative at all?

"Yes, Miss." The mercenary responded instantly, scooping her up and rushing her to the hospital.

Outside the cafe, beneath the camphor tree, Nico and Tessa sat side by side on a bench.

Since stepping out of the cafe, Nico hadn't said a word; he just sat there quietly. Seeing him like that, Tessa stayed silent too; she simply sat beside him.

Peak

"Tessa, I'm sorry." After all that time, it was the only thing Nico could bring himself to say; there was nothing else he could do.

Tessa glanced over at him.

"Nico, this has nothing to do with you, okay? You can't keep putting everything on yourself like that-it's not healthy."

"Sorry for making you upset again.")

Tessa sighed. "I really don't even know what to say to you anymore. Alright-see you in Simonville." Since nothing she said would get through to him, she figured it was better to say nothing at all. "Hmm." As soon as she stood up, Nico asked, "You're leaving already?"

"What else? My grandpa's still waiting at home." She'd been out long enough; it was time to go back.

"Then, goodbye." Nico had never been this uncertain before, but because of Sharon, this was who he had become.

Honestly, Tessa thought it was a shame.

Nico was definitely talented when it came to physics.

If he kept going down that path, he'd definitely succeed; but in his current state, it was really concerning.

She paused mid-step, then turned around and asked him seriously, "Nico, setting your mother aside, do you actually like physics?"

Chapter 390 Werewolf Physics

Nico nodded without hesitation. "Yes, I do. I really love physics."

Right now, there were only two things he loved most in the world, Tessa and physics.

"In that case, give it your all in the competition. And don't worry-I'm not going easy on you. Let's settle this with skill, okay?"

"Okay." At the mention of physics, a light returned to Nico's eyes.

"See you in the exam room."

Tessa flagged down a taxi and left, while Nico remained seated for a long time afterward.

He found himself wondering-if he kept diving deeper into the world of physics, would he have a chance to stand alongside Tessa someday?

She was incredibly gifted in physics. If she continued down that path too, maybe they could end up working together one day.

She didn't like him now, but with enough time... maybe that would change. People grow closer the longer they're together, don't they? Until I meet my fated mate... until I form a bond with someone else... anything is still possible, right?

They were still young; no one could predict what the future might hold.

Suddenly, confidence surged through Nico again; he straightened up, renewed with purpose.

Meanwhile, Landon was using his break from work to work intensively on preparations for Tessa's coming-of-age ceremony.

Werewolf adulthood rites were solemn and steeped in tradition.

Normally, an elder or respected chieftain from the pack would conduct the purification ritual on the night of a full moon, using sacred spring water while chanting ancient blessings-connecting heaven and earth, offering prayers for a smooth path ahead.

Afterward, the young werewolf would brave the perilous forest trial alone...

Unfortunately, Tessa had been exiled from the Frostmoon Pack five years ago; all the honor and trials she deserved had been taken from her.

But Landon was determined to give her everything she'd missed-he planned to invite Walter, former alpha of the Frostmoon Pack, to perform the purification and blessing on her special day.

He had already visited Walter in secret.

When Landon explained the purpose of his visit, a flicker of pain crossed Walter's eyes. He had tried countless times to bring Tessa back into the pack, only to be turned down each time-she was tired of the prejudice and chains of tradition; she preferred her free, unfettered life.

But when Landon explained he wanted to hold a coming-of-age ceremony not tied to any pack, Walter agreed without hesitation. "That's what my Tessie deserves."

Once Walter gave his blessing, Landon threw himself into preparations with full force.

He knew she had spent the last five years surviving alone in the remote region of Falindale her trials had already been far harsher than any forest challenge.

So, he decisively removed the traditional trial segment and instead began reaching out to her friends, he planned a celebration rich with warmth, laughter, and real-life comforts-a day filled with both the blessings of elders and the love of friends.

Just one week remained before Tessa's eighteenth birthday. Landon was at the sanctuary, performing a final inspection.

At that moment, Nathaniel came in with a report. "Mr. Thorne, Sharon caused trouble for Tessa again.."

Before he even the sentence, a chill burst from Landon's body, plunging the sanctuary's temperature.

Nathaniel quickly added, "But Tessa wasn't hurt-she used Sharon's own gun to shoot her in the foot! It was a silver bullet; it went straight through her instep."

"Silver?" Landon ran his fingers along the wolf-tooth ornament on the edge of the altar, his lips curving into a cold smile. "So losing a hand wasn't enough to teach her her place? Fine-then let her understand this completely, if she dares lay a finger on my future mate again, I'll grind down every last bone she has left to crawl with."

Nathaniel blinked, hesitant, and carefully reminded him, "But... she's the daughter of the Dawson family..." "I've already given her more than enough chances." Landon's eyes narrowed dangerously.

She'd pushed him, again and again, right to the edge of his patience...

Nathaniel knew Landon had finally reached his limit with Sharon. He responded without hesitation, "Yes, Mr. Thorne! I'll send someone to deal with it right away!"