

Alpha-less 401

Chapter 401 Don't Stop I'm Already Burning

He 38 Peans

By the time the two wolves finally returned to the lake, panting and breathless, dawn had already begun creeping up the pine branches with gentle knocks of light.

Emma nuzzled against Flex's neck, letting out a low, satisfied hum.

Once they'd run their fill, the wolves yielded control back to Landon and Tessa.

When their human forms returned, snowflakes and a few pine needles clung to their hair.

Landon pulled Tessa into his arms; his lips found her carlobe in a teasing bite. "Now... this time is ours," he murmured.

His voice was hoarse with desire. "Tessie, I want to have all of you... every last part."

He didn't finish his sentence-Tessa pressed her lips to his in an eager, searing kiss that told him everything he needed to know.

Her hands were swift; she stripped off his coat without hesitation. That last sliver of restraint within Landon shattered completely.

He clutched her tightly, breathing like fire in a snowstorm; the very air between them ignited.

Tessa couldn't wait-she tore at his thin shirt with desperation, shredding it in seconds.

Her slender, pale fingers swept across his firm chest and the ridges of his abs- places she'd fantasized about more times than she could count.

In the snow, their clothes piled up one after another.

Landon laid her down, shielding her with his coat to keep the cold ground from biting her skin.

But Tessa was burning up; her whole body radiated heat. She needed him so badly that even the icy earth could never cool her.

The second he pinned her down, she arched up, catching his Adam's apple between her teeth.

Her tongue licked over it; her teeth grazed, nibbling just enough to leave a mark- red and wet. A low growl tore from his throat as the heat between his legs surged, nearly snapping his control.

With one rough pull, Landon ripped her sweater apart-shreds fluttering down to the snow.

She lay bare beneath the pale light of morning, her smooth skin gleaming, curves hypnotic. The soft rise and fall of her chest, breathless and flushed, drove him wild with want.

He reached out as if in worship, rough palms sliding reverently over her tender body. The callouses on his hands made her shiver wherever he/touched.

His breath came hard. One hand traced her rounded shoulder, then moved down- cup her breast.

With one firm squeeze, her soft flesh molded to his hand, reshaping with every press.

the full swell of

"Ah!"

A moan slipped from Tessa's lips before she could stop it. The sound was enough to push Landon further he kneaded her breasts more roughly now, one hand, then both completely lost in the intimate paradise, that was hers and hers alone.

Her skin began to glow with a faint flush; only then did he let go.

His right hand drifted lower, brushing her waist, fingers tracing lazy circles on her flat stomach. Each stroke sent sparks skittering through her nerves; her breathing grew ragged, thighs twitching in anticipation.

Then his lips took over. He kissed down her body, finally reaching her pert breasts. His tongue traced the tender curve before his mouth closed around the rosy tip-sucking deep.

"Ah... don't do that..."

Tessa whimpered, fingers curling in his hair; her body betrayed her, pressing toward him for more.

Seeing her so undone, Landon let his right hand slide even lower-down to the juncture of her thighs.

He gently parted her legs; his fingers slipped past the thin fabric of her underwear and found the slick heat waiting for him.

That was it-the spark that lit the wildfire inside him.

"Tessie... you're mine."

He stroked her folds, circling teasingly; sometimes grazing the edge, sometimes pressing in just enough to make her cry out with need.

The snow beneath them crushed and melted, icy water seeping along her spine. But between her legs, she was soaked-hot, pulsing, and aching.

"I want you... all of you," Tessa gasped, trembling.

Her hands found his waistband; she tugged at the belt, fingers slipping inside- wrapping around his burning hardness...

Chapter 402 Slick Heat and Dirty Whispers

Landon froze; a rough, ragged breath tore from his throat as he suddenly dipped down and crushed his lips against hers.

His tongue pushed aggressively into her mouth, tangling with hers, sucking so deeply she could barely breathe.

His large hand had completely enveloped her slick heat; two long fingers already plunged deep inside, claiming new territory.

Tessa gasped uncontrollably. Her hands clutched his hair in a death grip as her body arched toward him, legs wrapping around his waist.

Beneath the thin layer of fabric, she could feel his hardened heat-so hot it made her moan over and over.

The slick wetness between her thighs dripped freely; desire surged through her like a bolt from the blue.

Consumed by a wave of lust, Tessa flipped over the moment Landon withdrew his fingers. She straddled him with a sudden, feral grace; something wild and teasing burned in her eyes.

She leaned down, lips trailing from Landon's chest down to his abs; her teeth nipped the muscle along his waist, while her tongue traced every groove of his stomach.

Each motion dragged a low growl from his throat-he was burning hot and hard, pressing up against her lower belly.

Her hand slid between his thighs, stroking and teasing. She gripped his scorching length, moving up and down; sometimes gently, sometimes with force. His breath came in sharp bursts, deep and unrestrained.

Landon couldn't take it anymore. Gripping her ass, he flipped her beneath him, pinning her back down into the snow.

The last of their clothes were torn to shreds-scattered, forgotten. Naked bodies entwined in the snow, igniting a wildfire amidst the cold.

His hand slid from her waist to the inside of her thigh, forcefully spreading her open. His heat rubbed against her soaked entrance; she trembled like a leaf, her low moans breaking into breathless cries. Her slick arousal soaked the snow beneath them.

Tessa's nails dug into his shoulders; her body moved in sync with his, clinging tightly to him. Each slow grind made her pant, her voice a wicked, seductive poison.

Landon growled her name, hoarse like a beast caged too long. With one powerful thrust, he buried himself deep inside her.

"Ah!"

Tessa screamed, her body bowing violently. Her legs locked tightly around his waist; her wet heat clamped. down on him so snugly it made her scalp tingle with pleasure.

Landon was buried to the hilt, her body stretched around him, tight and wet. The sensation made her shiver uncontrollably; he let out a rough growl, his breath harsh and primal.

His hands gripped her waist; his fingers sank into her soft skin-his strength dominating, yet filled with aching tenderness. Each slow thrust was like lighting a match; every stroke made her moan louder.

Tessa's nails left red trails down his shoulders. She met every movement of his hips, the heat between her legs dripping and sticky. Their slick sounds echoed through the snow.

"Tessie, you're so damn beautiful..." Landon rasped, his voice heavy with obsession.

He lifted her leg, resting it on his shoulder; his heat slid in and out of her slick center, slow but firm.

"Harder! Give me more! Give me everything!" Tessa cried, unable to contain her pleasure.

The second he heard her desperate cry, Landon let out a guttural roar; he drove into her, deep-hitting the furthest depths of her. She screamed again, her body arching, her tight wet heat gripping him so tightly tears welled at the corners of her eyes.

He stopped holding back; the beast inside him finally unleashed. Gripping her ass, he pounded into her, each thrust harder and deeper.

His rhythm quickened-every stroke wild, like a storm crashing through her. Her body convulsed beneath him, rocked by the force.

The snow beneath them caved with the intensity of their movements; snowmelt mixed with sweat trickled down their skin. The air was thick with the scent of wet lilies and pine.

"Oh my, you're amazing! The way you move-sweating all over me like that-you're so damn hot!"

This scene I've dreamed of a thousand times... it's finally real tonight!

Chapter 403 Bent Over and Begging for It

Tessa's breathless praise-so open, so unabashed in its affection-made Landon growl with satisfaction, the heat inside her swelled harder, thick with desire.

He cupped her ass, pulling her closer until she was pressed tightly against him; he thrust deeper, harder, like he was driving his very soul into her.

"Ah, I'm going to die!"

Tessa's whole body trembled; her eyes rolled back in pleasure. Wet heat gushed between her thighs, soaking the snow in a slick, sticky mess.

"Landon... I love you..." Tessa moaned, voice hoarse and syrupy sweet like poison. Her nails raked down his back, leaving bloody trails as her body bloomed wildly on the brink of climax.

Landon bit her earlobe, panting heavily. "Tessie, you're mine. Forever"

He suddenly picked up the pace; a rush of molten release exploded deep inside her, driving her straight into the peak of ecstasy.

She screamed his name; her body seized tight as climax crashed over her. The way her walls clamped around him nearly drove Landon to the edge; he groaned, low and rough, unable to contain

the pleasure. Their first climax came fast and furious. The two of them clung tightly to each other, riding out the aftershocks for a long, breathless moment before slowly returning to themselves.

Landon held her close; his sweat-slicked chest pressed to her cheek, his heat warming every inch of her skin.

Tessa curled in his arms, listening to the strong, steady beat of his heart; a satisfied smile played at the corner of her lips, her body still trembling from the fading climax.

The morning light spilled across the snow, casting their overlapping shadows-like a vow they'd never be parted.

Landon kissed her forehead, his voice low and lingering. "How do you feel?"

Tessa kissed him back, her fingers brushing along his cheek as she smiled lazily. "Not bad... I could go for another round."

Her words sparked like a flame, instantly reigniting the fire inside him that had barely cooled.

Landon's burning gaze locked onto Tessa's flushed, sweat-dampened face; he flipped her beneath him once again. "Don't worry... however many rounds you want, I'll give you all of them."

With a low growl, he gripped her waist and gently turned her over, guiding her onto her knees in the snow, her ass lifted high.

Tessa's back arched in the morning light, seductive and perfect. Snowflakes clung to her pale skin; the soft lily scent drifting from her body stirred another deep groan from his chest.

His large hands slid up to her ass, kneading her firm curves with practiced skill. From the motion, her freshly spent core began to pulse again; Landon's seed trickled slowly from her, scented faintly with pine.

That glistening trail of white slipping from her still-flushed entrance-so obscene, so beautiful-made him hard all over again, the ache sharp and insistent.

His hand brushed across the smooth skin of her back, fingertips gliding along the sensitive curve of her nape. Her body shuddered; a breathy moan escaped her lips.

Landon's eyes fixed on the delicate slope of her neck, pale and fragrant with lily pheromones. It triggered something primal inside him.

Deep within, his wolf snarled. Mark her! Claim her! Fill her with our scent, make her ours forever!

Driven by that raw, ancient instinct, Landon leaned in close to her snowy-white nape.

His teeth brushed against the skin, gently grazing the spot where her gland pulsed. He nibbled, teasing; sometimes light, sometimes hard.

Just as his fangs began to emerge-ready to pierce her skin and mark her....

Emma's voice burst into Tessa's mind, roaring in panic. Tessie, no! You can't let him mark you! Your blood bond with Nathan isn't broken yet. If he forces the mark, your blood vessels will rupture, and his wolf soul will be torn to shreds!

Chapter 404 Claimed by Destiny

Tessa flinched, twisting away as Landon's fangs grazed her skin.

"No, not now... we can't..."

A tight breath caught in Landon's throat. He forced himself to pull back, lips brushing her neck in apology instead of instinct.

"Shh... it's okay, baby. That's on me. This moment's too important to rush-we should've waited for the right time."

She hasn't even met my family yet. Our elders haven't even had a proper meeting. I shouldn't be marking her here-like this-so careless, so raw. Not in the

snow.

He'd always pictured it differently. He'd bring her to meet Grandpa, Reginald Thorne-the gruff old alpha who never stopped calling him wild. He wanted the entire Nightshade Pack to see exactly who his mate was.

My Tessie should be wearing that starlight blue diamond I picked out just for her. She should be standing beneath an altar woven with lily of the valley when I make that mark. Not kneeling in frost. Not with my bite still catching snowflakes. He'd let his emotions run ahead of him-too caught up in the rush of finally being one with her.

Landon breathed her in-the sweet scent of lilies clinging to her skin-then let go of the urge to mark her. He had other ways to show her how deeply he wanted her.

His hand locked around her waist as the other slid between her thighs. She was already soaked; wet and ready, like she'd been waiting just for him.

As his fingers moved in and out, Tessa gasped and arched her back, hips grinding into his hand without meaning to. Her heat clenched around him and it took everything he had not to lose it right there.

"Please-just f*ck me already! Don't make me beg!"

"Oh, baby, you're the one torturing me... do you have any idea how good you feel?"

His voice was rough as he shifted position, the head of his cock pressing right against her entrance.

Then he thrust, hard and deep, bottoming out in one stroke.

Tessa cried out, body lurching forward as her fingers clawed into the snow. The cold bit into her hands, but all she could feel was the hot ache inside her.

This angle had him hitting so deep it made her head spin.

"You're incredible... God, no wonder you're the Montedra alpha king. I swear, every inch of you drives me crazy-especially the one inside me."

Maybe it was fate. Maybe it was that damn mate bond. Whatever it was, I wanted him like I've never wanted anything. I want to stay like this forever... our bodies touching, hearts are wrapped around each other. I don't ever want to let him

"Relax, baby... you've got no idea what's still coming," Landon murmured against her skin, hips driving forward again and again.

Tessa had always been quiet, blushing and flustering at the smallest things. But today, today she was something else-brazen, breathless, begging.

And the way she praised him, loved him so openly-it wrecked him in the best way.

I want to cover her in my scent. I want her soaked in me. I want to come so deep she feels it for days.

She's mine... she really is.

That thought settled into his chest with a fierce kind of peace.

He grabbed her ass, both hands firm, and pounded into her harder. Every thrust

made her body rock and made her cry out again and again.

Their skin slapped together faster and louder, the sound sharp and wet.

He bottomed out inside her each time, grinding into her sweet spot until she was moaning uncontrollably.

F*ck, she's tight. So damn wet for me.

Landon gritted his teeth, sweat dripping from his body onto hers as he moved. Her back glistened where it touched her.

Tessa's hips rose high to meet him, each stroke pulling a scream from her lips. Her whole body was slick, wild, and trembling.

"Landon-don't stop! I'm right there-ah!" she gasped, hands bracing in the snow as her orgasm hit. Her walls clenched hard around him, squeezing every inch.

He snarled deep in his throat, slammed into her one last time, and spilled inside- hot, thick, and endless- filling her to the brim.

Their bodies crashed into climax at the same time, pulsing with heat and need.

Tessa screamed his name, clinging to Landon's chest as he held her tight-until suddenly, the silver ring on her finger flared with a sharp white glow. Just a flash, but unmistakable. A flare from the cursed Bloodbound Sorcery Nathan had tied to her.

Still catching her breath, Tessa's eyes narrowed. Her nails dug into her palms so hard they almost broke the skin.

I swear... I'll tear this thing off myself if I have to. I'll rip Nathan's brand out of my blood. I'll burn every trace of him

away.

And then-then I'll give myself to Landon completely. No strings. No stains. Just us. Just our pheromones weaving a bond the way nature intended. No more haunting reminders. No more chains.

Chapter 405 The Beast Beneath His Skin

Tessa and Landon weren't just wolves-they were awakened wielders of the Ancient Wolf Spirit. Their bodies ran hotter, stronger, longer than anyone else's.

And after just two intense rounds of soul-deep sex, the sky had already turned fully to morning.

Landon lay back against the snowbank, completely sated, eyes tracing the soft rise and fall of Tessa's body nestled against his chest. He kissed her forehead, damp with sweat, still craving her.

If it weren't for the fact that Tessa's coming-of-age ceremony was scheduled next, he wouldn't have left her body so easily.

Tessa, who'd tasted real pleasure for the first time in her life, was already hooked. She rested against his bare chest, fingers sliding playfully across his firm pecs.

"I could get addicted to this," she said softly.

The way their spirits had connected... the way their bodies had moved... it wasn't just sex. It was a total union.

It felt like every nerve, every instinct, every part of me said yes to him.

Landon let out a husky laugh, kissing her swollen lips with restraint he didn't feel.

"Oh, I'm way more gone than you are. But after tonight's ceremony? You're mine for the rest of the night."

Tessa's lips curved into a slow smile. "Mmm. I'll be counting the minutes."

Then she glanced toward the shredded mess of fabric in the snow and laughed softly.

"Although... those clothes are officially done for."

Landon stood up and draped his black coat-the only thing left intact-over Tessa's naked body. It swallowed her frame, hiding the flushed skin and the marks he'd left behind when he couldn't hold back.

Then he scooped her up in his arms.

"Well. That definitely wasn't the plan. We need to head back to Wisteria Apartment, get cleaned up, and find clothes that aren't torn to pieces."

He hadn't brought her out here expecting chaos. Just a quiet night under the stars, counting down to midnight. Her birthday. The moment their bond would be revealed-Destined or not.

If it turned out they weren't mates, he would've still kissed her; still held her; still told her exactly how he felt.

But if they were? Then hell, he'd kiss her harder and thank the Moon Deity herself for giving them this fate.

He'd wanted her for a long time. He'd dreamed of being inside her. But he trusted himself enough to wait.

I was going to wait. For the blessing at the Wolf Sanctum. For her grandpa Walter to sanctify the bond. For her friends to celebrate her birthday, so we could finally steal away and make that night ours.

That had been the plan.

Until she flipped everything upside down.

He'd never seen her like that-fire burning beneath all that usual quiet. His fee princess had turned to liv and it melted every bit of control he'd been holding onto

They'd gone at each other like animals, right there in the snow. He hadn't even packed backup clothes.

Good thing wolves came with biological safeguards. In an unmarked state, the female's gland barrier kept her from getting pregnant- a defense evolved by the Ancestral to protect unmated partners before formal bonding.

She was still in high school. Their bond hadn't been witnessed by the pack's elders. This wasn't the time for a baby.

Tessa let Landon carry her to the car without protest, melting into his hold.

"I'm gonna take a quick nap," she murmured with a soft smile.

She leaned her head back against the passenger seat and let her eyes slip shut.

Sure, her body was far stronger than most wolves-but Landon wasn't most wolves. He was Montedra's Alpha King; he'd awakened the Ancient Obsidian Crystal spirit, and it showed in every way that counted. Samuel had been right. Landon didn't just fight like a monster-he f*cked like one too.

I'm already worn out... and he still looks like he could go another three rounds.

Tessa made a playful little sound-half pout, half laugh-as her competitive side kicked back to life.

Once the ceremony was over? Oh, she was going to ride him. Like a queen. She'd pin him down, take over, and make him gasp and growl under her instead.

In the back of her mind, her wolf, Emma, tossed her silver mane and let out a low, cocky whimper. Challenge accepted. She wanted Landon's wolf-Flex-on his knees too.

Girl and wolf; one shared desire, one perfect plan.

Chapter 406 Coming of Age Under Moonlight

When they got back to Wisteria Apartment, Landon didn't waste a second. He scooped her up again, carried her straight into the bathroom, and stepped into the shower with her, hands moving slow and tender as he washed her off himself.

But the second his fingers brushed her waist, Tessa leaned in and bit his neck- soft but sharp enough to tease him.

Hot water slid down their skin as she glanced at the faint bite mark still on his collarbone. Without warning, she hooked her arm around his neck and kissed him there, lips pressing against his skin like a promise.

That's when the shower stopped being just a shower.

Steam curled around them like a veil, but the sounds weren't innocent anymore- wet skin slapping, bodies grinding, moans bouncing off the tile. The water kept running, but so did they.

By the time they finally stepped out wrapped in towels, the clock was already ticking past two.

Landon dropped her gently onto the bed, but she was too busy smirking at the fresh scratch marks she'd carved into his hips to stop giggling.

He growled and caught her fingertip between his teeth, voice rough with need he still hadn't burned through.

"Laugh all you want, but if you keep teasing me, you won't be getting any rest."

That finally shut her up-at least a little. She curled against him, nose brushing his chest, letting the steady beat of his heart rock her to sleep.

The snow outside was finally easing up, and the moon, along with a sky full of impatient stars, had already risen-like the heavens themselves were lining up to bless what was coming next.

At exactly seven, Landon pulled up to the Nightshade Pack's sacred grounds, the Wolf Sanctum.

Tessa gave him a side-eye, one brow lifting.

"Wolf Sanctum? Technically speaking, I'm a rogue without a pack. I don't think I'm even allowed in here..."

"You're my future mate," Landon said without hesitation. "Everything under my rule already belongs to you. They'll kneel, or they'll get out of the way."

He brought her straight to the entrance, eyes locked ahead. "Frostmoon Pack can keep their old rules. We don't play that way in Nightshade."

Landon pressed his hand to the door. The pine-scented wave of Alpha pheromones rolled over the head carving like a flood. Laurel crests etched into the bronze glowed one after another-proof that

something only the Nightshade Alpha could do. He didn't need permission from the Elder Council to open the Wolf Sanctum. That power was his alone.

The doors began to open, heavy and slow, revealing what lay beyond.

And the moment they opened all the way, Tessa's breath hitched.

Beneath the vaulted ceiling, surrounded by twelve towering totems, stood a man

in deep gold ceremonial robes. In one hand, he held a staff capped with a fierce wolf head.

His presence was magnetic. Authoritative. Ancient.

Then he turned.

And Tessa's entire body went stiff.

Her eyes locked on his face. Her hand shot out and gripped Landon's sleeve. "Grandpa? What...what are you doing here?"

Walter, who was usually all warmth and softness, now stood tall with quiet strength in his presence. But his smile was still full of love as he looked at Tessa. "It's my granddaughter's coming-of-age. Of course, I'm here to bless her myself." Long before Landon ever approached him, Walter had already tried reaching out to the Frostmoon Elders, hoping to hold the ceremony at their Wolf Sanctum.

They'd shut him down. Predictably.

Fine. If Frostmoon wouldn't open their doors, then he'd bring the whole damn thing to Nightshade- and make it bigger, better, prouder.

My girl deserves the best. If others get honored, Tessie gets more.

Right on cue, voices rose as familiar faces appeared from the mist around the sanctum.

"Damn right! I'm not missing this for anything!" Ysabel called, dressed in Nightshade's ceremonial robes.

"Me too!"

"Count me in!"

Tessa's eyes swept the space, heart pounding. Avery. Steven. The whole Avery Band. Camille. Nathaniel. Hudson. Cameron...

They're all here. Every single one of them.

Her chest tightened, and tears threatened to spill. She turned toward Landon, her voice soft and trembling

"You invited them... all of them?"

Landon smiled and took her hand, warm and firm in his.

"I did. We're all here for you, Tessa. Your moment. Together."

Chapter 407 The Spring, The Bloodbond Ring

Moonlight poured through the glass dome above them, spreading across the sacred spring in the center of the hall. The surface sparkled with silver light, and the faint scent of lilies floated in the air like a blessing.

Walter moved slowly toward her, staff in hand. He looked softer than usual, but beneath that warmth was gravity—a quiet power. The edge of his ceremonial robe whispered over the stone with each step.

"My Tessie," he said gently, "tonight you become an adult. In the name of Frostmoon Pack's former Alpha, I bestow upon you the rites of purification and blessing."

Tessa's chest lifted with a slow breath.

This is really happening.

Her pheromones sweetened the air around her like blooming lilies. She nodded through the blur of tears.

Walter lifted his staff and tapped it lightly against the spring. The pool stirred. A clear stream of water rose from its center, hovering right in front of her like magic come alive.

He began to chant, voice low and ancient, like pine trees humming in the wind. The springlight turned to mist, rising and swirling around her body-cool, clean, and holy.

Then it happened.

The silver ring on her finger flashed-black against the white mist.

The inscription on it-Forever Yours-shuddered with rage. The Bloodbound Sorcery inside it pulsed, reacting violently to the sanctified air.

It's fighting back...

The spell Nathan had slipped onto her five years ago when she was unconscious. His trap. His claim.

'Now it hissed like something alive, like a curse being scorched straight out of her veins.

Tessa felt it. A faint tremor from the ring on her finger.

Her breath caught.

No way...

She'd tried for years-everything she could think of. Spells, runes, and even physical force. Nothing ever worked. That silver ring wouldn't come off. She couldn't break it. Couldn't sever the damn Bloodbound Sorcery Nathan had forced on her.

But now... here, under the magic of the sacred spring... it was reacting.

Something's changing...

Across the sanctum, Walter paused mid-chant. He felt it too. The dark energy curled around her-thick, unnatural, wrong.

Pain flared in his chest.

What did they do to you, Tessie?

What kind of twisted bastard forced something like this on you? This is forbidden sorcery. High-grade. Designed to hurt

Who the heck would mark you like that?

He didn't have time to chase down that fury. Not now.

Right here, right now-under the blessing of the moon and the power of the sacred spring-he had a chance to free her. He had to act.

He bit into the tip of his tongue without a word and let a drop of his blood fall into the spring.

According to the Frostmoon Rite, an Alpha's blood could amplify the sanctum's power-just enough to burn something dark out of someone they loved.

He prayed it would be enough.

Tessa exhaled and let her body go soft, surrendering to the spring. Her skin soaked in the sacred mist, and she followed its slow glide through her like a thread of silver.

It moved through her bloodstream-cool and clean-scrubbing away the black residue in her veins.

And then, as it passed her gland...

Wait...

She felt it. The faintest shift. The Bloodbound Sorcery loosened ever so slightly under the spring's touch.

But it only lasted a heartbeat. As the mist finished its path through her body and drifted away, the silver ring stayed right where it was. The curse held tight.

Still... that flicker of change lit something inside her.

That was real. It moved. That means it can break. Maybe this spring isn't just symbolic... maybe it's the key.

The sacred mist circled her once. Then again. Then a third time. Each loop was dimmer than the last. By the end, it was nothing more than light-soft and fading.

That was all the spring had left to give.

Across from her, Walter's eyes darkened with regret. His shoulders sagged just slightly under the weight of

1. it.

Even with his blood and his spirit at full strength, he couldn't force the high-level curse loose.

Not yet.

They'd need to wait-watch for the right moment. And next time, finish what they started.

Walter lifted his staff one last time, and the final shimmer of mist on Tessa's skin gathered into delicate beads of dew, sliding down to the stone beneath her feet. Around them, the totem pillars began to glow a soft, otherworldly blue-like the sanctuary itself was welcoming her rebirth.

Deep inside her mind, she felt Emma stir.

Her wolf was howling-low and soulful-resonating with the stars above.

Walter stepped forward and gently touched the tip of the staff to her forehead. The moonlight poured down like a blessing.

"In the name of the Moon Deity, I bless you, Tessa. May your wolf spirit stay fierce. May your path be clear. May love and power never leave your side."

His voice rang across the domed chamber. The glowing laurel crest above them shimmered like moonlight woven into stone; the beams flowed down, soft as silk, resting across her bare shoulders.

Tessa opened her eyes. Tears slid freely now, and a quiet warmth rose in her chest-deep and sure.

She heard me. The Moon Deity answered.

The ceremony was complete. The purification, the blessing... her rite of passage was finally hers.

"Thank you, Grandpa," she whispered, her voice thick with emotion.

Walter smiled and cupped the back of her head with one hand.

"Silly girl. It was an honor to perform your rite of passage."

Landon came to her side, wrapping his hand around hers. His pine-rough scent merged with her lily-sweet one-steady, grounding, full of promise.

Cheers erupted around them. Ysabel clapped first. Avery Band whooped and teased from the edge of the sanctum, filling the space with laughter and warmth.

Chapter 408 He's My Destined Mate

After the formal rites ended, the group made their way to Silvermoon Estate for a feast.

The dining room glowed with warm lights, and the long table was covered in gorgeous food. Bouquets of lilies of the valley lined the center; their scent danced

in the air, twining perfectly with Tessa's pheromones.

Ysabel rolled in with a five-layer cake, singing as she went.

"Birthday girl coming through!"

Everyone chimed in, gathering around Tessa and singing with loud, off-key joy.

She clapped along, heart full, eyes glowing with happiness.

I'm never going to forget this night.

When the last note faded, Ysabel grinned and slid the cake right in front of her. "Okay, Tessie-wish time!"

Tessa looked around at all the people she loved-her friends, her family, her mate- and closed her eyes.

Please let the people I care about stay healthy. Let them stay happy. Let life be kind to them.

Then she opened her eyes and blew out every candle in one breath. The room exploded in cheers and laughter.

Walter was already cutting the first slice. He handed it to her with a proud smile.

"Happy birthday, Tessie. You're officially an adult now... but to me, you'll always be my little girl."

"Thanks, Grandpa!" Tessa said with a glowing smile as she took the first bite of cake, all eyes on her.

'A smudge of cream clung to the corner of her mouth. Landon let out a soft laugh, leaned over, and gently wiped it off with his thumb-then licked it off without a second thought.

Nathaniel's jaw dropped.

"Mr. Thorne-seriously? That's how you're acting in front of everyone?"

Landon raised a brow, cool and unbothered.

"I'm being close with my Destined mate. You got a problem with that?"

"Wait, what did you just say?" someone asked, stunned.

Every head in the room turned toward them.

Walter looked like he might burst with joy. Tessa met their eyes and smiled.

"Actually, that's what I was just about to announce..."

She reached for Landon's hand and held it tight.

"Landon and I are Destined mates."

Silence. One heartbeat. Two.

Then the room erupted-applause, shouting, celebration.

"Oh my god, Tessie! Your Destined mate is my Uncle Landon? That's insane- we're family now!" Ysabel threw her arms around her.

"Finally! Nightshade's getting its Luna. May the Moon Deity bless you both," Nathaniel added, grinning.

Hudson and Cameron jumped in with their congratulations too.

No hesitation. No doubt. Everyone welcomed her. They embraced Tessa not just

as Landon's mate-but as their future Luna.

Camille lifted her glass with a smile.

"Congrats, Tessa. Getting to be Destined mates with someone you actually love? That's a dream."

Then she turned to Landon, arching a brow.

"Doesn't matter if you're Montedra's all-powerful Alpha King-if you ever hurt her, I will end you."

"Damn right!" one of the Avery Band guys jumped in. "You mess with Tessa, you mess with all of us. Alpha title or not."

Landon didn't even flinch. No anger, no pride. Just quiet conviction. He lifted a hand toward the moonlight streaming through the window and said, "I swear by the Moon Deity-if I ever hurt or fail Tessa, may I-"

But Tessa clapped a hand over his mouth, cutting him off. "No cursing yourself on my birthday. Not allowed."

Landon kissed her palm, voice soft. "Then I'll do whatever you say."

"Oh my god," Ysabel groaned with a laugh. "We get it-you're crazy about each other. Can you give the rest of us single people a chance to breathe?"

"Yeah, yeah. Come eat before the feast prepared by Mr. Throne goes to waste," Nathaniel added, chuckling.

Everyone laughed and sat down, toasting, drinking, and filling the space with warmth and joy.

Only Avery stayed quiet.

In his pocket, his hand clenched around a ring box-holding a diamond meant for Tessa.

He was going to confess tonight.

But that's not gonna happen anymore...

Chapter 409 A Love Confessed

Laughter filled the room as glasses clinked, silver cut through the cake, and everyone dug into the feast without holding back.

But in the middle of it all, Tessa saw something no one else did-Avery quietly slipping out the door.

She leaned over to Landon with a soft whisper, then followed after him.

A moment later, Ysabel came up beside Landon and leaned in.

"Uncle Landon, she went after Avery. Aren't you going to do anything?"

He shook his head.

"No. She's allowed to have her own space. Her friends. I trust her."

Every feral instinct in him clawed at that decision. He wanted to chase her. Keep her close. Keep every other man away from what was his.

But he knew better.

I love her, yeah. She's my mate. But that doesn't mean I get to cage her. Tessie was born to run. She's not a girl to be locked down-she's a wolf built for the wind and wild.

He wouldn't be the fence.

He'd be the wind beside her. Moving with her. Free, loyal, untethered-but always hers.

Tessa found Avery on the second-floor terrace. He was alone while playing the piano.

He was playing her favorite song.

She didn't interrupt-just stood a few steps away, listening. Letting the music settle around them.

Avery looked so different like this

like the bold, cocky version of him

onstage. Right now, he was just soft light and quiet keys. The silver chain around his wrist shimmered as he moved. It was the wolf bone bracelet she'd given him for his sixteenth birthday.

When the last note faded, Tessa stepped forward and sat beside him.

"Play something with me?" she asked. Her voice was low, shy. She didn't play much-but enough.

"Always," he said without hesitation.

She smiled. "Chopin?"

He didn't answer with words. Just nodded and set his fingers on the keys.

Together, they played-effortless, wordless, in sync.

Avery's eyes drifted to her face again and again. She was radiant. Happy. Strong.

And not his.

She found someone. Someone powerful. Someone written in fate. Why does it still hurt like this?

He thought he'd locked those feelings away a long time ago.

Clearly, not well enough.

The final chord faded. Tessa's hands stilled. And then, without even turning to

look, she asked-so gently it nearly broke him.

"Avery... is there something you want to tell me?"

They knew each other too well. Of course, she'd seen through him.

Avery was quiet for a moment before finally turning to her, eyes clear and voice steady.

"Tessa... you've felt it, haven't you?"

The way I look at you. The way I never stopped caring.

Tessa's fingers gripped the edge of the bench-subtle, but a clear sign she was nervous. She always did that when something hit too close to the heart.

"I was going to tell you tonight," Avery continued. "That I like you. Not as a friend-

as a man who's wanted you for a long time. I was ready to say I'd stay by your side forever. But now... it's clear I'm too late."

He took a breath and smiled-soft, but real.

"Congrats, Tessie. You found your Destined mate. I really hope you two stay happy. Always."

He didn't dance around it. He didn't pretend. Just laid it bare, honest, and whole. And with the words out in the open, he felt lighter.

His blessing was real.

Even if she'd never be his, he meant it when he said he wanted her to be happy. "We're still gonna be friends, right?" he asked, holding out a fist.

Tessa searched his face, making sure that smile wasn't just for show. Once she saw it was genuine, she smiled too and tapped her fist against his.

"Always. We're friends for life. And you'll find your girl, Avery. The one who's meant just for you."

"I'll hold you to that."

They shared one last look-one filled with understanding, no regrets-and the last of the heart them finally slipped away.

between

"I wanna play something for you."

Tessa sat at the piano, alone now. Her hands rested on the keys for just a breath-

then she started to play

This time, it wasn't just any song. It was his favorite.

Every note was her way of saying goodbye-with love, not regret.

As the song neared its end, a soft sound from the hallway stirred Avery to his feet.

"I should get going. But let's write something together soon."

"We'll have plenty of chances," Tessa said with a knowing smile. "My

entertainment label's launching soon."

And just beneath the notes still hanging in the air-she caught it.

That scent. Pinewood. Strong and familiar. Landon's here.

Chapter 410 A Moment of Tenderness

And just like Tessa expected-Landon showed up not long after.

As he crossed paths with Avery, the other man gave a quiet nod and said, "Take good care of her.

Then he walked away-calm, unburdened.

Landon didn't need to hear a word of what they'd said. He already knew.

He didn't flinch as he passed Avery. No glares. No growls. Just stone silence as

he made his way over to Tessa and sat beside her.

She hit the last note and turned toward him.

"You found me. What happened to Ysabel and the others?"

"They're at the club-dancing, drinking, doing their thing. You don't need to worry about them."

Silvermoon Estate had its own built-in club, full of food, music, and high-end distractions. A favorite for nobles with too much time and money.

Landon took her hand in his. His touch was firm and familiar.

"You never stop surprising me, Tessie. Piano? Really? You've got layers."

"Want me to play something for you?" she asked, smiling.

"Yeah. Play 'Marry Me' for me," he said.

Right now, that's all he wanted to hear.

Tessa didn't hesitate. She pulled out her phone, quickly searched for the Marry Me sheet music, and propped it up on the stand.

"This is my first time playing it," she warned with a teasing smile. "If I mess it up, you're not allowed to laugh."

She was decent at the piano-but it wasn't her focus. And this piece, while beautiful, was still unfamiliar.

Landon just shook his head.

"Laugh? Never. You're perfect to me."

And he meant it. However the song sounded, if it came from her, he'd listen forever.

Her fingers began to glide over the keys-delicate, sure.

She played their song. A wedding dream, just for him.

Landon didn't say a word. He sat right beside her, eyes locked on her. She looked different like this-so quiet, so lovely.

God, how do I protect something like this without holding on too tight?

As the second section began, Landon reached out and rested his hands on the piano.

He joined her. Four hands on one instrument.

Tessa turned in surprise.

He did barely. Just two years of lessons as a kid. But with the Obsidian Crystal Wolf blood in him, he didn't forget things as other people did. Notes and patterns burned into his neurons like starmaps.

And this piece? Wasn't all that hard.

Together, they played. No words. No hesitation. Just fingers and rhythm.

And when the last note drifted into silence-they looked at each other and smiled.

No practice. No prep. But somehow, they moved like they'd done this a hundred times before.

"You know how to play piano?" she asked, raising a brow.

She never would've guessed-he didn't seem like the type to waste time on something so... refined.

"Two years of lessons."

"That's it?"

"Yep."

"Mr. Thorne-

"Landon," he cut in, voice smooth as silk. "We're past that, aren't we? 'Mr. Thorne' sounds way too formal."

Tessa laughed, flustered. Her cheeks pinked.

"Okay, Landon. I just... I think you're really gifted. If you'd stuck with it, you could've been a real pianist."

"I never cared about being a pianist," he said, voice dropping. "But....."

"But what?" she asked, eyes narrowing in curiosity.

He reached over, fingers grazing her collarbone-right where his teeth had marked her that morning.

"My wolf, Flex, thinks your skin is a living piano. And he'd rather play you than any set of keys."

His breath hit her ear, warm and electric. And just like that, the memory of their bodies tangled together came rushing back.

Her face burned.

"Is that Flex talking? Or is that you?"

Landon laughed low in his throat.

"There's no difference. What he wants-I want."

Inside him, Flex was already pacing with impatience. All he wanted was to pull Emma away and disappear into a space where nothing existed but skin, scent, and heat.

"Watch it. We're still outside, Tessa whispered, giving him a warning look that was way too soft to be

threatening.

Her modesty was back-sweet, hesitant, delicate. It drove Landon absolutely wild.

He pulled her in, one arm locked around her waist as he stood, lifting her up with him. "Enough of the social hour. You've been theirs long enough. The rest of tonight... is mine."