

Alpha-less 481

Chapter 481 The Goodbye He Couldn't Say

By the time everything was finally wrapped up, it was already eleven-thirty. Right then, Avery and the others returned.

"Tessa, you're still here?" Stephen was so exhausted he collapsed onto the couch the moment he walked in.

"Do you have any events this afternoon? If not, just go home and rest. If you keep pushing like this, you're going to end up collapsing on stage."

"There's one more event."

"Stephen, is this one important?"

"It's already been signed. If we bail now, people will say the Avery band is acting like divas," Mateo explained. He knew how worn out the group was, but they had already committed. Backing out now just wasn't an option..

"I'm fine, Ms. Tessa. I'll just nap here in your office for a bit, and I'll be good to go again," Stephen mumbled before dozing off on the couch. Their recent schedule really had been brutal, but it only proved just how hot they were right now.

Ms. Tessa frowned. Still, since a contract had been signed, it wouldn't be right to break it. A person needed to have some sense of integrity.

"Stephen, be more mindful of the workload in the future. We're done with variety shows that aren't related to music." Those shows boosted popularity, sure, but they were too draining.

Mateo nodded immediately. "Don't worry. I'll handle it."

Avery had something to discuss with Ms. Tessa, so the two went to her office.

"So? What did you want to talk about?" she asked once they were alone.

"It's nothing big. I just wanted to chat with you."

"You feeling too worn out lately?" she asked with concern. As the leader of the Avery band, if even he was exhausted, then things were clearly getting out of hand.

"No. This level of exposure is perfectly normal. Just because it's us doesn't mean we deserve special treatment."

"Avery, I'm not in this for the money. What I want is for you guys to be happy making music," she said. If she couldn't give them that, then what was the point of having them with her?

"Ms. Tessa, you-" Avery hesitated, but in the end said nothing.

"You've got something on your mind, don't you? If you do, just say it. There's no need to beat around the

bush with me."

"I want to take a break," Avery said plainly.

Ms. Tessa didn't quite understand what he meant by that. "Avery, what do you mean?"

"I want to leave the Avery band," he answered directly.

Ms. Tessa fell silent. "Why?" Whatever the reason, there had to be one if he wanted out.

"Ms. Tessa, please don't ask too much," Avery replied. Even though the Avery band was thriving right now, and he genuinely enjoyed working with her, he didn't want to keep living like this. Maybe it was time he faced what he'd been avoiding for so long.

Ms. Tessa said nothing. When she'd left in the past, the rest of the team must've felt the same way she did

now.

"Do the others know?"

"They don't," he said. He'd been gone long enough. It was time to return, even if it meant doing something he didn't love. Otherwise, he'd end up dragging everyone else down-including Ms. Tessa.

"Avery, aren't we best friends? Can't I at least know the reason?"

She didn't want to guilt him, but something about this didn't sit right.

Avery shook his head. "I'm just tired. I want to rest. I've been in this industry for a while now, and I'm over it."

"Alright. If you don't want to say, I won't force you. But are you saying you want to disband the Avery band?" What about the others? What were they supposed to do?

Avery stayed quiet. Yeah, that was the problem. He'd thought about it a lot. If he left, what would happen to the rest of the band?

"Don't overthink it. Take a few days to rest first. Maybe you're just burned out," Ms. Tessa said softly. "Let's not tell the others yet, okay? It'll affect their morale."

The Avery band had just made it through a lot together. If he left now, how would the others handle it? "Ms. Tessa... I'm sorry." Avery didn't want to make her feel stuck, but he really didn't know what else to do.

"Avery, you don't owe me an apology. No matter what your final decision is, I'll support you." Just because she now ran TS Entertainment didn't mean she'd place demands on him.

"Thanks. I'll head out now." Avery stood up, and as he stepped out of her office, he quietly whispered, "I'm sorry..."

Chapter 482 Hidden Reasons

At noon, Ysabel finished her training and came to find Ms. Tessa.

48 Pearls

"Come on, let's go eat! My uncle's already waiting downstairs," Ysabel said with a cheerful grin. After an exhausting morning, she was truly starving.

"Alright, let's go."

Ms. Tessa tidied up the documents on her desk and stood up. But her mind was still occupied by what Avery had said.

Avery was someone who loved music deeply. He'd stayed with the band through its toughest times. How could someone like that suddenly feel tired and want to leave? There had to be another reason-something more than he was letting on.

But what exactly was it?

"Tessa, what are you thinking about?" Ysabel asked, realizing she was being completely ignored. She had to stop walking just to get her attention.

Ms. Tessa snapped back to reality. "It's nothing. Let's go."

The two of them left TS Entertainment and got into Landon's car.

Ms. Tessa didn't say a word the entire ride. Ysabel, sensing her mood, also kept quiet. Landon focused on driving, but he noticed right away-she was distracted.

She had something on her mind.

Was there trouble at TS Entertainment?

When they got back to the Wisteria Apartment, the housekeeper had already prepared lunch—a well-balanced spread that looked and smelled amazing. Ysabel was thrilled. She sat down eagerly; she hadn't felt this hungry in ages. "Ma'am, your cooking is amazing!" she said sweetly, her words warm and full of praise.

"As long as you like it. If there's anything special you want, just let me know and I'll make it for dinner," the lady replied with a smile.

"I like everything you make."

Landon quietly served a bowl of soup for Ms. Tessa. She took a few sips, only ate half a piece of bread, and barely touched the dishes.

After lunch, Ysabel helped the housekeeper clear the table, while Landon brought Ms. Tessa into the study. "What's going on? You're not yourself. You barely ate lunch," he asked gently.

Any small change in her, he could sense immediately.

"Avery says he wants to leave the Avery band."

That... well, whether he stayed or not, it was Avery's choice. No one could make that decision for him.

"Did he give a reason?" If it was a valid one, maybe it could be understood.

"He didn't. But I don't think it's that simple." She knew how much Avery loved the band. There was no way he'd walk away so easily—not without something forcing his hand.

"So what are you going to do?" She'd started TS Entertainment for the Avery band, hadn't she?

"I don't know." This wasn't a simple issue. But she also didn't want to pressure Avery. So right now, she honestly didn't know what to do.

"Give it some time. Maybe Avery just needs a few days to cool off. Could be a spur-of-the-moment decision."

"It's not impulsive. He's probably been thinking about it for a while."

"Do you think... it's because of me? Maybe he likes you, but your fated mate is me." If that were the reason, Landon could understand.

"No way." That wasn't it. Avery wasn't that kind of person.

"Alright. Then I'll look into it for you." The only way to fix this was to find the root cause.

"I'll handle it myself."

The bond between her and the other members of the Avery band wasn't something outsiders could fully understand. Whatever it was, she wanted to deal with it on her own.

"Okay, I get it." If she didn't want him involved, he wouldn't force it. But it hurt to see her so upset.

"Do you want me to talk to Avery?" Sometimes, things were easier said between

men.

"No need. I don't want anyone else to know about this just yet. Don't worry-I'll take care of it myself." No matter what happened, she just hoped Avery was following his heart.

The rest didn't matter as much.

"Alright." Landon would always support any decision she made.

"By the way, about the fragmented Wolf Codex you mentioned yesterday-I've already sent someone to the Nightshade Pack's library to look into it. Their archives are the most complete in the werewolf world. Scrolls like this are usually well preserved, but they don't have digital records, so it'll take some time to locate. As soon as there's any news, I'll let you know."

Chapter 483 The Words He Couldn't Take Back

"Thank you!" Ms. Tessa said, kissing Landon on the cheek in excitement.

Landon chuckled and teased, "It's not that big a deal, but with how excited you are, I almost thought you were the one who needed it."

Ms. Tessa froze for a split second before quickly regaining her composure. "I'm just happy for Grandpa. He's wanted a complete copy of that ancient text for a long time."

Of course, Landon noticed that brief hesitation. He didn't know what she was hiding, but anything she asked for, he'd support without question. After all, he'd ended up with a little girlfriend full of secrets. What choice did he have but to indulge her?

"If you ever need help, come to me. It makes me happy to be able to help you, understand?" Landon said seriously. "And if you still can't figure out what's going on with Avery, come to me."

"I know. I'll try talking to him first. If anything comes up, I'll let you know."

But over the next few days, Ms. Tessa didn't get a chance to see Avery at all.

The Avery band's workload had also eased up significantly during that time. The members finally had a chance to rest properly. And after catching up on sleep, they bounced back quickly-after all, they were still

young.

Their new album was a huge success.

Now, they were closer than ever to achieving their dreams, and Stephen was clearly thrilled.

"Captain, I think things are really great right now! I really hope this can go on," Stephen said enthusiastically as they grilled on the rooftop of the villa. "It's such a shame Ms. Tessa couldn't make it. A moment like this doesn't feel complete without her."

"Yeah, things were so rough back when we were at Tianle. Even then, we didn't give up. quit now."

There's no way

we'd

"Captain, what's on your mind? Why aren't you saying anything?" Stephen nudged him with his elbow when he saw him spacing out.

Avery knew this moment would come. He knew that eventually, the topic would fall to him. But how could he say it? They trusted him so much. How could he let them down?

What would they think if he told them now?

He didn't even want to imagine it.

"Captain, are you upset about something? If you're not feeling great, let's just ask Ms. Tessa for time of...d all go somewhere to relax."

The captain was their rock. If he wasn't okay, everyone would be shaken.

"I'm leaving the Avery band," Avery said at last. No matter how painful it was, he had to say it.

The words had barely left his mouth when the whole rooftop went silent.

Stephen rubbed his ear. "Captain, what did you just say? Can you say that again? I honestly didn't catch it."

He was still smiling.

"No, you all heard me," Avery said slowly. "And I'll say it again. I, Avery, am leaving the Avery band. I won't be continuing with you."

This time, Stephen could no longer pretend nothing had happened.

"Since when? How long have you been planning this? How could you just drop this on us? We've been together for so long, and now you're just quitting?" Stephen's voice grew louder, his emotions more and more intense.

Were all those years of brotherhood meaningless?

Why leave without a word?

"Stephen, calm down. Everyone has their own path to walk. Mine just ends here. I really am sorry to all of you."

"Avery!" Stephen shouted, voice cracking. "Do you even know what you're saying? Do you realize how hard we've fought to get where we are today? I was nearly beaten to death for this band, and I never gave up. And now you, our captain, say you're giving up? If you walk away, what happens to us?"

Had he even thought about that?

Seeing Stephen like this made Avery feel awful.

He reached out, wanting to pat him on the shoulder, but Stephen stepped back sharply.

"If you want to leave, fine. But I want to know why." Stephen's voice trembled. When Ms. Tessa had left, it had been hard enough to accept. And now, even their captain wanted out?

Chapter 484 The Breaking Point

"Stephen, calm down. You're too impulsive. When I'm not around anymore, you need to learn to manage your emotions, alright? And don't forget, you still have Ms. Tessa. She'll find the right lead vocalist. So even without me, the Avery band will still go on."

Stephen let out a cold laugh. "So you've got it all figured out, haven't you? You're not here to talk this over with us-you're just here to inform us."

Avery felt awful, but in the end, he could only nod. "Everyone has a right to make their own choice. I just hope you can respect mine."

Stephen smashed the beer bottle beside him onto the ground. "Sure, I respect you. In fact, let's just scrap the idea of replacing the lead. Let's disband the Avery band right now, at the height of our success."

If that was better for everyone, then so be it. Maybe he was the only one who'd been holding on so tightly all along.

"Stephen, don't be like this. Just because I'm gone doesn't mean you can't move forward," Avery said helplessly.

"Captain, are you really serious about this? After everything we've been through, after all the struggles... how can you choose to walk away now?" another member asked, unable to accept

1. it.

"Captain, don't be rash. Whatever it is you're dealing with, we can face it

together," one of the others chimed in, trying to reassure him.

"Yeah, let's not jump to this. We've made it through worse. Things are finally going well-whatever it is, we can fix it."

But Stephen's tears fell without warning.

Even when Evan had beaten him nearly to death, he hadn't cried. But now, he couldn't stop himself.

"Avery... I'm sorry," Avery said quietly. He couldn't make it to the end with them. He hadn't kept his promise.

Stephen shook his head. "Don't apologize to me. You haven't wronged me." He didn't want to say anything more. He didn't want them to see him like this. He turned around and headed back to his room.

"Stephen-"

The others called after him, but he simply waved them off. Right now, he just wanted to be alone.

"What is going on? How is it that we were able to grit our teeth and pull through when things were at their worst, but now that everything is finally looking up, this happens?" one of the members said in frustration.

Their dreams had only just begun. How could it all fall apart like this?

Avery had no words. After all, he was the one who started it.

Stephen shut himself in his room and broke down in tears.

They had worked so hard to get where they were. If the Avery band really disbanded now, how could he possibly accept it? He locked himself inside and refused to come out, no matter who knocked or called him.

In the end, Avery had no choice but to call Ms. Tessa. As soon as she got the call, she came over immediately.

"Stephen found out, didn't he?"

There was no way he would've reacted like this otherwise.

Avery nodded. It all came back to him-he hadn't handled it well.

"You go rest. Leave this to me. Everything will be fine," Ms. Tessa said softly.

"Tessa, I'm sorry for dragging you into all this. I really didn't want it to turn out like this."

He'd always been the one who wanted the Avery band to last forever. And yet, now he was the one causing so much turmoil.

"Avery, don't beat yourself up. Stephen's just having a hard time processing it. That's how the world works- no one can stay with anyone forever. When it's time to part ways, you have to part ways, no matter how much it hurts."

They didn't know why he was leaving, and that made it all the more painful.

"I won't be staying here these next few days. If you can't reach me, don't worry. I just want to be alone for a while," Avery said.

The summoning mark on the back of his neck was darkening at a visible rate-it was a sign the werewolf clan's message spell was about to take effect. If he didn't leave now, his father's men might come to drag him back by force. And when that happened, the rest of the band could get caught up in it too.

Chapter 485 The Weight of Silence

Ms. Tessa frowned. "What do you mean by that? Are you leaving? Where are you going?" If he just walked away like this with no explanation, how were the other members supposed to take it?

"Avery, you should know no matter what you do, I'll support you. But you can't just leave without a word."

Avery knew full well that what he was doing wasn't right. But he truly had no other choice.

"You just need to know that wherever I go, I'll be safe. You don't have to worry about anything else." There were things he simply couldn't tell her.

"Avery, you can't do this. Even when I left before, I still told all of you the reason, didn't I?"

"I really am just tired. I want to rest for a while. I'm sick of this life in the entertainment industry."

He clung tightly to that explanation. No one could force the truth out of him.

"Let's talk about this tomorrow, alright? Right now, the most important thing is Stephen." He was the youngest among them and had the hardest time dealing with emotional blows.

Avery nodded. "Take care of Stephen. I'm leaving him in your hands."

Ms. Tessa stared at him, brows still furrowed. The way he was speaking, it felt like once he left, he wouldn't be coming back. It made her chest ache.

But she couldn't dwell on it now. She turned and went straight to Stephen's door, knocking firmly.

"Stephen, it's me. I know you're in there. Open the door."

"Did you hear me? If you don't open up, I'm going to kick this door down. I mean it."

"Stephen! I'm saying this one last time-open the door!"

She pounded on the door, loud and insistent, but there was no response from inside.

The other three members were clearly worried

"Tessa, do you think... do you think Stephen might be thinking something extreme?" The second that possibility was spoken aloud, Ms. Tessa's face went pale.

She couldn't wait another second. Without hesitation, she lifted her foot and, with a loud bang, kicked the door open.

Inside, they found Stephen sitting alone on the windowsill, staring blankly out the window.

"Stephen-"

"Don't come near me!" he shouted without turning around.

The other members all froze, glancing nervously at one another, not knowing what to do next.

Seeing that he hadn't done anything drastic, Ms. Tessa let out a small breath of relief. Then she turned to

the others.

"You all go get some rest. Leave this to me. No matter what happens, we're always part of the Avery band."

Even if she'd left before, her heart had always remained with them.

"Ms. Tessa, we're counting on you. Stephen listens to you the most. Please talk to him. As for the captain, let's deal with that tomorrow."

She nodded.

After the others left, she quietly walked over, making sure not to disturb Stephen. Then she sat down on the windowsill across from him, saying nothing, just keeping him company. At this point, he probably wouldn't be able to hear anything anyway.

She stayed there with him like that until nearly dawn. Rain started to fall softly outside. Only then did Stephen lift his head.

"Tessa... did I do something wrong? Is that why the captain wants to leave?" It was the only explanation he could come up with. If that was the case, how could he ever forgive himself?

The Avery band was his anchor in life. He couldn't bear to see it fall apart..

"Stephen, people have to grow up. If he's made the decision to leave, then there must be a reason he has to go. As his friends, the best we can do is hope he finds happiness. If we can't support him, then who else will?"

She truly was thinking about what was best for Avery.

Stephen's eyes turned red. "So really... the most selfish one is me, isn't it? I've only ever thought about what I want, never what anyone else might need."

They must all be so disappointed in him.

"Stephen, don't think like that. I know how much you care about the Avery band. Nothing has been finalized yet.

Let me figure out why Avery wants to leave. Once we understand, we'll deal with it together, okay?"

Stephen nodded.

"Tessa, why did you leave back then?" he asked quietly. It was something he'd never been able to let go of.

Chapter 486 The Soul of the Band

"Stephen, everyone has their own path to choose. I've been gone for a long time now, so there's no need to dwell on it anymore. Even if I'm not physically there, my heart is always with you all. I'll always be a part of the Avery band. I just didn't want to live constantly under the spotlight, that's all."

That kind of flashy life had never been what she wanted.

"Yeah... okay. I understand."

"So give me a little time, alright? Let me figure out what's going on with Avery, let me understand why he wants to leave. And until then, you need to take care of yourself. Don't make everyone worry again."

He was nineteen already-an adult. He couldn't keep being so emotional and impulsive.

"And don't let the fans find out about this yet."

"Got it." Stephen felt genuinely ashamed. Ms. Tessa was younger than he was, yet she was always the one who had to handle his messes.

"You don't need to worry about me. I'll take good care of myself. Your only task right now is to figure out why the captain wants to leave."

"Alright. Try to get some sleep. All of tomorrow's schedules have been canceled. Just stay here and get some proper rest."

"Stephen probably doesn't know about that yet," Stephen reminded her.

"Yeah. I'll let him know."

Only after watching Stephen lie down did Ms. Tessa leave the room.

The moment she stepped out, the other three members stood up immediately. They hadn't left. They'd been waiting outside the whole time.

"Tessa, what are you planning to do about the captain?"

"Yeah... if we don't have a captain, are we even still the Avery band? Should we just disband?"

No matter who they brought in, it wouldn't be Avery. And if it wasn't Avery, then it wasn't the Avery band.

They couldn't accept a replacement. If Avery left, then the band would have to end. A band couldn't exist without a lead.

"Alright. For now, just get some rest. I'll figure out what's really going on. Until I do, no one says a word to anyone."

The three nodded. Ms. Tessa was someone they trusted.

They believed in her.

"Please keep an eye on Stephen. His emotions are unstable. He can't have another breakdown right now."

"Leave Stephen to us. You find time to talk with the captain. Even if he really is leaving, we deserve a reason. We're not asking for much-just the truth."

Ms. Tessa nodded. "Yeah. I understand."

"Tessa, thank you for everything."

She smiled. "No matter what, I'll always be part of the Avery band. And right now, I feel exactly the same way you do."

After leaving the band's villa, she found Landon waiting outside.

The moment she got in the car, Ms. Tessa let out a long sigh.

Only by Landon's side could she drop the strong front and allow her emotions to show.

Seeing her like this, Landon knew Avery truly intended to leave.

He gently held her hand.

"It's alright. No one can stay in your life forever-not even your parents. So how could we expect it from friends?"

Ms. Tessa didn't respond. Of course she knew he was right. But even knowing that didn't make it any easier to accept.

Avery... he was the soul of the band. If he left, then the Avery band would cease to exist.

Replace him with another lead?

None of them could accept that.

Back at the apartment, Landon poured her a warm glass of milk. "It's really late. Drink this and get some sleep. No matter what it is, as long as it's a problem, it can be solved."

"Okay."

She knew he was worried about her.

"Honestly, I can accept the outcome. What I can't accept is the reason he gave for it."

There had to be more to it.

"Yeah."

After lying on the couch for a bit, Landon gently picked her up and carried her into the bedroom, laying her down on the bed.

"For now, don't think about anything else. Just get some rest."

"Okay. I'll sleep."

She didn't usually sleep well, and she wasn't really sleepy at the moment. She wasn't someone who liked forcing herself to rest. But when she saw the serious look on his face, she nodded and closed her eyes.

Breathing in the scent of his pinewood pheromones, Ms. Tessa slowly let her thoughts quiet down. Landon stayed beside her the whole time, not moving until her breathing grew calm and steady.

Once he was sure she was asleep, he quietly left the room.

Then, he pulled out his phone and made a call to Avery,

"Come out for a drink."

Chapter 487 A Meeting with Shadows

The next morning, Ms. Tessa woke to find herself still in Landon's arms.

Seeing her awake, he placed a gentle kiss on her forehead. "How'd you sleep?"

"With you next to me? Of course I slept well." She nuzzled against his chest

affectionately. "Why haven't you gone to the office yet?"

"I wanted to wait until you woke up. No rush."

"Hmm... did you go out last night?" she asked lazily.

She vaguely remembered stirring in the middle of the night and finding the bed empty. He hadn't returned until two hours later, and by then she'd fallen back into a deep sleep.

"Yeah. Something came up. Had to step out." Landon didn't explain further. "Want to get up and have breakfast? The housekeeper's already made everything."

"Alright."

While she was washing up, Ms. Tessa received a message from one of the band members-Stephen's mood had stabilized, and now everyone just wanted to understand why Avery was leaving.

That was what she wanted to know too. She immediately called Avery.

When the call came in, Avery was still asleep, sprawled across his bed. He'd drunk too much with Landon the night before. His head throbbed like it was going to explode. Hangovers were miserable.

He fumbled around blindly before finally finding his phone. "Hello?" he mumbled hoarsely.

"Avery, where are you? Can we meet up?"

"Ms. Tessa, I've already said everything there is to say. No matter what you ask, my answer won't change."

Ms. Tessa was speechless. She hadn't even said anything yet, and he was already brushing her off? Was that really necessary?

"I'm just asking to meet. What, are you planning to never see any of us again?" Even if he was set on leaving, it didn't have to be like this.

Avery didn't reply for a long time.

She was right.

Was he really planning to never see them again?

Could he really be okay with that?

"... Alright. Let's meet at noon. Just not at TS Entertainment. I'm not ready to face the others yet."

He couldn't bring himself to look them in the eye. He was terrified of seeing their disappointment. Because in the end, he really had let them down. And for that, he felt truly sorry.

"Okay. Let's meet at the Silvermoon Estate at eleven." With the time and place settled, Ms. Tessa hung up and let out a deep breath.

Avery was seriously hard to deal with.

That noon meeting was probably going to be anything but smooth.

After breakfast, Landon personally drove her to TS Entertainment before heading off to Thorne Corp for his own work.

Ms. Tessa handled a few matters at TS Entertainment, and once the agreed time approached, she left for Silvermoon Estate.

Meanwhile, Avery didn't wake until close to noon. After a quick shower and getting ready to leave, he opened his door-only to find several men in black suits blocking the hallway. They were tall, broad-shouldered, and carried an unmistakable edge in their eyes. These weren't ordinary bodyguards.

His brows drew together. "What the hell is this? I told you I'd go back. I just need a little more time to finish things here. That's not allowed?"

The man in front stepped forward, voice stiff. "Young Master, we're just following orders. Please come with us."

They all knew-if they failed to bring him back, they'd be the ones punished.

"I'm going to meet someone. You wait here. After that, I'll speak to my father myself." Avery understood they were in a tough spot, but he had his own priorities. "Sir, we really-" one of them tried to object.

"What? You want to get physical here?" Avery's gaze turned ice cold. "You know what I am now. If this turns into a scene and fans catch it on camera, it won't be good for any of us."

He wasn't afraid of a fight. He just didn't want to cause unnecessary trouble.

The men exchanged glances and fell silent.

They knew he was right. If things escalated here, none of them would get off clean.

Finally, the lead man clenched his jaw. "Fine. We'll wait here. But don't make us look bad. Walter said if you stall any longer, he won't hesitate to go after the people close to you."

It was a direct threat, sharp and unambiguous.

Avery's pupils instantly contracted into narrow, dangerous slits. He lunged forward

and grabbed the lead man by the throat. "I'll go back with you. But if any of you

lay a finger on my friends, I swear-I'll make you regret it."

Chapter 488 More Than Goodbye

At the appointed time, Avery still hadn't arrived at Silvermoon Estate, but Ms. Tessa didn't leave. She remained seated, waiting patiently.

Silvermoon Estate was known for its strict privacy and high-level security. With dedicated personnel and fully enclosed barriers, even someone as popular as Avery didn't need to worry about being spotted by the public. No one would be able to track his movements here, much less expose anything he did inside.

It was a long wait before Avery finally showed up.

"I thought you weren't coming," Ms. Tessa said.

"Sorry. Something came up unexpectedly and delayed me."

"It's alright. I haven't been waiting that long." She had time, after all.

Ms. Tessa handed him the menu. "Go ahead and order. We'll talk over lunch."

Avery made his selections, but he only picked dishes that Ms. Tessa liked.

He'd always been like that—no matter what the situation was, he always put her preferences first.

Seeing this, Ms. Tessa didn't know what to say. After a moment, she picked the menu back up and added two dishes Avery liked.

The waiter, recognizing the superstar in the private room, didn't react at all and simply went about his job.

"You don't look so great," Ms. Tessa said bluntly.

Avery patted his face. "Had too much to drink last night. Not feeling great today."

"You drank? With who?"

"Your Landon," Avery said without hesitation.

Mr. Landon really was good to Ms. Tessa. He paid attention to everything about her. He'd come to see Avery last night because of this situation-because he didn't want to see her worried.

Knowing someone like that was by her side made it easier for Avery to let go. Ms. Tessa hadn't expected that Landon's "something came up" last night had been going to meet Avery. Realizing it now, a warmth spread through her chest. He was always quietly doing things for her without ever needing recognition.

Not wanting to get too sentimental, she teased, "You two are too much. Drinking without inviting That's just rude."

"Ms. Tessa, I'm honestly glad you found someone like Mr. Landon. He's your fated mate, and he treats you so well. That's enough to set my mind at ease."

"Avery, I don't want to hear you talk like that-like you're saying goodbye forever." They were best friends. If something was wrong, couldn't he just tell her?

"We used to promise each other that no matter what happened, we'd talk about it and face it together. Don't

you know how much it hurts everyone when you act like this?"

Avery laughed, brushing it off casually. "It's really not a big deal. My family just wants me to stop working and come home to inherit the family estate."

"What?" Ms. Tessa blinked, stunned.

He had never once mentioned his family before. This was the first time she'd even heard of them.

And now they suddenly wanted him to come back and inherit everything?

"The real question is-do you want to go back?" she asked. If he didn't want to, he could just keep singing.

"Tessa, you know I'm an adult now. Some things aren't about what I want. It's time

I went home and took on the responsibilities that are mine."

People couldn't be selfish forever. He'd been selfish long enough.

She understood exactly how he felt. Just like her-she didn't care much about the Sinclair Corporation. But since her grandfather hoped she would take over, hoped she would carry it forward, how could she let him down?

Some things weren't just about passion. They were about duty.

"Is that really all it is?" she asked. She couldn't shake the feeling that he still

wasn't telling her everything.

"Alright, don't overthink it. You know how I am. If I didn't want to go, no one could force me, right?"

"So you're really going to leave, just like that?"

He'd been with the Avery band for so long. Could he really walk away?

"Yes."

He had to.

Because nothing was more important than keeping Ms. Tessa and the others safe.

Chapter 489 One Last Stage

"Give me one last month," Ms. Tessa said suddenly, an idea striking her. "Let's hold a concert together You've always wanted me to perform with you, right? This time, I'll stand on stage with you as a final goodbye."

A concert, with her?

The idea stirred something in Avery's heart.

Of course it did. This had always been his dream. How could he not be moved?

"So? Let's put on a rock concert together. No matter what happens afterward, I want to join just once-as a member of the Avery band."

"Alright. I'll do it," Avery agreed.

No matter how hard it was going to be, he'd make time for this final month.

"Good."

She needed time-time to dig out the truth. She still didn't believe this was the full story. But for now, a little time was enough to start dealing with everything that was happening.

After lunch, they left Silvermoon Estate. Avery didn't return to the company with her.

"Where are you going?" Ms. Tessa asked, concerned.

"I left something at the hotel. I'm going to pick it up." What he really needed was

to go deal with the people his father had sent.

Watching him get into the car, Ms. Tessa finally hailed a ride back to TS Entertainment.

Inside the conference room, the other members of the Avery band were already waiting. Seeing their expressions, Ms. Tessa took a deep breath.

"We have one month," she said. "In this month, I'll figure out the truth. I've already told Avery that we'll put on a concert together. Let's treat it as a farewell show. No matter what happens in the end, I don't want him leaving with any regrets."

People couldn't be that selfish. They couldn't force Avery to stay against his will. "A concert?" Stephen asked.

"Stephen, if in the end there's really nothing we can do, I hope you'll be able to accept it."

Not everything in life could go the way they wanted.

"Yeah... okay. I get it." If the captain truly wanted to leave, then the least they could do was let him go i

peace.

After all, for the past few years, the captain had taken care of each and every one of them. They couldn't try to guilt him into staying forever. It was time to grow up.

"I'll have the planning department start on preparations. You guys start rehearsing. A concert like this takes

serious work."/

"Tessa, are you really going to perform too?"

"Yeah. I'll be there." Wasn't this what they'd always wished for?

That afternoon, during rehearsal, Avery arrived. The moment Stephen saw him,

he jumped out from behind the drum kit and ran over.

"Captain, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said those things to you!"

No matter what, the captain had always supported him. How could he let him down now?

Avery patted him on the shoulder. "Stephen, thank you. Thank you for understanding."

"Alright, Captain. Let's not overthink it. Let's just give it everything we've got-one last time!" No matter what came after, even if this was the end of the Avery band, they would make it count.

"Yeah! Let's make music together!" Ms. Tessa pushed open the door and walked in with a smile.

Seeing her, Avery smiled too.

No matter the cost, for this one last month, he wanted to enjoy music with everyone. Even if he could never do what he loved again, this one month-he would live it to the fullest.

Ms. Tessa joined them. The six of them linked arms, forming a circle.

"Let's do this!"

This had always been their way of cheering themselves on. It had never changed.

And Ms. Tessa-she'd been gone far too long.

This time, no matter what, she wouldn't miss a single moment.

"Let's do this!" she said, voice trembling with excitement. It had been so long

since she'd felt this rush-this joy.

It was the kind of feeling she'd never forget.

Chapter 490

Just One More Night Together

All afternoon, Ms. Tessa rehearsed with the Avery band. The six of them felt like they had gone back five years-back when they had nothing, but could still enjoy the pure joy of making music together.

It wasn't until the sky had darkened that Ms. Tessa finally stood up and said goodbye. "It's late. I'm heading home."

"Tessa, it's already this late. Why not just stay here tonight? Why go all the way back?" someone asked.

Ms. Tessa shook her head. "No. Landon's still waiting outside."

He understood the bond she had with the band, so he hadn't come into the rehearsal room at all. But she knew him-if she didn't go home tonight, he would wait out there all night without saying a word.

Once the others heard that, they stopped trying to convince her to stay and walked her out instead.

Sure enough, the moment she stepped outside, she saw Landon's car parked nearby. As soon as he saw her, he got out and opened the door for her.

Ms. Tessa sank into the seat and leaned back without saying a word. She really was a little tired.

"Tired?" Landon asked with concern. He knew she was planning a concert and hadn't objected- whatever she wanted to do, he would support it.

"Yeah. It's been a while since I practiced with them. I'm definitely a little exhausted... but I really love this feeling."

She'd never wanted to debut or live under the spotlight, but she truly did love music.

"Then that's all that matters. If there's anything I can help with for the concert, just tell me."

"Not for now."

"Alright. But if there's anything you need, you have to let me know. Okay?"

"Of course. Don't worry. If I need your help, I'll definitely tell you."

"Just be careful when you go out lately. Evan's backed into a corner wounded dogs bite harder. He's dangerous, and not the kind of guy to play fair."

Landon couldn't be by her side twenty-four hours a day. In the end, she'd still have to be careful.

"You be careful too," she said. She worried about him as well. No matter how strong he was, he was still just

one person.

And she didn't want to become his weakness.

"Don't worry. Evan wouldn't dare touch me." Evan knew exactly what kind of man Landon was-and could and couldn't be messed with.

When they arrived at Wisteria Apartment, Landon went straight to the bathroom and drew a hot bath in the large tub. Then he returned to the living room and gently picked up Ms. Tessa, who was resting on the

couch.

"You've had a long day. A hot bath will help you relax."

"Mm." Ms. Tessa felt like he was spoiling her too much. So much that she was starting to lose the ability to take care of herself.

"Landon, aren't you spoiling me a little too much? You're going to ruin me."

Landon chuckled. "I want to spoil you. And even if I do ruin you, that's fine- because I plan to keep spoiling you."

He always worried he wasn't giving her enough. He always wanted to give her the best of everything.

There was over a decade between them. Naturally, he sometimes feared there might be a gap between them.

Ms. Tessa leaned into his arms.

"Well, looks like I'm stuck with you for life. No one else in this world could ever treat me better than you.

After experiencing the kind of care he gave, how could anyone else possibly compare?

Hearing her say that made Landon incredibly happy.

"I like that. I like when you say 'for life.'"

He carried her into the bathroom and gently set her down. "Want me to undress you?"

He'd be more than happy to help.

Ms. Tessa laughed and boldly raised her arms. "Yes."

Landon raised an eyebrow.

She definitely understood what he was implying. If she had said no, he would have held back for the night.

But clearly, she still had the energy for some nighttime activity.

And that... he wasn't about to pass up.