

Alpha-less 521

Chapter 521 A Long Night, A Gentle Dawn

Knowing she was exhausted, Landon didn't disturb her. He simply drove in silence.

Her face still wore heavy stage makeup.

It had begun to smudge a little.

But even like that, it didn't take away from her beauty in the slightest.

One of Landon's hands held hers.

The other rested on the steering wheel.

"I know you're tired. Sleep for a while, okay? I'll wake you when we get there."

"I'm alright. Let me keep you company."

It was already past 2 a.m.

He had to be exhausted too.

She didn't want him driving alone while tired-it was dangerous.

"Just trust me and rest, alright?"

Tessa smiled. Her delicate face lit up with that stunning smile.

"I do trust you. But I still want to stay with you. I don't want you to be alone."

It wasn't about doubt. She just wanted to be there.

He'd waited so long for her at the stadium.

Quietly, patiently.

Now it was her turn to sit with him.

But her eyes were struggling to stay open.

Landon's heart ached for her.

The wind tousled her long hair.

+8 Pearle

"Alright, trust me—I'm not even a little sleepy. You're clearly worn out. Get some

rest. It hurts me to see you like this."

Tessa turned her head to look at him, her gaze calm and sincere.

There was something incredibly gentle and obedient about her expression.

"Sleep. We have a whole lifetime together. There's no rush."

"Okay."

Tessa really was exhausted.,

In just a few minutes, she had fallen asleep.

Landon pulled into Wisteria Apartment. Seeing she was sound asleep, he didn't wake her.

He got out of the car, opened the passenger door, and gently lifted her into his arms.

Then he headed toward the elevator.

Back at the apartment, he laid her down carefully on the bed.

Looking at the heavy makeup still on her face, Landon frowned slightly.

Sleeping in full makeup must be uncomfortable.

He had never removed makeup before, so he pulled out his phone and looked up how to do it.

When he saw how many steps were involved, his frown deepened.

Still, he followed the instructions online—fetching makeup remover and cotton pads—and began carefully taking off her makeup, bit by bit.

From the moment he touched her, Tessa had actually woken up.

But she was too tired to open her eyes.

And seeing how gentle and careful he was, she didn't stop him.

His touch was soft and delicate. Being cared for like this... she quickly drifted off again.

Because he was unfamiliar with the process, removing her makeup took nearly half an hour.

Afterward, he warmed a towel and wiped her face and neck.

Then he even wiped down her feet.

Watching her sleep so peacefully, Landon felt a deep sense of contentment.

She no longer needed sleep aids or rituals to fall asleep—that alone was worth celebrating.

He leaned over the bed and gently kissed her forehead.

"Sweet dreams."

The affection in his eyes was so deep, it seemed as though it might overflow.

The next morning, she woke up to find it was already past 8 a.m.

She'd gone to bed very late, but still wasn't used to sleeping in.

She picked up her phone and opened a video streaming site.

There it was—Avery Band's concert had already surpassed 10 billion views, and the comments were skyrocketing by the second.

This particular site had obtained exclusive rights to stream Avery Band's final concert. The company & Cro had been monitoring the numbers all night, knowing they'd hit the jackpot.

With the band's popularity peaking, many fans hadn't even gone to sleep after returning from the concert. They'd logged in immediately, bought premium memberships, and binge-watched the entire concert video through the night.

Though the concert was over, the Avery Band situation was far from settled.

Tessa thought to herself—maybe it was time to pay Avery's father a visit.

Chapter 522 The Girl Who Came Knocking

After changing clothes, Tessa stepped out of her room and found Landon already in the kitchen with breakfast ready.

"Come eat. You should res

It was still early, and Landon

buttons left undone.

today-yesterday was way too exhausting for you."

hadn't put on his tie yet. He wore only a white button-down shirt, the top few
trained and seductive.

The open collar revealed his chiseled chest-equal parts

Tessa walked up to him, wrapped her arms around his neck, pulled him close, and
kissed him.

Landon melted into the kiss, savoring her initiative. He loved when she took the
lead.

"You really went above and beyond yesterday."

He was a grown man, yet he'd removed her makeup for her.

Tessa was genuinely touched.

Landon slid his hands around her waist and smiled. "Not at all. Helping you
makes me happy.

Thank you, Landon. Really."

He bit her lip gently in mock reprimand.

"I've told you before-I don't want to hear you say 'thank you.'"

"Alright then. I love you."

Landon froze for a second.

Then his smile deepened.

Those three words-he could hear them a thousand times and never get tired of them.

He pressed her up against the table and kissed her again, long and deep, before finally letting go.

His breathing had grown heavier.

Tessa's cheeks were flushed red, her heartbeat racing.

"Alright, breakfast now."

If they kept going, he wasn't sure he'd be able to stop himself, and she clearly needed rest

After breakfast, Landon reluctantly said goodbye.

He wished he could spend all twenty-four hours of the day with her.

But his role didn't allow for that luxury.

As soon as he left, Tessa didn't stay home to rest either.

She returned to the bedroom, changed outfits again, put on sunglasses, and left the apartment.

At the Coldfang Mercenaries' headquarters....

"Boss, there's a young woman outside requesting to see you."

Xavier, current head of Coldfang Mercenaries-and Avery's father-glanced up at his subordinate.

"You're all useless. Do you think I'm someone just anyone can walk in and meet?"

"She said she's here to discuss something about your son."

Because it concerned the heir, they had dared report it.

At the mention of Avery, Xavier gave a slight nod.

"A young woman, huh? Fine. Bring her in."

Was she Avery's girlfriend?

If so, Xavier needed to take a good look.

He already had a preferred candidate in mind for his son's wife-someone strong, capable, a dominant female wolf.

That kind of partner could support Avery once he took over the Coldfang

Mercenaries.

Moments later, his men returned with Tessa in tow.

To show respect, she deliberately suppressed her wolf aura.

"You're Avery's girlfriend?" Xavier asked, frowning.

He was clearly unimpressed.

He couldn't sense even a ripple of wolf energy from her. She looked frail and

delicate. Definitely a low- ranking wolf. No way she could support Avery-more

likely, she'd just burden him.

-"Girlfriend?" Tessa blinked, confused.

When had she ever said she was Avery's girlfriend?

"You're not?" Xavier's tone turned colder. "Then what are you doing here? Do you

think I'm free enough to chat with strangers?",

His schedule was packed. He didn't have time for nonsense.

"You misunderstood. I'm not Avery's girlfriend. I'm his brother."

"You're a woman. And you call yourself my son's brother? Who do you think

you're insulting?"

Xavier's voice thundered as his palm slammed down on the desk in front of him-
splintering the heavy wood into dust.

"I meant no disrespect. You don't need to get angry."

Xavier had become a mercenary at thirteen and later built Coldfang Mercenaries
from the ground up. He'd lived every day dancing on the edge of death.

Even without releasing his aura, his sheer presence was overwhelming.

His subordinates didn't even dare breathe loudly.

But Tessa?

She stood there, calm and unbothered.

Not a flicker of fear in her eyes.

Chapter 523 Prove It in Blood

"You're not afraid of me?" Xavier's eyes widened in surprise.

Whenever he lost his temper, his men would tremble in fear. Yet this girl-meeting
him for the first time didn't even flinch

"Why should I be afraid of you?" Tessa shot back, genuinely puzzled.

"Do you even know where you are, little girl? Watch your mouth, or you won't be
walking out of here in one piece!"

Xavier had lived a blood-soaked life. Ruthless and hardened.

Tessa scoffed.

"What are you laughing at?" Xavier frowned. Was this girl just stupid? Only a fool would be so bold.

"I came to talk about Avery."

"You're not his girlfriend. What right do you have to meddle in his affairs? Why would I waste my time talking to you?" Xavier looked down on her with utter contempt.

He had no patience for the weak.

"Then what would make you willing to talk?" Tessa stared him down, refusing to retreat.

"Get her out of here," Xavier waved a hand.

He didn't want to hurt one of Avery's friends. If word got back to Avery, he'd be fuming. Better to just toss her out.

"Time to go, little girl," one of the guards urged.

Tessa sat there like a nail driven into the floor. "I told you-I'm not leaving until I've

talked about Avery."

"You got no shame?" a hulking man barked and reached for her arm. "This is

Coldfang Mercenaries, not your playground!"

"Don't touch me," Tessa said coldly. "I don't like being touched."

The man ignored her and grabbed anyway.

That did it.

She'd tried to be civil. He wanted to suffer?

Tessa spun, grabbed his wrist, and twisted. A sickening crack echoed in the room,

The man howled like a wolf, falling to the ground and writhing in agony, clutching

his arm.

Xavier's eyes twitched.

This girl looked weak. Her aura was faint. Yet her strike had been so vicious?

"You dare raise a hand on my turf?" Xavier's voice turned glacial. Murder flashed

in his eyes. The Coldfang

brand on his neck began to glow red.

"I know mercenaries live by strength. So let's fight. If I win, you hear me out. How

about it?"

Tessa knew wolves only respected

those in mercenary corps.

"You're challenging me?" Xavier's rage flared. It had been years since anyone

dared speak to him like this.

He stood abruptly, bones crackin 967

gel. His men shrank back

as wolf power surged from his body. The air around him thickened like

"Let's fight outside. Wouldn't want to break your stuff," Tessa said calmly.

She was here to talk about Avery.

g their headquarters wouldn't help.

"You cocky little brat," Xavier growled, eyes burning with battlelust.

"Boss, let me take her!" one of his men volunteered eagerly, cracking his

knuckles.

No need for the boss to deal with a girl.

"No," Xavier snapped. "She challenged me, so I'll fight her myself."

He was no coward. Anyone who challenged him-he faced them head-on.

They stepped into the wide courtyard. A circle of mercenaries surrounded them, eager for the show.

Xavier and Tessa stood face-to-face.

"I'll give you three moves," Xavier said, arms crossed, towering over her. "Don't come crying when you lose." "No need for that. A real fight deserves real respect.

I won't hold back," Tessa replied, eyes sharp. "Arrogant!" Xavier barked. "Let's see what you've got!"

Tessa moved first. Her body blurred like a shadow, claws slicing through the air as she lunged for Xavier's shoulder.

She deliberately suppressed her white wolf aura, using only fifty percent of her strength to avoid revealing too much.

Chapter 524 The Girl Who Knew Too Much

Xavier truly lived up to his title as the leader of Coldfang Mercenaries. His body twisted sharply as his claws met Tessa's strike, wolf force surging through him. Cracks splintered across the courtyard floor, dust flying

into the air.

The two moved so fast it was almost impossible to follow. Claw against claw, arcs of Moonforce burst in every direction like miniature fireworks lighting up the yard.

Xavier was seasoned in battle, every move heavy and ferocious like a beast. But Tessa was faster. Even using only thirty percent of her wolf force, the latent power of her white wolf bloodline gave her a subtle edge.

Xavier was startled. This girl is no ordinary wolf.

Grimacing, he poured more power into his blows, the Coldfang brand on his neck flaring crimson. He couldn't lose face in front of his men.

Noticing how hard he was pushing himself, Tessa cased back slightly-not out of fear, but to spare his pride. She hadn't come to humiliate him. She just wanted a conversation.

His subordinates were dumbs

The boss... is getting overpowered by a girl?

"Enough!" Xavier growled, stepping back, panting. "I'm done."

He hated to admit it, but continuing the fight would only end in defeat. The girl's speed and strength had far exceeded his expectations.

Clearly, she was hiding her true abilities. She was nothing like the weakling she appeared to be.

Avery... that kid wasn't exactly cut out for the mercenary world either. Sure, he'd awakened a high-grade wolf soul, but he'd never seen real combat, never had the heart for this life.

If Avery took over the Coldfang

1. c. ercenaries, he'd be eaten alive.

But with a girl like this by

With her, maybe... maybe it could

Tessa stepped back, complete Ork after all.

"Follow me."

steady, as if the fight hadn't even happened. "Now, can we talk?"

Xavier turned and led her into the study.

"What's

"Tessa."

s your name?" he asked, sti

settling into his chair.

"You're that Tessa?" Xavier squinted at her, sizing her up. He'd heard the name

from Avery-said she was his closest friend.

"Does Avery know you're here?"

"No."

"Alright then. What do you want?"

"I want you to let Avery keep doing music," Tessa said plainly. "He loves it. He's good at it. Forcing him back here to inherit the corps-he's miserable."

"Avery came back on his own. I didn't force him. I gave him five years to do whatever he wanted. Now I'm old: Someone's got to take the reins," Xavier said, frowning.

"He's not suited for it." Tessa shook her head. "This life-mercenaries, violence, killing-it's not him. He's an artist. Not a blade-licking soldier."

Xavier said nothing.

Of course he knew Avery wasn't right for this. But Coldfang Mercenaries was his life's work. What choice did he have?

"You've lived this life long enough to know how dangerous it is. Do you really want to throw Avery into that pit?" Tessa locked eyes with him, her voice unwavering.

Xavier fell silent, a flicker of conflict crossing his gaze. As a father, of course he wanted his son safe.

But who else could carry this burden if not Avery?

Seeing his hesitation, Tessa pressed on. "I know your health is failing. The Coldfang Battle Array depends on the commander's core. That's why you need Avery. But it's not the only way. The formation could be redesigned-with special crystal cores to stabilize the center, reducing your load. Or... you could choose a different successor from within the corps. Someone more qualified. I'm sure someone like that exists. It's just a question of whether you're willing to consider it."

Xavier's eyes narrowed. His expression turned wary. "How do you know about that?"

"Avery told me."

"I'm not talking about him. How do you know how to modify the formation?" His tone turned sharp. "That array's energy flow, the wolf-core trajectories, the real-time kill-field simulation models-that knowledge only comes from ten years in a slaughterhouse./No outsider should even know those systems."

Tessa didn't flinch. She met his gaze with cool calm.

Chapter 525 His Bottom Line

"I happened to read some ancient wolf-clan battle array texts. If you're interested,

I can share them with you."

Xavier fell silent..

Tessa seized the moment. "Avery carried this burden for five years. You know how much he loves music. You've lived this mercenary life long enough to know the dangers. Are you really willing to trap him in this forever?"

Xavier's eyes flickered with conflict, his expression layered and unreadable.

"You don't understand, kid," Xavier said lowly. "Those energy crystals for modifying the battle array aren't easy to come by. Outsiders can't be trusted with succession—loyalty's never guaranteed. Things in this corps aren't as simple as you think."

He waved a hand. "That's enough. I'll let your little visit slide this time. Go home."

There was no reason to keep talking. In his eyes, there was no other option- Avery was his only son. He had to inherit Coldfang Mercenaries.

"I truly hope you'll think about this, carefully. None of us want Avery to get hurt. We all want him to be happy."

But just as she speaking and was about to leave, a commotion erupted outside.

Avery burst into the room.

"Dad! I told you not to touch the people around me! I said I'd do anything you asked, but you couldn't lay a hand on them. How could you go back on your word?" The moment Avery learned that Tessa had shown up at Coldfang Mercenaries, he completely lost his composure.

He stormed in, yanked Tessa behind him protectively.

"Tessa, are you okay? Did he hurt you?"

"I'm fine," Tessa said calmly, grabbing his wrist. "Don't get so worked up. He didn't bring me here-I came on my own."

Avery stared at her, completely thrown.

"What do you mean, Tessa? I told you-stay out of my business. Why would you come here? What if something happened to you? What would I do?"

He was furious.

Didn't she understand how worried/people would be?

"I didn't mean anything by it," she said. "I just wanted to talk to your father."

Avery's face darkened.

He knew he had overreacted. But what could he do? When it came to Tessa, he could never stay calm.

"Tessa, just go home. Stay out of this, from now on."

Tessa frowned. "Avery-"

But he said nothing more.

"Just go."

48 realis

Seeing that he was genuinely upset, she didn't push it. It was clear nothing more could be done today.

"I'm sorry for the interruption," she said to Xavier before turning to leave.

She quietly shut the door behind her.

"Avery," Xavier said as soon as she was gone, "you like her, don't you?"

It was obvious from his reaction.

Avery didn't answer.

"I was wrong today. I'm sorry. But I'm warning you-don't ever hurt the people around me again," he said coldly.

coward? If yo

"Avery, come on, you're my son. Could you stop being such a like her, then go for it!"

After fighting with Tessa and talking to her, Xavier's view had shifted. If she were to become his daughter-in-law... that wouldn't be so bad.

At the very least, with her around, no one would dare bully Avery.

"Dad, Tessa already has a destined mate. Don't start with this nonse again. And stop threatening my friends. That's my bottom line."

"So what? Even if someone has a destined mate, they can reject them or get rejected. Happens all the time. If you like her, fight for it!"

"There's no point talking to you. I've got stuff to do." With that, Avery turned and left the study.

After leaving Coldfang Mercenaries, Tessa walked in silence, frowning in deep thought.

She'd known Xavier wouldn't be easy to reason with.

Beliefs like his were deeply ingrained.

It wasn't something that could be changed with a few words.

What could she do to help Avery out of this?

Suddenly, her phone rang, cutting off her thoughts.

She glanced at the caller ID and answered. On the other end, someone's excited

voice rang out:

"Poetry, we got the Moonstone!?"

Chapter 526 Smuggled Moonlight

"Did you get the Moonstone?"

Tessa's heart skipped a beat, pounding with excitement. The setback with Xavier didn't sting as much

anymore.

"Thanks for your hard work. Is anyone hurt?"

"A few of our team took minor injuries while distracting the Yalvaria guards, but nothing serious. Everything's under control."

"That's good to hear. But you can't let your guard down. Remember to put the Moonstone in the blacksilver wood box-embed the wolf core fragments to prevent lunar energy leakage. We can't afford to draw attention. Be extra, extra careful on the road!"

Tessa's warning was firm.

Even though they made it sound like retrieving the Moonstone was no big deal, she knew it had to be dangerous.

Now came the next challenge: getting the Moonstone out of Yalvaria and into her hands.

Moonstone was rare, and the Yalvarian Council held exclusive mining rights. Their armed patrols would be watching the borders like hawks.

There were also werewolf mercenaries lurking near Eclipse Hollow. Nathan from the Tundra Pack might try to steal the Moonstone to speed up his own Pack's rebuilding.

"Understood, Ms. Tessa! We've mapped out multiple backup routes. The blacksilver wood box holding the Moonstone is hidden at the bottom of a container full of silver ore. The metal interference from the silver will mess with any lunar energy scans. We've got a double layer of protection-no one will find it!"

Her subordinate's tone was firm with confidence.

"Good. Stay sharp. I'll be waiting for you in Navoris."

Tessa ended the call, both thrilled and anxious.

She was getting closer to breaking the blood pact with the Moonstone. Hopefully, nothing else would go

wrong...

While she waited for the Moonstone, Tessa stayed busy.

After Avery's exit triggered a dip in TS Entertainment's profits, she quickly stabilized operations and then acquired Evan's SkyEcho Entertainment, expanding her company's reach.

Evan, despite being Alpha of the Thornbane Pack, failed to support his Pack financially-and even diverted funds meant for their development for his own gain. The Thornbane Council elders voted unanimously to strip him of his Alpha title.

Desperate, Evan turned to trafficking drugs through his Pack members. He was immediately reported to the Council and exiled from Montedra-banned from ever returning.

Landon seized the opportunity, bringing the now leaderless Thornbane Pack under his command and expanding Nightshade Pack's territory and power in the process.

After a few hectic days, the new university semester finally began.

Landon made it back to Navoris just in time, traveling from Los Anville-where the Thornbane Pack was based-so he could personally take Tessa to her enrollment.

Both Navoris University and the Navoris Medical University were starting that day, so Ysabel came straight to Tessa's place to head over together.

"Tessa, school's starting soon and I'm kind of nervous."

She had no idea what kind of people she'd meet in college.

Her feelings were a mix of anticipation and fear.

After all, her album was about to be released.

She'd be entering college as a public figure, so she had to be mindful of her image and behavior.

"Don't worry about a thing. Just be yourself."

The company hadn't assigned her any fake persona or public image.

She could be her real, unfiltered self.

There was no risk of a public persona collapsing-because there wasn't one.

Ysabel threw her arms around Tessa.

"I knew you were the best!"

Now she could relax and just be herself-as long as she didn't cross any lines.

"Ysabel, don't hug Tessa anymore," Landon snapped, annoyed to see her clinging to his woman again.

"Look, I'm your niece! Are you seriously jealous of me?"

"When I say no, it means no. Got a problem?"

Ysabel turned to Tessa with a pitiful look.

"Tessa, look at him! He's bullying me! Aren't you gonna say something?"

Tessa pinched her cheek with a smile.

"Come on, you know how possessive your uncle is. Don't take it personally."

Wasn't it perfectly normal for a guy to be possessive of his fated mate?

Especially since he hadn't seen Tessa for nearly two weeks-and now that he was finally back, Ysabel had stolen the first hug. That just wasn't fair.

"Okay, okay, I won't fight him over you. Let's go! Time to check in at school!"

With Tessa backing her up, Ysabel stuck her tongue out at Landon, completely unbothered by his scowl.

After all, once they got to campus, Tessa would be all hers again!

Chapter 527 A Scholar's Dilemma

Although Landon wasn't thrilled about Ysabel tagging along like a third wheel, he

still insisted on personally driving both girls to school.

On the way, Tessa received several phone calls from Mr. Oscar.

He was terrified she might back out, reminding her over and over again to show

up. To ease his nerves, Tessa and Ysabel decided to stop by Navoris University

first.

Mr. Oscar was already waiting by the gate. The moment he saw Tessa, he rushed

up eagerly and personally escorted the girls to his office.

As they walked, he kept trying to win her over.

"Tessa, our research institute at Navoris University is top-tier. With your talent,

you'd get in without question."

Navoris University's research division was considered a launching pad for the national research academy. Many of its graduates were scooped up directly into high-level government labs.

"I was really worried you wouldn't come. Look, saving lives is important, sure-but cutting-edge scientific research is just as vital for a nation's future."

"Don't worry, Mr. Oscar. I gave my word, and I'm here. But I haven't changed my mind-I'm still going to the medical university." Her tone was firm, her resolve unwavering.

Seeing she wouldn't be swayed, Mr. Oscar could only nod.

"Alright, I understand. I'll have the dean of the Physics Department come escort you personally!" If he couldn't push her now, he'd let her get a taste of the physics world. Once she saw how fascinating it was, he was sure she'd let go of the medical track on her own.

"No need for special treatment. We'll head over on our own." Having the physics dean come pick her up would draw too much attention.

She still preferred to keep things low-key.

After successfully checking in at Navoris University, Landon and Tessa headed straight to the medical university, where another Mr. Oscar was waiting outside with a beaming smile.

“Tessa, you've got excellent judgment. I promise you won't regret this-healing others is such a noble pursuit.”

The medical school's Mr. Oscar had never expected the top student in the nation to enroll there.

He'd heard that both Navoris University and MIT had reached out to her directly, so learning that she'd chosen their program had come as a massive surprise.

Still, it wasn't too shocking-after all, their medical school was one of the best in the country.

The profession was tough, but the sense of accomplishment it offered was unmatched.

“Mr. Oscar, here's the situation: While I'll be studying at the medical university, I'll also be attending classes at the physics department over at Navoris University. I hope that won't be an issue?”

“Of course not! No objections whatsoever. Once you spend some time with us,

I'm sure you'll change your mind about the other side.”

As long as she enrolled, he was confident he could convince her to stay for good.

“In that case, I'll probably need help arranging my course schedule.” Of course,

she could just hack the system and sort it herself-but since they were being so

accommodating, there was no need for that.

“No problem at all. Just bring me the schedule from Navoris University, and I'll

coordinate everything on

our end.”

“Thanks! I really appreciate the help.”

No matter what, she was genuinely grateful for his support.

“Tessa, listen-I just heard a rumor, the International Werewolf Medical

Organization is relocating to Navoris! That place is the dream of every werewolf

studying medicine. People are dying to get in. If you make it, it'll be the best

decision you ever made! You've heard of Samuel, right? The S+ ranked healer?

He's part of the organization-and he graduated from our school. On the Montedra

continent, everyone knows his name."

Tessa honestly didn't know how to respond.

What was she supposed to say? That the founder of the Werewolf Medical

Organization, Smith, had personally visited her last month-and only decided to

relocate the organization to Navoris because she refused to go to Yalvaria?

Chapter 528 Teeth Bared

"It really is impressive."

That was all Tessa could say as she nodded in agreement.

Though to be fair, Samuel was indeed an incredible healer.

Mr. Oscar launched into another long string of passionate reasoning and grand ideals.

But when he realized Tessa wasn't particularly moved by any of it, he finally let it go.

"Mr. Oscar, since you don't have any objections, I'll go finish the check-in process. I'll send you my course schedule once I'm back."

"Alright, I'll walk you out!"

Mr. Oscar shed any trace of seniority and still wore a proud smile on his face.

Tessa politely declined the escort. She didn't want other students thinking she was getting special treatment. Instead, she left with Landon by her side.

Once they were in the car, Tessa tried to slip her hand out of Landon's-but he held on tight.

She looked at him, puzzled.

Suddenly, Landon said, "Why don't I go to school with you?"

He wanted to walk with her through campus, to share that kind of youthful experience-something he'd never really had. And now, with her, he wanted it more than ever.

Tessa hadn't noticed, but walking through the university earlier, nearly every male student they passed had turned to stare at her.

She was dazzling.

Landon wished he could wrap her up in his arms right then and there, shield her from every prying eye. But he knew that wasn't realistic...

To Tessa, it just seemed like he didn't want to be apart from her. She gently squeezed his large hand and comforted him. "What are you thinking? Don't worry. I'll finish everything I need to learn as quickly as possible."

"There's no need to rush. I don't want to see you wearing yourself out," he said, even though he couldn't wait to introduce her to his elders and officially confirm their mate bond in the Nightshade Pack.

Still, he didn't want to see her burn herself out for it.

Learning should be a step-by-step process.

"I know."

But she really did learn faster than most. That wasn't something she could help. After dropping Tessa off at Wisteria Apartments, Landon headed to Thorne Corp.

Not long after she got home, Tessa's phone rang. It was Ash.

Tessa, where are you right now? Avery's in trouble!"

Tessa frowned.

"What happened? Calm down and explain."

"Someone came to the Wolfborn Corps and started a fight. We're all at the base right now!"

"Got it. Tell Avery to hold his ground-I'm on my way."

She'd known Xavier handing the reins of the Corps to Avery wouldn't go smoothly.

The werewolf mercenary corps were Montedra's underground military backbone. Any sign of instability in one of the major corps would attract enemies like sharks to blood.

News of Xavier triggering the blood pact succession ritual had spread across the werewolf black market's communication web like wildfire.

Other corps had surely already picked up on the scent of power vacuum- especially since Avery's wolf-core branding ritual hadn't been completed yet. It was the perfect window for a takeover.

Ash stood nervously, facing a crowd of bloodthirsty, savage-looking werewolves. These were not the kinds of people he was used to dealing with-he was just a music guy, after all.

But no matter how scared he felt, as long as his captain was there, he wasn't going to run. He was ready to stand with him, come what may.

The ones causing trouble were from the Ironfang Mercenary Corps, a well-known werewolf faction in Navoris.

Their leader, Tigre, sneered arrogantly at Avery.

"Avery, I told you before-you're not cut out to run a mercenary corps. We're here today to take over the Wolfborn Corps."

Avery didn't back down. His laugh was cold and sharp. "Oh really? If you want to take our Corps, you better prove you've got what it takes."

Even if he didn't want to inherit the Wolfborn Corps, he sure as hell wasn't going to let anyone barge into his turf and make a mockery of him.

"Hah! You arrogant little brat. I guess you won't learn until you've been beaten to the ground. Fine. Today I'll show you what a real mercenary looks like!"

He raised his voice and roared, "Brothers! Move in! After today, there will be no Wolfborn Corps left in Montedra!"

At his signal, Ironfang's soldiers ripped open their collars, exposing the glowing red wolf-brand on the backs of their necks.

As defiant howls echoed through the air, their bodies surged and shifted into towering, muscular wolf forms. Gleaming fangs bared, they locked eyes on their enemies-ready to pounce, ready to tear them

apart.

Chapter 529 Fangs and Fire

"Steven, get out of here-this has nothing to do with you!" Avery growled, eyes flashing with urgency. His grip tightened around the wolfbone dagger in his hand, the blade glinting coldly.

The bandmates were musicians, not warriors. They didn't belong in the blood- soaked world of werewolf mercenaries.

"Captain, how can we walk away now?" Steven transformed into his wolf form on the spot, making his stance clear-he would fight beside Avery, no matter what.

"Yeah! Avery Band sticks together! If something happens to you, we're not leaving!"

The other three followed suit, shedding their human forms as their fur bristled and eyes locked onto the Ironfang werewolves across from them with deadly resolve.

Avery's throat tightened. His chest burned from the brotherhood they showed-but the Ironfang Mercenary Corps weren't some street thugs. These were stone-cold killers-wolves who'd crawled out of mass graves in Bloodmoon Canyon, who carried the heads of black market bounty list elites in their claws. They'd completed seventeen human sacrifice missions in the Arctic Wastes alone. Not to mention the bone altars they'd built with the remains of enemies in the South American rainforests.

These weren't just fighters. They were monsters forged in meat grinders of war. They'd seen more death than the band had played songs.

He couldn't let his brothers throw their lives away.

"I'm your captain. That's an order-leave!" Avery bellowed, shifting into a massive gray wolf and throwing himself in front of them. "This isn't something loyalty can solve!"

"You're not going anywhere!" Tigre sneered.

"Tigre, don't push it! This has nothing to do with them!" Avery snapped.

"Avery, you're still so naïve. They're your friends-do you really think I'll let them walk away?"

Tigre's twisted grin dripped with malice.

Avery's fur stood on end, back muscles taut with rage. He wanted to rip Tigre apart then and there.

And he regretted it-regretted bringing his bandmates into this mess...

"Enough talk. So tell me-are you handing over the Wolfborn Corps or not?" Tigre's patience was gone.

"No!"

If he had inherited the Wolfborn Corps, then he had to take responsibility for it.

"Fine. If they're that stubborn-brothers, teach them a lesson!"

At Tigre's command, the Ironfang wolves launched themselves toward Avery and the others like missiles.

"Protect them!" Avery shouted, leaping forward to shield his team as he called on his own corps to intercept the attackers.

Just as the two sides were about to collide, a powerful surge of lupine energy burst from the doorway,

forcing both sides apart like a shockwave.

Everyone froze and turned toward the entrance.

There stood Tessa—her slim frame cloaked in moonlight, her aura chilling and ethereal like a ghost,

Avery's heart dropped when he saw her.

He spun to Steven, furious. "Did you call her? Why the hell would you bring her here?!"

Even though he knew Tessa was powerful, Avery didn't want her caught up in the savage mercenary wars.

d of

This wasn't a battlefield with rules. This was the underbelly-cruel, lawless, and drenched in blood.

"Captain, I just thought-Tessa can fix this!" Steven stammered.

Tessa knew people none of them could dream of reaching.

Any one of them could end this whole standoff in a heartbeat.

So why wouldn't they call her?

And hadn't the captain said it himself?

No matter what happened, Tessa would always be one of them.

"Well now-what a pretty little thing we've got here." Tigre's eyes gleamed with a flash of lust as his fangs bared and his lunar aura surged toward Tessa. Avery, is this your girl? Hand her over, and I might just let your little Wolfborn Corps off the hook."

Chapter 530 She Who Hunts the Wolves

"Tigre, touch her and I dare you!" Avery roared, claws digging into the floor, his killing intent flooding the

air.

That bastard dared lay eyes on Tessa?

He'd never let him walk away from this.

"Stickin' with this little punk won't get you far," Tigre sneered, wiggling his fingers toward Tessa. "Hey pretty girl, come with me. I'll show you a real good time."

Steven's fur bristled with rage. "What the hell did you just say?!"

He instantly regretted calling Tessa here.

No matter how strong she was, she was still a girl-and a stunning one at that. It was too easy for male werewolves to get ideas.

The guys could risk a brawl, sure. But for Tessa? This place was way too dangerous.

Tessa's laugh was cold, sharp as ice. "So what-you're not planning to leave until we've had some fun?"

"Ooh, even her voice is music to my ears. You're just my type, sweetheart. Let's make it a night to remember," Tigre grinned lecherously.

Tessa's eyes narrowed. "And what do you think you can do? What's your idea of fun?"

"What do you think? Man to woman-get you in bed, and I'll teach you everything," he said with a greasy smile.

That was it.

Avery's bandmates lost it. Their claws screeched across the concrete as rage exploded off them. No one could tolerate someone talking about Tessa like that.

"I want blood!" Steven roared, lunging forward to tear Tigre apart-

-but Tessa raised her paw and stopped him cold.

A flash of pale light lit her eyes. Lunar force surged through her body.

In the blink of an eye, she shot forward, appearing right in front of the still- unshifted Tigre.

Her kick landed square in his chest.

Tigre didn't even have time to react. His massive body flew through the air like a broken kite, crashing against the ground.

"You don't know when you've been given a chance."

Even before the words leaving her mouth, the white wolf totem at the back of Tessa's neck blazed to life. Silvery fur erupted from beneath her sleeves

In that instant, the Ironfang mercenaries lunged, hellbent on avenging their fallen leader.

Tigre staggered up, clutching his chest where she'd kicked him. His eyes locked on Tessa, full of murderous hatred, and with a feral snarl, he shifted into a massive black warwolf..

His transformed face twisted with rage, and the coarse black mane along his spine stood up like spears.

As Ironfang's alpha, his warwolf form towered over two meters. The dried blood still clinging to his claws told stories of past carnage.

And yet he'd been knocked out of the air by a single kick from Tessa-his ribs misaligned, the pain searing through him.

"Get her! For the boss!" the deputy roared, transforming into a scarred spotted warwolf. The iron-fanged gauntlets on his forepaws gleamed ominously.

Ironfang mercs surged in, forming a semicircle around Tessa. Their glowing red eyes showed no fear of her -just the thirst for blood. A lone female wolf? They didn't see a threat.

1

Avery's heart jumped to his throat.

Tessa's wolf form was lean and slender-surrounded by these hulking, vicious monsters, she looked like she'd be crushed in an instant.

Because of the concealment necklace she wore, her true white wolf form appeared as an ordinary gray wolf to outsiders.

Avery was just about to charge forward and help break her out when-

Tessa suddenly arched her back and let out a clear, piercing howl.

Unlike the usual guttural war cries of battle wolves, her howl carried something... stranger. Something that pierced the mind.

The Ironfang mercs paused-just for a heartbeat-but it was enough.

"You're dead!" the spotted warwolf lunged first, iron-clad claws aimed straight for Tessa's throat.

But the moment he closed in, Tessa rolled to the side. Her tail swept behind his knees in a flash.

The moonlight shimmered across her fur as she moved-quick as a shadow, impossible to pin down. The spotted warwolf stumbled, just a beat-just long enough for Tessa to circle around behind him and strike the most vulnerable part of his nape.

The spotted warwolf howled in pain, spinning to slash at her with a massive claw. The swing tore up the ground, sending gravel flying-but Tessa shot upward like a bolt of silver lightn

Her front paws landed on his skull, and using it as a springboard, she vaulted into the air- and landed right in front of the black warwolf.

Tigre.

Her pale eyes reflected his stunned expression.