**The Two Wolves**

As a Combagal, Loba was many things. She was the ace of the Risk It Biscuit, as she was the strongest Combagal in the agency and the one who was in her road to achieve a champion belt. She was also the main attraction, as her merchandise was twice as big as the merchandise of the other Combagals in the agency.

But if there was something on which Loba was vastly inferior to her peers, it was providing fanservice. The Risk It Biscuit Combagals were instructed to go to a meet and greet in Hagone to cement Loba’s status there.

Though Loba and Risk had visited Hagone many times to cement Loba’s reputation there, they barely knew anything about the infrastructure of the district.

Luckily for them, Frieda, one of their Combagals was a Hagone local. And she personally helped Risk to rent a spot for their greet and meet.

“I didn’t know that you lived in Hagone?” Risk told Frieda as they were establishing their spots for the event.

“I came from a family of athletes,” Frieda explained with a casual shrug of her shoulders. “They had me try different sports to see which one fits me better. I did baseball, soccer, basketball, and volleyball.”

“If that’s true, then how come you didn’t show up in the sports channel before?” Risk asked Frieda with a raised eyebrow.

“I never made it to the professional leagues,” Frieda sighed with boredom. “I was good at those sports, but they never appealed to me as furry fighting did.”

“Is that why you never told us about Hagone?” Loba raised an eyebrow.

“I want to be independent from my family’s legacy,” Frieda stated. “Even if I had your success, Loba, I wouldn’t have bothered to have my championship road in Hagone. I want people to look me for who I am, not by who sired me.”

“You shouldn’t take your family for granted,” Lei-Tei told Frieda. “As someone who grew up an orphan, I can assure you that a loving family can make a difference in having a fulfilling life.”

“I didn’t know that you were an orphan,” Loba stated, shocked at not knowing that fact of the panda despite knowing her for a while.

“It’s kind of an open fact,” Frieda admonished Loba. “Her parents visited the agency a few times. They were squirrels. No way they would have given birth to her.”

“How was living with them?” Loba asked the panda.

“They were a loving family,” Lei-Tei smiled gratefully at their memory. “They are from Sonachi, and they taught me everything that I know about art and calligraphy. I want to honor them someday by becoming the Sonachi Champion one day.”

“You’re gonna have to train hard,” Loba stated. “Nubia is already rising through the ranks to the belt.”

The jackal was the first person who ever defeated Loba in a match. Though Loba eventually got even with Nubia, it was a private fight. She wasn’t going to feel vindicated until she defeated the jackal in an official match.

“I shall try as long as I can,” Lei-Tei promised.

“What about your family, Benny?” Loba asked.

“We’re from the outskirts of Botaun,” Benny explained as she set up her booth. “I was born in a farm outside of Botaun. My folks provided milk to the L’Asagne Family. I learned everything that I learned about furry fighting by watching the Combagals there.”

“So you were a secondhand student?” Loba asked, noticing that Benny never mentioned a direct teacher when talking about her training.

“I am a secondhand student,” Benny nodded her head. “But my folks supported me and had me settle in Tendonchi.”

“What can you tell us about your parents, Benny?” Lei-Tei asked.

“My dad is retired from farming,” Benny sat on her booth. “So that leaves my three sisters to take care of the farm. They and mom are coming here to see me.”

“Must be nice to have your folks visit you,” Loba pointed out, barely hiding her jealousy at Benny having a mother and father to greet her whereas she had a dead mother and an absent father.

“It is,” Benny smiled.

“The meet and greet will start in five minutes,” Risk announced to the Combagals. “I want you girls to sit there and look nice. You will greet your fans, shake their hands, and then sign everything that they want you to sing. Am I understood?”

“Yes, Risk,” Loba rolled her eyes while the others replied with more enthusiasm.

“Good,” Risk clapped his hands and rubbed them excitedly. “With Loba making progress in Hagone, we need the people there to know about our agency.”

“Just make sure to keep recruiters away from me,” Frieda groaned in dismay. “I already made it clear that I am a Combagal. I don’t want my family name to be used to promote me when I have my own skills.”

“I have security in case that happens,” Risk promised. “Now start smiling, girls! We’re making Hagone love us!”

The doors opened just as Loba finished her booth. The wolf Combagal sat down and then prepared to receive the largest amount of fans that she got in her life.

*I guess I’m not as popular as I thought I was,* Loba thought as she noticed the booths of her fellow Combagals. Though she was still the most popular Combagal in the Risk It Biscuit agency, she was only *slightly* more popular rather than twice as popular as her fellow compatriots.

It helped that Frieda was filled with fans from her previous days as an athlete. She was having a forced smile as she endured the questions about sports that she didn’t play anymore rather than her career as a Combagal.

For her part, Benny was having the time of her life. Her family didn’t just come to visit her booth. They also brought in her friends from the farm.

Lei-Tei was the least popular, but she had a decent following.

For her part, Loba was doing fine. She was being polite and smiling more often. It was a learned skill that she had from working at Chef Gruyere’s magazine store a few months ago. It was also a relief for Risk to see that Loba was calmer than before. She didn’t get annoyed at the fans and she was keeping her temper in check.

After signing a bunch of autographs, Loba reclined on her chair and rested her feet in the table. Her posture was not professional, but that was the only problem that she’d displayed at the event. Risk advanced to Loba’s booth, but paused when he noticed that she was talking with fellow Wilds about fitness.

“The secret is to have the right fuel and the right training,” Loba explained, her feet bobbing back and forth as she talked with the Wilds. “You have to eat lots of protein and little fats and sugars to fuel your body. And then you have to work your ass off to become stronger.”

“Thanks for the advice,” the leader of the Wilds bowed to Loba and then led her group away from her. They all carried their own Loba merchandise, which had been signed by Loba before she gave them fitness tips.

“Are you having fun, Loba?” Risk asked the wolf Combagal.

“Not really,” Loba shrugged her shoulder. “But this is less annoying than expected. I thought that I was going to be surrounded by creeps.”

“Not all fans are creeps,” Risk sighed. “But that’s not the issue here. I need you to get your feet off the booth.”

“I’m on break,” Loba protested.

“And the booths are rental,” Risk reminded her. “Besides, the fans want to have a face to face conversation with you. Not a face to feet conversation. The last thing you need are your fans thinking that you’re gonna kick them in the face.”

Considering how often Loba kicked him, Risk’s concern was a valid one. She even kicked his head into a wall and pressed her foot when they first met. Not a good first impression for either one, but definitely a memorable one.

“Fine,” Loba groaned as she pulled off her feet from the table. “Anything else that you want me to do, Risk?”

“Excuse me, Ms. Loba?”

The two of them noticed a male border collie staring at Loba’s feet. The wolf Combagal groaned as she pulled her feet away while Risk threw her a smug and vindicated look.

“What do you want, kid?” Loba asked with annoyance.

“I got a body pillow from you at a store,” the border collie explained as he produced a body pillow from his backpack.

The mention of the word body pillow made Risk nervous. He noticed the twitching of Loba’s eyebrow when it was mentioned. And then Risk was sweating bullets when he saw the body pillow placed in front of them. It showed Loba posing sensually with her old costume, but she was flexing her body so hard that her clothes were being torn.

“I would like a selfie with me and the pillow in it,” the border collie stared at Loba, whose eyebrow was twitching angrily.

“Where did you get that body pillow?” Loba asked, sounding midly agitated.

Next to her, Risk was gesturing at the fan not to say anything if he wanted to keep all of his teeth inside of his mouth.

“I got it from a random fan site that had me go to a store,” the border collie pointed out innocently.

*Don’t hurt him, Loba!* Risk begged inwardly. *He’s not a pervert, he’s just a young man who is clearly too trusting for his own good.*

“You got that from a fan site that had you go to a store?” Loba asked slowly.

“The back of a store,” the collie responded. “Apparently, they were a collector’s item, so I had to order it fast before they ran out.”

“I see,” Loba nodded and then pointed at the body pillow. “Then I am sorry to inform you that I never posed for that body pillow.”

“What?” the border collie asked, shocked by Loba’s words.

“The image that you are seeing here is fan made, and it’s not accurate,” Loba pointed at the supposed image of herself in the body pillow. “Take a look at the musculature. It’s too toned to be me. And the eyes are a smidge off center. It looks like an artist just painted me with some digital software rather than take a picture like it was supposed to be.”

“So this body pillow is fake?” the border collie asked, dismay evident in his huge eyes.

“Yes,” Loba nodded her head at the disappointed collie before turning her face at her manager. “Get him one of those body pillows that you forced me to make.”

Risk gasped at Loba’s request. She hated making the body pillows. And yet she was asking him to provide one for a disappointed fan.

“You’re giving me an official body pillow?” the border collie asked, sounding moved by Loba’s request.

“You already paid for one,” Loba shrugged her shoulder. “Even if it’s fake, you still paid for a body pillow. As long as a certain manager of mine arrives with the thing…”

Risk immediately moved for the merchandise store after Loba glared at him. He returned with another body pillow. This one was made from a picture that was taken with Loba’s consent a week ago. She was using her new Combagal costume, and she was using a Muay Thai picture so that her fans could use it as reference for when they needed to practice a basic Muay Thai stance.

Though the body pillow was not as risqué as the previous one, the border collie loved what he got.

“This is so much better than the previous one!” the border collie hugged the new body pillow while letting the previous one slump into Loba’s booth. “It feels so alive despite being a picture.”

“Just use my fan website if you ever want merchandise from me,” Loba picked up the body pillow, growling angrily at it before ripping it in half with her bare hands.

RIP!

The two halves were pulled, revealing all the stuffing inside of the body pillow. Risk paled at Loba’s brutality, but the collie stared at the display of strength with a huge blush.

“That’s the hottest thing that I ever saw,” the border collie sounded hypnotized from her display of strength. He didn’t mind the fluff that came out of the ripped body pillow covering his face and body.

“Don’t push your luck, kid,” Loba deadpan at the border collie and gestured him to stand by her side. “Now get your selfie with me.”

“Yes,” the border collie picked up his new body pillow and stood side by side with Loba, who took his phone from his pocket and used it to take a picture.

Once the border collie got his selfie and his signed body pillow, he made sure to leave the booth, allowing Loba to talk with her manager.

“Such a creep,” Loba stated, annoyed at him getting turned on by her ripping off his previous body pillow in half. “I have a feeling that he would have asked for a selfie with my feet if I hadn’t pulled them out of the booth.”

“I am proud of you, Loba,” Risk told the wolf Combagal.

“For what?” Loba raised an eyebrow.

“The old you would have threatened that border collie for bringing a body pillow with your fake image on it,” Risk sounded a bit afraid as he made the description. “But you kept your cool and still found a way to pander to him.”

“I’ve been doing some soul searching for the past few months,” Loba sighed, remembering her defeat against Nubia, her training to master Muay Thai, and her fights with Kendra and Galina making her reconsider what a woman she wanted to be. “Let’s just say that I came to a revelation.”

“What kind of revelation?” Risk was curious.

“I need to be more cordial to the public if I am going to become the Hagone Champion,” Loba spoke her revelation with a serious face.

“Really?” Risk snorted, trying to not laugh.

“Don’t you laugh, punk!” Loba yelled at him, using the ambient noise of the convention as a way to buffer her volume.

“Sorry,” Risk apologized with a smile. “It’s just that I didn’t realize how mature you are despite being the same as you were.”

“Don’t let your guard down then,” Loba jokingly elbowed him.

The chocolate Labrador gasped from the elbow. And yet he still laughed. The convention moved forward. The Risk it Combagals kept signing off merchandise. The main difference was that Loba was laughing softly as she gave the autographs, feeling more at peace with herself.

The following day, Loba took a break from Risk It Biscuit, preferring to train in a different location. Rather than going to the gym, she settled for a nearby recreational area. The wolf Combagal leaned with her back against a tree, waiting for her sparring partner to arrive.

“Did I come in late?” Galina asked as she approached Loba.

“I’m sure you came early but had trouble finding me,” Loba joked, making the polar bear chuckle. “This park is huge. I would be less surprised if we got lost and didn’t get to spar.”

“I agreed to have the owners lend us this park,” Galina pointed out. “However, we are forbidden from harming the vegetation.”

“And what do you suggest that we do?” Loba asked. “Furry fighting can cause collateral damage when outside of the ring.”

“I already thought about that,” Galina turned her back against Loba and extended her leg as far as she could.

“What are you doing?” Loba asked with a raised eyebrow. “Are you going to dance ballet or something?”

Galina didn’t reply. Her toe claws dug a line on the ground. She swung her leg at an arc to the left and then to the right. Then she turned around and repeated the process while facing Loba. The result was that Galina drew a circle that surrounded her.

“We are using this circle as our sparring match,” Galina stated. “This will ensure that all our fighting will be done at a place where we can’t hurt nature.”

“I dig it,” Loba nodded her head as she picked up a stick that she found on the ground by her feet. “But we need a bit more space. Let me draw a larger circle that’s as big as the ring where we fight.”

Galina nodded her head and watched as Loba drew a larger circle. It looked like a circle, but it was clear that Loba wasn’t good at drawing shapes. The polar bear Combagal had to leave her smaller circle to help Loba draw a proper circle.

Once they made their fighting area, the polar bear and the wolf stood in front of each other. Since they didn’t have a bell to announce the start of their match, they settled by tackling each other as soon as they were in the smaller circle.

WHAM!

Galina and Loba started with a lock-up. The polar bear and the wolf growled angrily at each other, trying to establish dominance. Galina had the upper hand because of her superior physical strength, but Loba stamped her feet into the ground, sinking herself a bit as a way to anchor her body.

“Nice trick,” Galina complimented. “But it won’t work if you destroy the mat.”

“I’ll find a way to do it,” Loba grinned at her. “Maybe I can have Trulla from the Cyclone Crushers spar with me. I heard that she’s got skills with sumo. Could learn a thing about fighting in small spaces and remain standing on my feet.”

  “How are you doing in your career?” Galina asked, hoping that the stalemate between strengths would be less boring with some conversation.

“Did a meet and greet,” Loba replied. “Don’t think that you’d know about it considering that you’re kind of a hermit.”

“I did some fanservice every once in a while,” Galina hooked her foot on Loba’s leg, using the technique to shove Loba to the ground.

“No kidding!” Loba wrapped her legs around Galina’s arms to prevent her from lifting them. The effort was futile as Galina lifted her arms with her still clinging to them.

“I did,” Galina slammed her arms to the ground, forcing Loba to break her hold and roll away. “By the way, when will you face the next contender?”  
 “Don’t know,” Loba seized Galina’s leg to trip her, but the polar bear stamped the ground to remain standing. “I don’t know much about the contender list. Was hoping that you’d tell me.”

WRAP!

Galina grabbed Loba in a bear hug, squeezing the wolf Combagal in her arms.

“I’m not surprised,” Galina squeezed Loba. “The number two contender is very elusive when it comes to public appearances. Never met her before.”

“You never met her despite her being in an upper rank?” Loba asked the question between gritted teeth.

“Ranks are not only given to you based on victories, you are also given a rank based on appeal,” Galina explained. “She was initially expected to fight Lilikoi, but her irregular appearances made her lose a rank.”

BAM! BAM!

Loba slipped her arms out of the hold and broke the bear hug with two simultaneous elbows to the arms. She then followed by jumping and putting Galina in a headlock. Loba used gravity to slam on the ground, further intensifying the hold that she had on Galina.

“What do you mean by that?” Loba demanded as she tightened the headlock.

Galina couldn’t speak. The headlock was preventing her from speaking out. And resisting was going to make things worse. The polar bear tapped out Loba’s arm to tell her to break the hold.

“You’ve gotten stronger,” Galina remarked as she rubbed her neck. “You used to lose a lot against me when we only used grappling.”

“Kendra’s a good grappler,” Loba pointed out. “If I want to beat her in a rematch, I need to know how to counter submission holds, throws, and pins.”

“You learned a lot in our sessions,” Galina sat on the floor. “Your stamina has improved and so has your strength. You can take a lot more punishment as well.”

“The results speak for themselves,” Loba sat down alongside Galina, a bit proud of herself for not panting like she did in the few rare occasions that she outwrestled the polar bear Combagal. “But I want to know more about my next opponent.”

“Her name is Nashoba,” Galina pointed at Loba, as if she was about to give her an important revelation. “She’s a wolf, just like you. However, she’s descended from the Native Roots of Concatta.”

“The Native Roots of Concatta?” Loba raised an eyebrow. “I think I heard that when I was a child. I did a report about them. That was where the first settlements of Concatta were made before the city-states were formed.”

“Yes,” Galina nodded her head. “The people born in the Native Roots were considered the first citizens of Concatta. Sadly, that’s no longer the case.”

“What do you mean?” Loba raised an eyebrow.

“Thanks to nationalism, everyone not born within the city-states of Concatta is considered a Wild,” Galina sighed, feeling sympathy for Nashoba’s plight. “As such, despite her heritage, Nashoba and her people are treated as Wilds by the people of Concatta. They have to live in reservations dotted along the continent.”

“That’s bullshit!” Loba growled angrily. “They were the first citizens of Concatta. They can’t take that away from them just because they chose to live in their homes rather than move into the city-states.”

“It is indeed an injustice,” Galina nodded her head as she offered her hand to Loba to help her stand up. “But she’s trying to make something out of it.”

“What do you mean?” Loba stared at Galina as the polar bear dragged her out of the circle so that she could see a cooler that contained many types of drinks.

“Nashoba is fighting for her people to ensure that they are treated with the respect that they deserve,” Galina opened a can of beer and stepped aside so that Loba could pick her favorite beverage. “Sadly, she’s not one for speaking in public appearance, so that makes her case hard to relate to the audience.”

“Why is Nashoba so elusive with the public?” Loba asked as she took a sip of beer.

“I am not sure,” Galina shook her head as she kept drinking. “But she does have a few matches every once in a wild. And she does charity work in her campaign for Wild tolerance and acceptance.”

“That sounds like many public appearances,” Loba complained at Galina. “Where’s the mystery in that?”

“The mystery is that she disappears for a few days every month,” Galine explained as she finished her beer. “She falls completely off the radar and comes back into the public eye as if nothing happened.”

“Is there like a pattern in her disappearances?” Loba asked Galina as she took the last sips of her beer.

“I haven’t done research on her disappearances,” Galina shook her head as she took another can of beer. “All that you can do now is send a challenge letter and wait until she replies to you.”

“I already did,” Loba started her second can of beer. “Waiting for a reply.”

“I believe that she will,” Galina smirked at Loba. “I’ve seen videos of her fights. I can assure you that she’s a fierce competitor despite her personality and appearance. I promise you that she won’t turn down a challenge.”

“Thanks a lot, Galina,” Loba finished her second beer. “I appreciate the sparring, the information about Nashoba, and the advice.”

“You are welcome, Loba,” Galina nodded her head as she gestured at Loba to give her the empty cans of beer. The polar bear Combagal lead Loba to the exit of the park, trying to find a trash can where she could throw down the garbage.

“Do you wanna do something different besides sparring the next time that we meet each other?” Loba asked Galina as she carried the polar bear’s cooler.

“It’s the first time that you want something to do with me that is not related to sparring,” Galina pointed out with a smile.

“I’m more than just a fight-obsessed woman,” Loba chuckled as they reached the park’s exit and Galina got rid of the empty beer cans.

“How about an inter-agency barbecue in a few weeks?” Galina proposed. “My agency will bring some meat and supplies. And your agency brings in their own meat and supplies. I heard that you even have a chef.”

“We do,” Loba was proud of having Boss Gruyere come to the barbecue. “I can promise you that you will taste the best meat of your life once Boss Gruyere starts cooking it.”

“I look forward to it,” Galina grinned at Loba. “Just so you know, I make a mean spiced burger.”

“I’m ready for some spice meat,” Loba promised. “Will talk about my match with Nashoba when we meet again next time.”

“It’s a promise,” Galina nodded her head and went back to the park.

For her part, Loba started jogging from the national park all the way to the Risk It Biscuit to continue her training. With all of the stamina and endurance training that she had with Galina since their match, Loba was confident that she could travel long distances on foot.

Loba made it to the Risk It Biscuit by sunset. To the wolf’s surprise, she wasn’t exhausted from running that long. She felt like she could keep running for another hour before she started to show signs of fatigue.

*I guess I have to thank Galina for my new stamina,* Loba thought as she stared at her sweat-covered hands without feeling pain in them. *I can’t wait to brag to Risk about what I can do now.*

Her bragging was going to have to wait. The first thing that she noticed was that Risk was standing outside of the Risk-It Biscuit. The chocolate labrador was standing next to a crane, instructing the operator to be careful. The crane was holding a sign with the name of the agency.

*Never noticed that we were replacing the old sign,* Loba thought as she looked down and noticed the old sign. It was made of wood with painting. It was a good sign for a dojo, but not one meant for a Combagal agency. The sign change was a long time coming.

“Move it a bit up,” Risk instructed. “Try to be careful though. It’s a brand-new sign. We can’t afford another one if it breaks. We barely got the revenue for this one.”

“What are you doing, Risk?” Loba asked as she approached him.

“Loba?” Risk was stunned, checking on his clock to make sure that he got the time right and then blinking at her. “You came earlier than expected. I thought that you were going to hang out with Galina all night.”

“I did too,” Loba crossed her arms. “I guess I improved too fast. Beat her at a wrestling encounter for once.”

“I see that your grappling straining and your increased levels of stamina and endurance are starting to pay off,” Risk observed with a smile.

“Never thought that I’d see you change the sign,” Loba remarked. “I always thought that this agency was so low that we couldn’t afford any more changes.”

“Me too,” Risk admitted shamelessly. “But that was before you came along and started making everything better. Your fights with high-level Combagals and your champion road led to an increase in revenue.”

“I always knew that I was going to be the face of the agency,” Loba chuckled. “But I never expected to cause that much change.”

“You’re not the only one who contributed,” Risk pointed out. “Each Combagal of this agency is finally taking a leap on their careers.”

“How so?” Loba raised an eyebrow. “I always thought that they were just meant for opening acts.”

“Benny’s family motivated her to try her luck at Ankyono,” Risk explained. “She wants to make a better world for the farmers in Concatta.”

“I guess her family gave her the motivation to surpass her limits,” Loba smiled approvingly. “Still, she’ll have to be careful. She will have to face against Leona in the future. If she can’t beat me, then she won’t have a chance against my rival.”

“Lei-Tei visited her parents and decided to try to have matches at Sonachi,” Risk ignored Loba’s comment to talk about the panda.

“It will be a tough fight for Lei-Tei since she will have to deal with Nubia,” Loba remarked, feeling afraid for the panda Combagal.

“Frieda doesn’t have a champion road yet,” Risk pointed out. “But she wants to try to make a reputation around Botaun by fighting against Combagals from different districts.”

“I guess it’s harder to be a challenger than a champion,” Loba smiled cockily. “I’d say that I prefer an underdog than a winner any time.”

  “Anything else happened during your time with Galina?” Risk asked as he alternated between the sign and Loba.

“We’re gonna have a barbecue in a few weeks,” Loba casually replied. “That’s why I want to have a match with Nashoba for the number two rank.”

“You certainly changed a lot,” Risk burst in laughter. “The old you would have never considered having a barbecue with a former enemy.”

“Risk,” Loba whispered to him.

“What is it, Loba?” Risk replied, wondering why Loba was whispering to him.

“Move the sign to the left,” Loba replied.

“Oh, you’re right!” Risk shouted before talking to the crane operator. “Move the sign a little to the left, please! We’re almost there! Perfect!”

Risk gestured the crane operator to move the crane away while he and Loba stood in front of the entrance to admire the sign. It wasn’t much of a change, but they felt something different when seeing the entrance. It felt more professional rather than amateurish.

“So much has changed since you entered here,” Risk stated as he grabbed the old sign of the Risk-It Biscuit and hummed nostalgically. “I think I’ll take this baby back home with me as a retirement home.”

“Are you sure?” Loba stared at him. “It looks old and moldy.”

“It’s got character!” Risk hugged the sign to himself.

“Whatever,” Loba rolled her eyes at her manager’s silliness. “I want to know more about the challenge letter to Nashoba. Has she sent a reply yet?”

“Cant’ wait until your dogfight with a fellow wolf?” Risk teased Loba.

“Quit it, punk!” Loba chuckled as she smacked Risk in the back of the head. Though the gesture was playful, she put a little bit of excess force in the smack, so Risk was knocked to the ground.

“I guess you’re still strong even if you’re more used to self-control now,” Risk stood up as he rubbed the back of his head.

“Did you send the letter or not?” Loba asked.

“I did send it yesterday,” Risk reminded her. “I suspected that you were going to forget about it though.”

“Sorry,” Loba apologized. “I’m a little excited for the upcoming match.”

“I am aware,” Risk deadpanned. “I didn’t get a reply letter, but I did get a call.”

“A call from who?” Loba asked.

“A call from her father, who is also her manager,” Risk clarified. “She wants to meet you in person.”

“That’s badass!” Loba started shadowboxing her excitement away. “When can we leave to meet her?”

“As soon as you shower,” Risk showed her the keys to the Combagal truck. “We’re meeting Nashoba at your best.”

“I can try to put on my old costume from your office while I have this one dry,” Loba remarked.

“Been a while since you put on your first costume,” Risk chuckled. “I can see that you want to make a good first impression.”

“And it will be a glorious one,” Loba entered the agency to get a shower. “But first, I can’t show up covered in sweat. Would leave a bad first impression.”

“A body covered in sweat is a good impression if they meet you while you train,” Risk corrected her. “It’s only when you are the visiting party where that is a social mistake.”

“Thanks for the lesson in etiquette, sir!” Loba replied sarcastically as she entered the shower room.

“I think I love the new Loba,” Risk told himself happily as he entered his van and waited for Loba to make her return. They had a match to set up. And he was looking forward to it.

Loba put her old Combagal costume back on to have a tough appearance. With everything ready, she and Risk drove all the way to the Northern Oak Reservation.

“Are you sure that it’s a good idea to see them right now?” Loba asked Risk. “It’s pretty damn dark here.”

“Are you afraid of the dark?” Risk joked.

“I’m not afraid of the dark because I can see through it,” Loba scoffed. “But I am afraid of you not being able to see in the dark. Doesn’t matter if you are a Combagal or even the Continental Champion herself, you won’t survive a car crash like that.”

“I won’t crash,” Risk promised, annoyed that Loba thought that he was a bad driver when he personally drove her to many of her matches.

The two of them arrived to the Northern Oak Reservation. It looked like the national park where Loba trained with Galina earlier that day. The first thing that they noticed as they walked through the forest was that there were many cabins built inside the woods.

And as they moved across the reservation, the two of them felt something on their backs. It wasn’t something physical. It was something ethereal. Loba turned back and noticed that there were many wolves staring at her and Risk with suspicion.

“Do you have the feeling of being watched?” Risk asked, not daring to look behind him.

“We are being watched,” Loba confirmed. “Feels more like a prison cage than a walk across the park. Do you even know where to find the manager?”

“He told me to find the cabin with a sandbag on the outside,” Risk confirmed.

The duo kept walking, feeling more uneased by the wandering eyes of the wolves. Risk was a bit scared, but Loba was feeling self-conscious. She rarely got to meet wolves in Botaun even if she did see them. This was her first time being surrounded by the species itself, and she was feeling like an outcast.

*I have to relax,* Loba thought as she was breathing. *I am a wolf just like them. I am just a guest. I won’t let them decide how I should feel about myself.*

Her ears twitched. She heard whispering. She heard them refer to her as a “city wolf” disdainfully, earning a suppressed growl from her. She was a Wild just like them. She wasn’t going to let them judge her just because she wasn’t born in the reservation.

“Are you okay, Loba?” Risk asked, snapping her from her anger.

“I’m fine,” Loba snorted angrily. “Just impatient. When are we going to find out where this dude lives?”

“I think that I know who he is,” Risk pointed forward.

Standing in front of them was an old great plains wolf in his sixties. He was tall for his age as he was six feet tall with decent muscle tone even if he didn’t work out. He was dressed in a shirt made out of a animal leather, pants from the same material and moccasins.

He was standing in front of a cabin with a sandbag. Around him were fellow members of the community. The males were wearing the same clothes that he was wearing. And the females were wearing knee-height dresses that left the legs bare. Regarding footwear, male and female chose to either walk around on moccasins or bare feet.

It was a close community that he held a love of affection for his fellow wolves. He was doing a barbecue for them. The people were providing him with meat and he was grilling it so that they could have burger and steaks.

“That’s a coincidence,” Loba remarked, finding it odd that she and Galina promised to have a BBQ together but then she found out the manager of her next opponent doing a BBQ in front of her.

The older wolf stopped the cooking, giving it to a random youngster who replaced him as the cook.

“It’s a pleasure to meet the Relentless Fang,” the old wolf approached Loba and Risk with a huge grin. “My name is Ahiga. I am the manager and father of Nashoba.”

“Thanks for inviting us to your home,” Loba bowed her head respectfully. “Didn’t expect the place to be this full.”

Ahiga stared at Loba and then noticed that his fellow wolves were staring at her.

“Don’t mind them,” Ahiga patted Loba’s shoulder. “They’re not used to outside visitors, much less fellow wolves. Let me serve you both a piece of steak as compensation for our rudeness.”

“Sweet,” Loba beamed, sniffing at the grilled meat and enjoying its flavors.

Ahiga led Risk and Loba to a table and served them a steak. The two canines sniffed the pieces of meat, enjoying the scent. Then they chewed on the meat, eyes widening as they enjoyed the flavor.

“This is the best damn steak that I ever tasted in my entire life,” Loba growled in pleasure as she munched on the steak.

“Thank you,” Ahiga smiled at them. “But you should thank my daughter Nashoba for the meat. She personally hunts the meat and tenderizes them by using it as a sandbag. Come on out my daughter!”

The people stopped chatting to let Nashoba make her appearance. She was a great plains wolf who possessed an athletic build. She was a bit taller than her father at 6’2 and had dark chestnut fur with black highlights and short auburn hair. She wore the same leather dress as the females, but much bigger because of her size. Unlike her father, she chose to walk barefoot.

“What do you need from me, father?” Nashoba asked respectfully. “I must return to my training ground to practice on the dummies.”

She pointed at the back of the cabin to show a field filled with training dummies that were dented with fist marks and footprints from her punches and kicks.

“What’s up?” Loba stood up and extended her arm for Nashoba.

WHAM!

Nashoba’s fist flew at Loba’s face. Loba stood back and was about to counter when Nashoba’s fist was caught in her father’s palm.

“What the hell?” Loba called out at Nashoba. “I was trying to greet you.”

Nashoba’s eyes were golden, but they looked feral as they stared at Loba. Then they softened when she saw the stern face of her father.

“My apologies,” Nashoba bowed her head at Loba. “I tend to get too immersed in my training to recognize the difference between friend and foe. My conduct was not appropriate as a fellow Combagal and your next opponent.”

“It’s okay,” Loba shrugged her shoulders. “At least you got a better excuse than mine.”

“Take a break from your training,” Ahiga told his daughter with an authoritative tone that told her that she had no choice on the matter.

Sighing, Nashoba sat next to Loba and ate a steak with her. It was the most awkward dinner of their lives.

“So, what’s your motif, Ms. Nashoba?” Risk dared to ask.

It had been ten minutes since Nashoba sat alongside Loba. None of them said anything, and the pressure was already scaring Risk. He felt like he needed to say something to keep either female wolf from exploding at the other.

“Motif?” Nashoba snorted. “What I have is not a motif or a persona. I am a Wild descended from the Native Roots of Concatta. I grew up in this native reservation with my fellow tribe of indigenous natives of Concatta because the people from the cities refuse to consider us citizens despite our ancestry.”

“I can relate with Wild discrimination,” Loba munched on her meat. “So, you wanna become the Hagone Champion to make a better world for Wilds?”

“Yes,” Nashoba nodded her head. “I was originally going to aim for the Ankyono Championship, but I had to cut my ambitions short because of the corruption in that district. I wasn’t going to make that much impact with the sumiguza in control.”

“But why did you choose Hagone?” Loba asked. “Was there something special about it?”

“Hagone used to be the main place for the Queens of Fighters Tournament,” Nashoba reasoned. “I didn’t have a partner to enter the Tendonchi Challenges, so Hagone was the next best option.”

“Makes sense,” Risk remarked. “You took what you could to make it work. I respect that. But we should focus on the upcoming match soon.”

“I would like to give Loba the right to choose,” Nashoba nodded her head. “Since you took the liberty to visit my home so graciously, it should be fair of her to choose the date of our encounter. You can also consider this an apology for my earlier behavior.”

Loba hummed to herself. As much as she wanted to fight against Nashoba, it was going to be hard to do something. Ever since she started focusing on expanding her fanbase, Loba had a tight schedule that deprived her of free time.

*Need to think of a day where I am not busy,* Loba thought with frustration. *Think, what can I do to have this match come soon?*

She gasped when she realized that she had a choice.

“A week from now at night,” Loba grinned. “There’s a full moon. We’re gonna have a match under the moonlight by having an open roof match.”

Everyone froze at Loba’s request. They stopped partying to stare at her with shock.

“Was it something that I said?” Loba raised an eyebrow at them.

“I refuse,” Nashoba shook her head angrily.

“Excuse me?” Loba stood up from her chair.

“Choose a later date but that,” Nashoba told her.

“There is no later date,” Loba growled. “My schedule is full this month. I have to do public appearance, make shoots, and have to do interviews. This is the only day that I have to fight. So tell me why you don’t want to do it.”

“Ever heard about The Story of Two Wolves?” Nashoba cryptically asked.

“No,” Loba shook her head. “Never heard that story.”

“My father taught me that there are two wolves at war within everyone,” Nashoba explained calmly. “One represents the good because it’s known for peace, love, hope, humility, and kindness. The other one represents the evil because of its anger, fury, cruelty, savagery, and bloodlust.”

As Nashoba explained the story, Loba noticed that Nashoba’s peers were looking troubled. They were reacting as if they were hearing a horror story.

“Which one is the one who wins?” Loba asked, believing that the story would continue if she knew who won the fight.

“The one you feed,” Nashoba replied quietly as she stared at Loba with a forlorn expression.

“What’s the point of this story?” Loba asked, trying to understand what was the moral that Nashoba was trying to tell her. “And what does this have to do with the match? If this is some way to scare me into not having the match, then you are wrong.”

“So, you want to have the match within the week?” Nashoba asked slowly.

“Yes,” Loba nodded her head. “I have no other chance. I need to rise up the ranks to have my rematch with Kendra. And I want to challenge Lilikoi for the Hagone Championship as soon as I can.”

Nashoba stared at Loba. Then she stared at her father. And then she stared at her peers, who avoided eye contact with her.

“Very well,” Nashoba nodded her head. “But you have to be willing to accept anything that happens within the match. There will be no takebacks.”

“I know what I’m doing,” Loba told her. “You can’t enter furry fighting with a half-assed attitude. You have to accept the risks no matter what. That’s why I’ll face you head-on. I don’t care how much you hurt me. I will keep fighting until one of us falls down.”

Nashoba and Loba stared at each other for a few seconds.

“Just remember those words when the match takes place,” Nashoba told her with resignation as she stood up and returned to her training center. “Father, I want you to lend them that documental about me. They deserve to know who I am before we fight.”

“Sure,” Ahiga entered into the cabin and returned with a video that he handed to Risk casually. “Do try to keep the video in good conditions. To me, this video is like my daughter’s baby photos.”

“I will take care of it,” Risk promised, feeling intimidated by the size of the wolf looming over him.

Since Nashoba accepted the match and Ahiga gave them the video, Loba and Risk left the reservation and drove all the way back to Botaun.

“It’s very late tonight,” Risk stated. “We will have to sleep at the agency tonight.”

“Sure,” Loba closed her eyes. “You don’t mind if I fall asleep now? I need to work things out before I start my training.”

“Knock yourself out,” Risk told her. “I don’t need you conscious to drive my way to the city. Have a nap.”

“I will,” Loba relaxed her body.

She tried to sleep, but she couldn’t do it. She heard The Tale of the Two Wolves being played inside her head. Nashoba’s voice didn’t stop recounting the story as if she was in a loop about it.

*Gotta forget about what she said,* Loba thought angrily, focusing more on the sensations of the van driving across the road. *I have my match now. All I gotta do is prepare for the fight and win.*

Loba thought positively and used the van as a rocking machine that put her body to sleep. The next time she opened her eyes, she was going to be back on the agency.

As Loba predicted, she was back on Risk-It Biscuit. The difference was that she wasn’t sleeping on a bed. She was still inside of Risk’s van. Furthermore, she was sleeping on a different position than yesterday. She was no longer sitting on her seat. She was lying on top of it with her legs stretched out.

Her long legs pressed her large feet into Risk’s face, pinning his face into the window. He was snoring out loud, either from exhaustion or because she probably knocked him out with a sudden kick while she was moving in her sleep.

“Risk…” Loba pressed on Risk’s cheek with her feet. “Wake up, dammit!”

“What’s going on?” Risk asked, unable to turn his head because Loba’s feet were pressing on his face.

“We fell asleep,” Loba pulled back her legs, revealing two red footprints on Risk’s cheek.

“Its’ been a while since you pressed your pads in my face,” Risk complained as he stared at his reflection in the mirror, touching the paw prints that she left on him.

“Sorry about that,” Loba apologized. It was a first since she never apologized for bruising his face with her pads.

“Don’t be,” Risk rubbed his cheeks and stared at her. “You seemed to be having a nightmare. At least you only kicked me once we parked at the agency.”

The two of them got out of the van. They had to do something first. They had to see the video that Ahiga gave them. Risk turned on the television and started watching the documental with Loba.

The documental showed Nashoba being interviewed by a reporter. He was asking her about her life story and how she became a Combagal.

“My first time seeing furry fighting was at a young age,” Nashoba admitted with a wistful smile. “I loved how the Combagals fought each other and nobody was scared. They were excited to test the mettle of these two warriors.”

“When I saw the smile on her face, I knew that my little Nashoba found her life’s purpose,” Ahiga chimed in. “So I signed her up to learn the Okichitaw Fighting Style. It’s a hybrid of judo, taekwondo, and hapkido. You can see the elements of those martial arts in my daughter’s matches.”

A compilation of Nashoba’s matches took place. She showed up dressed in a simple red tube top with gold tribal trim and matching shorts. For the final detail, she wore toeless boots and elbow wraps. Loba wasn’t surprised to see that Nashoba was an expert at mixing striking and grappling. She used punches, kicks, and throws to pummel her opponent before finishing them off with a submission hold. There were occasions on which she actually won the fight with knockout, having a variety of ways to finish the match.

*She’s strong,* Loba thought with a raised eyebrow. *I don’t think I would have defeated her had I not faced against Galina first. I focus too much on strikes. I need to add more grappling if I am to face her.*

The interview changed to showing Nashoba walking across the reservation.

“What is your goal for furry fighting Nashoba?” the reporter asked her.

“I want to get rid of Wild discrimination,” Nashoba explained as she practicing taekwondo kicks on a sandbag, leaving paw prints where her feet were kicking the bag. “I want to create a world of tolerance for Wilds by teaching Botaun about empathy, community, strength, and patience.”

“And how will you change that with those virtues?” the reported pressed on.

“My ancestors were the original citizens of Concatta,” Nashoba sounded melancholic as she spoke. “However, when the rest of the continent moved away to make the city-states, those of my tribe who chose to remain were treated as outcasts. I want to show the people of the city-states that you can always be a Concattan as long as you were born in this continent and strive to make it better.”

“A final question,” the reporter pushed. “I noticed that you tend to disappear from the public eye every once in a while. Why is that?”

Nashoba looked tense.

“I have a medical condition that kicks in at the most inappropriate times,” Nashoba explained. “I don’t know how often it happens. But when it does happen, I need to retreat until I feel better.”

“Aren’t you worried that this may affect your rank?” the reporter pressed on. “Your absences will prevent you from facing Lilikoi. You might even be demoted.”

“There are some things that can’t be changed,” Nashoba looked down on the floor, looking frustrated with herself. “But as long as I keep trying, I can do this. So I will continue despite my condition to make a better world for Wilds.”

The interview ended with Nashoba smiling at the camera, but Loba could see that there was something hidden inside her that was trying to hide something.

“I think that there’s something wrong with her,” Loba rubbed her chin thoughtfully.

“Could her absences have something to do with the moon?” Risk wondered. “She was happy to let you choose the fight, but she made a scene when she mentioned an open roof match under the full moon.”

“Probably,” Loba shrugged her shoulders. “But we won’t know until we try to find the answer to this problem. It’s nothing that we should worry about. All that I need to is train for the next week to prepare for the match.”

“There’s more to the video to see,” Risk pointed out. “It was clear that this video was a compilation of smaller videos featuring Nashoba. We have to see all of them if we are going to find out more about her.”

The duo sat along to watch the movie. The first thing that they noticed was the number of fights that Nashoba had. All of the ones that she had since her debut match to the latest ones going up the ranks. That being said, Loba was left with a question. Why did Nashoba skipped out on matches? She could have fought against Lilikoi or at least kept her number one rank by fighting Kendra. The only reason why she remained in the number two rank was because Galina intended to prevent challengers from moving up the ranks by fighting them as the number three contender.

“Did you get all of the information that you needed from her matches?” Risk asked Loba as she finished watching Nashoba’s last match. It was a title defense for the number one match before she was demoted in favor of Kendra.

“I think that I studied all of her fighting style,” Loba declared. “Is there something else that we need to know about her.”

“There’s at least ten more minutes of footage,” Risk pointed out. “Maybe it’s a working routine that we can study.”

The next ten minutes were a compilation that showed Nashoba providing fanservice for everyone. She was popular with people, but she was especially beloved by the Wild circles of the public for her appearances. Her most recurring displays were on charities that were dedicated to Wild acceptance and tolerance.

Then they showed a video of a man with a crowbar attacking a Wild. Nashoba got in between the attacker and the victim, taking the strikes without flinching. The man hit Nashoba again and again, but she refused.

“A hatred-filled beast like you does not deserve the honor of a match against me,” she told him coldly. “Begone from my sight.”

The assailant screamed in anger as he pummeled Nashoba some more with the crowbar for daring to insult him.

WHAM!

Nashoba grabbed the crowbar after getting hit three times. She then glared at him. It was hard to see her eyes because of the angle of the camera, but Loba could see that she was staring him into submission.

“Stop looking at me in the eye like that,” the assailant trembled. It wasn’t a demand. It was a scared petition. The arrogant bigot was begging for mercy.

“Get out,” Nashoba growled.

The video ended with the racist running away while the Wild that Nashoba saved hugging her in gratitude. The video then ended with Nashoba addressing the public.

“Hatred is eternal, but so is love,” Nashoba told the camera. “If we love each other for what makes us unique rather than hating each other for what makes us different, then we can make a better world for everyone.”

The clip ended, leaving Risk and Loba alone to share their thoughts on the video.

“She’s a badass,” Loba remarked.

“And an inspiration too,” Risk added. “She’s essentially you, but more focused on Wild acceptance rather than the thrill of the fight.”

“I look forward to the match then,” Loba grinned as she stood up and went to the sandbag.

Curling her fists tight, she started pummeling the sandbag, ready to begin her week-long training for the upcoming match.

*You told me about two wolves fighting,* Loba thought. *I guess you were talking about us. Well, I am the one who’s going to feed the next time we meet.*

Loba threw a roundhouse kick to the sandbag and immersed herself in her training, ready to continue her confrontation with Nashoba in the near future.

The week flew by quickly. Loba made sure to train on her striking, but she also made sure to improve her grappling as well. She contacted Galina to have her last few days of training with her to better deal against Nashoba’s fighting style.

Once she was finished training, Loba had Risk drive her all the way to Hagone.

“You mind telling me why you wanted to have a fight at full moon?” Risk demanded angrily. “I had to work my ass off to get the people to agree with your demand. I even had to pay them to get them to accept your request.”

“Because all of the best fights take place at night,” Loba pointed out. “Nighttime is when we Combagals fight.”

“But why did you demand an open roof fight?” Risk questioned.

“Cause I love full moons,” Loba answered as if stating an obvious facts. “I am a wolf. I love seeing the moon shining brightly in the sky, surrounded by those stars. I never fought under it. I figured it would make the fight more exciting.”

“Two wolves fighting under the full moon,” Risk deadpanned. “It sounds a bit cliché if you ask me.”

“It’s a classic, you mutt!” Loba punched him in the shoulder as they arrived to the arena.

Since Loba was already using her Combagal costume when she was training with Galina, she didn’t need to go to the locker room. She had the other Combagals of the agency prepare something for her.

“You got the boombox?” Loba asked Frieda.

“Yes,” Frieda nodded her head. “Lei-Tei made sure to get a good musician to make the songs.”

“And my folks made you a coat that you can put on and off before the match,” Benny showed Loba a coat of black and red with the Risk-It Biscuit emblem in the front and a moon on the back.

“Badass,” Loba grinned. “Let’s go!”

Frieda turned on the boombox and then the Risk-It Combagals came out. Loba was doing shadowboxing Muay-Thai style. She didn’t just throw punches. She was pivoting on her feet to throw elbows, rising knees, and roundhouse kicks.

The crowd screamed in joy as Loba made her entrance.

“Loba shows her Muay-Thai expertise! She’s making a dance of fists, knees, feet, and elbows to show how powerful each of her blows are. The motions are fast and not wasted. Each blow could be the end of Nashoba if she lands them true.”

As Loba relished on her entrance, she stared at the opposite corridor to see the opposite entrance.

AWOOOOO!

The howling of a wolf echoed across the arena. It was accompanied by a tribal beat song made with drums. The beating of drums and the harmony of the howls made for a good entrance song as Nashoba walked stoically into the ring.

As the wolf Combagal stood up in the center of the ring, Loba noticed that she was tenser than usual.

*I have to beat her soon,* Nashoba thought as she stared up at the open ceiling. It was still sunset. The moon was going to take minutes before it reached her. *I have to end this match before nightfall starts.*

“Are you ready to fight?” Loba asked as she approached Nashoba.

“I am as ready as I can be,” Nashoba growled in frustration.

“Sorry for not having a full moon right now,” Loba pointed out. “I messed up on the timing. I am no weatherwoman.”

“Sunset is good enough,” Nashoba whispered. “Let’s start the match as soon as we can so that we can finish this soon.”

She stared at her father from the corner of her eye. She was scared of letting him down, and she could see that he was scared for her. She felt guilty for making him feel like that.

The two wolves assumed a fighting stance.

DING! DING!

WHAM!

Nashoba crossed the distance between the two and punched Loba on the nose. As Loba was pushed away, she followed with two kicks across the face that stunned her.

“The Native Combagal makes the first blow. She sucker punches Loba with a punch to the face and follows with two kicks.”

“You bitch!” Loba snarled as she blocked the kick and spun around for a spinning elbow to the temple.

BAM!

Loba’s elbow hit Nashoba, but the Native Combagal turned her head to the side to minimize the impact that she received. She followed by hitting Loba with a knee to stomach that knocked the air out of her. And then she hit her with a vertical kick that stunned her. And she followed with a judo throw that slammed her into the mat.

*Damn,* Loba thought angrily. *She’s got a better handle of mixing in strikes, grapples, and throws into her attacks. Can’t beat her if this goes on.*

As she tried to stand up, Loba noticed that Nashoba was standing on the turnbuckle with her back turned on her.

“Tomahawk!” Nashoba backflipped and then twirled her body sideway, landing with her stomach on top of Loba’s gut. She was pinned down by the blow, but Nashoba wasn’t going to give up so easily. She stood up, turned Loba around, and then put her in a camel clutch.

“GAH!” Loba cried out in pain. With the phoenix splash that Nashoba used earlier, she didn’t have the necessary air to numb out the pain. Her neck and spine were being stretched out painfully.

“Nashoba takes the lead with her Tomahawk! This is normally her finishing move, and yet she’s using it early on the match. Is it because she considers Loba an unworthy foe or she considers her so dangerous that she needs to be defeated fast?”

It was actually the latter for Nashoba, since she needed to defeat Loba fast. But Loba saw the use of a finishing move on her so quickly as an insult.

“GET…OFF…ME!” Loba shouted angrily as she elbowed Nashoba on the sides, making her break the camel clutch.

“Loba escapes by using her elbows to break the clutch. But will that be enough to save her from being defeated? We can only see the answer in the rest of the match.”

“Eight Limbs Barrage!” Loba rushed at Nashoba, pummeling her with fists, feet, elbows, and knees.

WHAM! BAM! POW! CRACK! SMACK! POW! PA! BAM!

Nashoba clenched her teeth and took the blows. She needed to measure the timing of the attacks before countering.

*It’s there,* Nashoba thought as she saw the openings in Loba’s attacks.

“Hurricane Barrage!” Nashoba kicked Loba in the gut as she threw a punch.

WHAM! BAM! POW! CRACK! WHAM! POW!

Nashoba was retaliating with her own combo. The difference this time was that she was the one attacking. Loba growled angrily and resumed her Eight Limbs Barrage, but none of her attacks landed. Nashoba’s punches and kicks flew without opposition, crashing into Loba’s body despite her rival trying to fight back.

“We are witnessing an unusual exchange of attacks. Nashoba lets Loba pummel her with her Eight Limbs Barrage. Once she gets used to the attacks, she counters with her Hurricane Barrage. She’s unable to fight back as Nashoba’s limbs hit her in between attacks.”

To Loba’s shock, Nashoba stopped her attacks. Instead, she backflipped so that her feet were standing on the top rope.

“Wolf Slicer!” Nashoba jumped at Loba, slamming her body horizontally into Loba’s torso, knocking her down.

WHAM! WHAM! WHAM! WHAM! WHAM!

Nashoba rained down blows into Loba’s face. With Loba pinned down, she was going to be pummeled into unconsciousness or until she gave up. But that wasn’t going to happen any time soon.

POW!

Loba raised a leg to slam a knee into Nashoba’s back, knocking her to the ground.

“Nashoba tries to pummel Loba unconscious with a Wolf Slicer. However, Loba uses a knee to the back to escape the pounding.”

*How can she be so tough?* Nashoba thought desperately as she stared at the sky, noticing that the sun disappeared into the horizon and the sky was turning blue with the incoming approach of the moon. *I hit her with my best moves. She should have been knocked out.*

She was sweating a lot. If she didn’t defeat Loba in a few more minutes, then the other wolf was going to come. She couldn’t feed that wolf no matter what.

CRACK!

Loba nailed Nashoba with a roundhouse kick that stunned her.

“What’s with you?” Loba taunted as she hopped on her feet. “You’ve been checking on the sky since the match started. Are you trying to tell the time or you just like the view?”

“You don’t know what you’re in for,” Nashoba growled at Loba. “I won’t make myself responsible for what happens to you.”

“Same thing goes for you!” Loba grinned as she activated Wild Heart. “Let me pay you back for all the damage that you caused me!”

CRACK! BAM! POW! CRACK!

Loba pummeled Nashoba with roundhouse kicks, elbow drops, and rising knees to weaken her. She then got behind Nashoba and put her in a choke hold, forcing her to look up to the sky.

From the corner, Ahiga stared up at the sky. To his horror, the sky was completely black and the moon was about a minute away from coming out.

“Tap out!” Ahiga shouted at his daughter. “You need to tap out and get out of here, Nashoba! The moon will come out.”

“You’re not giving up on me that easily!” Loba growled as she tightened the hold on her rival. “This match won’t end until you are out cold by my hand.”

Nashoba was hyperventilating. Any second that was passing would mean that the other wolf was coming out of her. Inwardly, she begged for Loba to knock her out to prevent her darker side from emerging. Her body was heating up. And then she saw the moon in the sky, its silver light bathing her and Loba under its gaze. It was a beautiful sight, and then everything faded to black.

WRAP!

Loba felt something grab her back. She was then flung downward into the mat, knocking the wind out of her.

“This is incredible! Loba made a comeback to pummel Nashoba with a combo ending with a choke hold. But at a few seconds from winning, Nashoba suddenly grabs Loba and throws her to the ground with unnatural strength.”

“What’s going on?” Loba groaned as she stood up. She then gasped upon seeing what was happening to her opponent.

Nashoba was twitching erratically. Her veins were bulging. Her hackles were raised. Her hair stood up. Her eyes turned white. Her nails grew longer and sharper. And she was starting to growl like a savage beast.

“What’s going on?” the audience called out.

“Is this part of the show?”

“Nashoba looks weird!”

“Something’s happening to Nashoba. The moment that the moon landed on her, she’s been acting weird. It looks like she’s turning into a different person.”

“It’s the full moon!” Loba shouted as she stood up. “That’s why she’s been avoiding matches. They all took place during the full moon!”

“Yes,” Ahiga admitted. “The full blood sets my daughter’s Wild blood aflame. It makes her predatory instincts come to the surface. We can only bring her back by daybreak, heavy sedatives, and knocking her unconscious.”

Ahiga took out a rifle and put in a sedative inside, pointing it at Nashoba.

“I can handle this,” Loba stood between him and Nashoba

“Are you insane,” Ahiga shouted at her. “You’re not strong enough to beat her. The match is yours. I don’t care about the rank as long as she’s safe.”

“But Nashoba doesn’t want to lose like this,” Loba stated. “I saw the video. I know how important this is to her. If she were to lose her rank by having her father shot her like a mindless beast, then that would make her feel greater shame.”

Nashoba rushed at Loba, who just took her All Fours Stance and started moving alongside. To Loba’s dismay, Nashoba was aiming claw swipes at her. If she got close enough, she actually tried to bite Loba’ ankles.

*She’s more animal than person now,* Loba thought angrily. *At his pace, she will kill me unless I beat her first.*

Loba leapt towards the turnbuckle and then backflipped. She landed with her torso on Nashoba’s back, slamming her to the mat.

“The fight goes on. Nashoba is trying to use her claws and fangs to defeat Loba now, throwing away all the fighting techniques that she developed over the year. Loba uses her All-Fours Stance to increase her speed and evade Nashoba’s strikes. But she switches tactics by leaping at the turnbuckle and slamming down on Nashoba with a moonsault!”

Loba backflipped away from Nashoba, landing on all fours. She rushed at Nashoba while she was standing up.

“Lupin Trinity!”

Loba balanced on her hands and swung her legs in an arc, tripping Nashoba as she was back on her feet. While Nashoba was falling down, Loba performed a handstand which transitioned into a handspring, jumping over her fallen opponent.

WHAM!

Both of Loba’s feet slammed on top of Nashoba’s skull. Such a blow would have knocked the average Combagal down, but Loba felt Nashoba about to raise her head beneath her feet.

“Not done yet!” Loba backflipped away from Nashoba to return to all-fours. She then moved around Nashoba, running circles around her.

“Loup-Garou Assault!”

WHAM! BAM! POW! CRACK!

Loba used her hands to transition into different kicks with one or both feet. Nashoba was pummeled by mule kicks, sweep kicks, low kicks, handstand kicks, and roundhouse kicks from below. She wasn’t affected by the kicks, but their momentum was keeping her pinned in one place.

WRAP!

Loba’s legs wrapped around Nashoba’s waist, bringing her down to the mat.

WHAM! WHAM! WHAM! WHAM! WHAM! WHAM! WHAM!

She threw several palm strikes at Nashoba’s face. Though she was mainly a punchers, Loba knew that palm strikes were potentially more damaging than punches because of the increased surface area of the palm and not having the risk of breaking her knuckles if she threw one wrong punch. She aimed her palms at Nashoba’s jaw and temples, trying to shake her brain enough to make her fall unconscious.

“Loba manages to get the upper hand on Nashoba. She stuns her with the Lupin Trinity and then she pummels her with Loup-Garou Assault. The increased brutality of Nashoba pales against Loba’s technical skill.”

CHOMP!

Nashoba’s jaws clamped down on Loba’s forearm as she was pummeling her. Loba screamed in pain as blood was oozing out of her forearm and into Nashoba’s jaws. The feral Combagal stopped biting her arm and tried to bite her throat. With every bite that Loba dodged, Nashoba tried to scratch at her body with her claws.

“Nashoba turns the fight around by biting on Loba’s arm. She’s clawing at her as the tries to go for the throat.”

“I’m ending the match!” the referee approached the two fighting wolves.

“Don’t you dare!” Loba shouted angrily.

“You have to end the match, Loba!” Risk shouted from afar. “You already did enough. It’s not worth risking your life over a match!”

“Shut your mouth, Risk!” Loba angrily grabbed Nashoba by the throat. She’d run out of energy to conserve her Wild Heart since she was bitten, but she wasn’t going to fall down now to Nashoba’s savagery. “You’re my manager, so trust me to win this fight the same way you trusted me to be your Combagal!”

Risk was left shocked at Loba’s outburst. However, he didn’t protest her decision. He just remained at her corner and waited for her to win.

“Nashoba,” Loba whispered into Nashoba’s ears as she hugged her with both arms and used her legs to prevent Nashoba from clawing at her with a scissor hold. “I understand how you’re feeling. I know about the rage and bloodlust that you’re feeling inside. I had those feelings too, but I learned to master that side of me.”

Nashoba snarled at Loba, trying and failing to maul her.

“The problem with you is that you still lock the beast inside the cage,” Loba was paying back Nashoba for the story of the two wolves by using her own metaphor. “The thing is that, whether you like it or not, you are a Wild with the feral instincts of our ancestors. Have some pride on those instincts! Embrace your gift!”

Loba unwrapped her legs from Nashoba’s torso and placed her feet on her enemy’s stomach. With a scream, Loba shoved Nashoba away from her. She then stood up with one arm hanging limply and the other guarding her body.

“The fight is reaching the end. Loba pushes Nashoba away from her, but her arm is useless for the rest of the fight, depriving her of right punches and elbows. Will Loba survive the fight by limiting herself to six strikes?”

*Actually four,* Loba thought. *I have to use the left arm for defense, so I can only use my legs for kicks and knees.*

Nashoba charged at Loba, attempting to bite her again.

WHAM!

The top of Loba’s foot hit her lower jaw with an upward roundhouse kick.

CRACK!

The other foot hit her in the ribs with a middle kick.

CRACK!

Loba stunned her with a rising knee.

POW! POW!

She followed with two quick kicks across the face.

Each attack that Loba used was using the Art of Impact to magnify the damage. And since Nashoba was attacking as she was pummeling, the science of counters was applying since it meant that the damage was being multiplied.

A final roundhouse kick staggered Nashoba. Loba took the chance to get behind her and put her in a choke hold.

“Loba manages to get the upper hand. Despite having one arm paralyzed, she manages to stun Nashoba by only using her legs to kick her into submission. And now she’s trying to choke her unconscious now that Nashoba is too stunned from the beating that she received.”

“I’m sorry for forcing you into this match,” Loba apologized to Nashoba, feeling that she indirectly caused some damage to Nashoba’s reputation by showing this side of her to the public. “I want to make it up. I want to teach you how to control your instincts as a Wild. You deserve to be yourself, free of burdens.”

Nashoba was thrashing around, scratching Loba’s arms with her claws, but Loba wasn’t complying. As Loba tightened her hold, Nashoba was shedding tears. Loba wasn’t sure if Nashoba was crying from the pain of being choked, the shame of losing, or because she somehow heard the words that Loba told her and was moved by them. It didn’t change the fact that Nashoba stopped moving a few seconds later.

  DING! DING! DING!

“And Nashoba becomes the number two contender of Hagone. She chokes out Nashoba into unconsciousness. Such an ending!”

Loba didn’t have time to celebrate as Risk and some doctors rushed into the ring and carried her into the infirmary.

“Let me go, assholes!” Loba protested.

“We need to treat your injuries,” Risk told her before staring at the doctor. “How is she doing, doctor?”

“Surprisingly fine,” the doctor remarked with amazement as he checked the bite wound on Loba’s arm. “The punctures are very shallow and there’s no extensive damage.”

“How can that be?” Risk asked.

“Cause I’m sturdy as hell,” Loba bragged at Risk and the doctors. “And the clothes that I am wearing are special. They’re made of a special fabric so that it wouldn’t shred every time that I use the Art of Impact. Kinda shocked that they can withstand bites.”

As Loba pondered about her good luck, she was taken to the infirmary for further treatment. She was discharged an hour later, and then she went back home.

The following day, Nashoba and Ahiga visited the Risk-It Biscuit agency.

“We apologize for the inconvenience yesterday,” Ahiga bowed his head at Risk and Loba, who was standing next to a sandbag. “We should have told you of my daughter’s condition so that she could have a proper match with you. I am deeply ashamed of what my neglect caused to you and my daughter.”

“Knock it off,” Loba started pounding the sandbag with her injured right arm. She was forbidden from overstraining it, so she could only use her right arm for jabbing for the next few days. “Seriously, Nashoba, did you come here to blubber or are you going to let me train?”

“I don’t want to hurt you further,” Nashoba bowed down her head.

WHAP!

Loba threw a pair of boxing gloves at Nashoba’s face.

“You won’t hurt me,” Loba told Nashoba. “Now put your gloves on. We got a few hours before the next full moon.”

“That’s the thing,” Nashoba stamped her foot in frustration. “Why are you going to face me again during the full moon.”

“You need to control yourself,” Loba told her. “That’s the only way that you can recover the support of your fans. And that way, you won’t get your rank further lowered by spending too much time in absences. You won’t have to skip another match in your career once you master this.”

“But why go for such a risk?” Nashoba asked as Loba changed her bandages.

“Wilds gotta look after their own,” Loba replied simply, looking over her shoulder to smirk at her. “Besides, what are friends for?”

  Having spoken those words, Nashoba joined Loba in training, ready to conquer her Wild side once and for all.