

Josh

Hey man

Josh

U around?

Josh

Wanna talk some stuff thru



Josh

Ive been lookin into dino bone

Josh

But its just a bunch of dead ends

Josh

Do u have any contact who knows a vampyre

Josh

Intel from the source species would be huge help

Josh

Hello? Aiden?

Michelle

There was something about getting my nails done that usually turned me on.

I knew that was a weird thing to say, but it was





true.

Having your hands pampered, massaged, and transformed was an extremely sensual experience.

Now, throw in a bunch of pregnancy hormones bursting through my body, and leaving the nail salon, I was about ready to throw Josh onto the floor and ride him for hours.

The praise still hadn't hit us, but it wasn't slowing us down. Not one bit.

Since we'd found out the news, we weren't just screwing at night; we were screwing whenever we got the chance. Call it celebratory sex, call it parenthood sex, whatever you called it, I was liking it.

A whole lot.



As I turned my key into the lock, pushing the door open, I thought about where I'd like to have ruthless, primal sex with my mate this afternoon.

In the bathtub?

In the armchair?

Or maybe across his office desk, like last time...

But then I stepped into the foyer, and my mind stopped working. I mean it stopped thinking. All it could do was take in the sights.

And by sights, I meant my house... completely



And by sights, I meant my house... completely turned upside down.

Couch cushions were strewn all over the floor. Lamp shades were thrown far from their lampstands, books and papers covered every surface, and empty food wrappers were littered all over the room.

“Josh?” I called out hesitantly. I took a few more steps and then tried again. “JOSH!”

A few seconds later I heard movement coming from Josh’s home office, and then I saw him appear in the hallway.

“You look like *shit*,” I exclaimed, my mouth dropping open in surprise.



In the course of the eight hours I’d been out of the house, my mate had managed to turn himself into a homeless man who’d been on a ten-year bender.

His hair was thick with grease. He had ink stains on his hands and face. His T-shirt had holes in it, and his eyes were so bloodshot I could see their redness from here.

“Hi to you too, babe,” he said, shifting on his feet.

“Are you *drunk?!?*” I demanded. “It’s not even five in the afternoon yet.”

“I was doing *business*,” he slurred. “And it was frustrating. So I had a few beers.”

“A few beers,” I repeated, hands on my hips.

He nodded



He nodded.

“What business?”

“Konstantin. The motherfucker’s making it real hard to track him down now that we don’t have his scent.”

I sighed, walking over to him.

Yeah, I was pissed my mate looked like the goddamn walking dead and was clearly not in a lighthearted screwing mood, but he was doing all this to protect our family and all that.

“What do you have so far?” I asked him.



“NOTHING!” he thundered, punching the wall beside him.

“HEY!” I screamed back. “DON’T YOU TAKE YOUR ANGER OUT ON THIS HOUSE, DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?”

He looked at me, wearing a puppy-dog face.

“Yes.”

“Good boy. What’d you find on that dinosaur bone? There must be some sort of research out there about other bones, other vampyres who’ve done the same thing—”

“*I know. I just can’t find it.*”

“Shut up, Josh,” I told him, grabbing him by the shoulders and looking him deep in the eye. “You’re the smartest goddamn man I’ve ever met. You’re the only one I trust to get this done, okay?”

You're the only one I trust to get this done, okay? It's out there. And you can find it."

His eyes sparkled at me, showing a little return to life. "You're sexy when you give me pep talks, you know that?"

"Yeah, well, you're not sexy when you reek of afternoon whiskey and you've turned the living room into a bomb shelter after the bomb," I replied, pulling away from him.

"Take that back."

I smirked at him. "No. I was ready to screw the life out of you the second I walked through the door, but instead, you're in here drinking and whining and throwing my couch cushions around —"

"Michelle—"



"You keep talking about taking action, Josh. So stop moping! Take action! You know what to research. So what you didn't find it in the first hour you looked? So what everybody else thinks you're crazy? **GET TO WORK.**"

"Michelle..."

"What?"

"C'mere," he said, smiling at me and grabbing my hands. "Let me see that manicure."

"How did you know?" I asked him, watching as he inspected my shiny red nails.

"You said you were ready to screw the life out

“You said you were ready to screw the life out of me the second you walked in. That could only mean one thing.”

I laughed, my frustration with my idiot mate subsiding. “Okay, smartass...”

He was kissing my fingers and then the back of my hand and then my sleeve fell down, exposing my wrist.

I saw the burn first.

It was glowing again.

“Josh,” I whispered, and his eyes shifted from the skin he was kissing to my face. When he saw my panicked expression, he followed my gaze, and immediately his eyes went wide.

“What the hell is that?”

“It’s from...it’s from the burn.”



“The burn that the tar gave you?”

I nodded at him. He swallowed hard. Then he lifted my wrist to his nose and took a deep sniff. After a second, he looked me in the eye.

“Michelle, I can use this. I can use it to track him.”

“You can?”

He nodded frantically. “Yeah. I need to take your hand with me...”



“You’re an idiot,” I snapped. “I’m coming with you.”

“No. You’re pregnant. I’m not putting you in that kind of danger. He’s unpredictable. The whole thing is unpredictable—”

I grabbed his face in my hands and shut him up with a kiss.

“Life is unpredictable, babe. But this is as much my problem as it is yours. I want revenge just as badly. I want safety. And you and I, we’re a team. So I’m coming.”

He looked at me for a second, and I could see his mind reeling behind his eyes.

He was unsure, worried, and a little turned on by my demanding tone.

God, he’s easy to read.



“If anything happens to you, Mich, I don’t know what I’ll do...”

“So make sure nothing happens to me. It’s up to us, Josh. The outcome’s in our hands. Besides, even though Sienna and Aiden say they’re doing whatever they can to help with this, they’re clearly too distracted to get anything done.”

Josh nodded at me. “Aiden seemed more willing to talk, but I haven’t heard from him since yesterday morning. He hasn’t returned my texts or my voicemails—”

“*Exactly.* It’s time for us to shine, babe,” I told him, nuzzling his face down to mine again. I kissed

him, pulling his face down to mine again. I kissed his lips and then his neck and then nibbled on his earlobe. “It’s time for you to be the Alpha here.”

When Josh pulled my face back to his, his eyes were lit up with new life—new fire. I smiled at him.

“But right now, clean up the goddamn living room,” I said, sidestepping him into the bedroom. “I’ll be waiting in the tub.”

Sienna

Okay, I know Willa turned out to be the worst assistant of all time—two-timing me and worsening all of the drama of the *Real Mates* docu-series—but I missed having her organizational abilities around right about now.



It wasn’t even my idea to have a joint baby shower, or a baby shower at all, for that matter, but here I was.

Making all the calls.

Organizing all the floral arrangements, the reservation, the menu.

“Yeah, I’d like to reserve the back room for a private party on Saturday?” I asked the girl on the other end of the phone. Michelle wanted the shower to be at Jewel, which was the trendy restaurant of the moment.

Saturday was literally two days away, though, and nobody had made a reservation yet. So I was left to the duty—apparently, my last name carries some status



some status.

Who knew.

“This Saturday?” the girl asked incredulously.

“That’s impossible—”

“It’s a baby shower. For myself, Sienna Mercer-Norwood, and my best friend, Michelle.”

I heard a sharp inhale of breath. “Oh. Oh, Mrs. Norwood. Of course. Of course, we can fit you in. How many people approximately?”

“Not more than twenty,” I told her.



“Great, and what time?”

“Noon, please.”

“Very manageable. And for the menu, are you looking at buffet style or a three-course sit-down meal or...”

I sighed, hoping she didn’t hear me. This was *so* not what I wanted to be doing right now.

Mindless prepping for an event I wanted no part in.

It would just be unwanted attention, people *ooh-ing* and *ah-ing* over something extremely private.

Especially after the way I’d been feeling since brunch with my parents and Aiden’s—and even before that, honestly. I wasn’t really in the mood for celebration.



I was in the mood to work through my own fears, quietly and alone, in a safe space. And Jewel didn't seem like it would be a quiet or safe space.

"Hello? Mrs. Norwood?"

"Hi, sorry," I replied to the girl. "I'll tell you what, you choose. We're all pretty low-key, but as long as there's normal brunch food, we'll be happy."

"You want me... to *choose*?"

"That's right. Thanks, see you Saturday," I said, clicking off the phone. I let out a deep exhale. *One down.*

I was about to call the florist to organize some sort of baby-themed floral arrangements—whatever the hell that meant—when suddenly a sharp pain whipped through my stomach.

It felt like a needle was being shoved right through my gut, with a million other needles jutting out from the first one in all directions.

"AAHHH!" I cried out, falling to the floor.
"AIDEN!"

Immediately I heard his running footsteps—and then he was standing right in front of me as I rocked in the fetal position, clutching my belly. "What is it?!" He hurried over, cradling the back of my head.

"I don't know! Call Jocelyn!"



Aiden



“AAHHH! AIDEN!” I heard Sienna’s wail from the bedroom and ran out of the kitchen immediately. She was on the floor, rocking back and forth, her face ashen.

“What is it?” I demanded, holding her head off the floor. My mind was spinning. *Baby, baby, baby*, was all it could think.

“I don’t know! Call Jocelyn!” she cried, and my hand shot into my pocket, grabbing my phone.

A second later I was calling Jocelyn’s phone, but it went straight to voicemail.

“I don’t know if she has it at the Retreat...”

“SO CALL THE RETREAT!” Sienna screamed, her breathing unsteady.

I dialed the number.



“Healers’ Retreat, how can I help you—”

“I need to speak with Jocelyn, the East Coast Pack healer. It’s an EMERGENCY!”

“Sir, calm down—”

“This is the East Coast Pack Alpha, do *not* tell me to calm down!”

“Jocelyn is no longer with us.”

My breath hitched in my throat. “No longer with you? What do you mean?”



“This is the East Coast Pack Alpha, do *not* tell me to calm down!”

“Jocelyn is no longer with us.”

My breath hitched in my throat. “No longer with you? What do you mean?”

“She left the Retreat yesterday, Alpha. If you want, we can put you in touch with the head counselor—”

I hung up, my mind continuing to do circles.

Jocelyn is gone.

Unreachable.

Sienna’s in pain.

Tears spilling down her cheeks.

The baby’s in danger.

Who can help us?

Who can take care of our child?



Next Chapter