



Sienna

At first, all I could see was darkness.

Then light began to bleed in.



Shadows and vague shapes danced across the pink of my eyelids.

I didn't know where or when or *who* I was. All I knew was that if I were to open my eyes, if I were to allow the outer world to intrude upon this cocoon of shrouded safety...

I would discover something terrible.

"Sienna...can you hear me?"

A soft familiar voice called out to me. The voice of a woman I knew and trusted. A healer, I think. *Jocelyn*.

She'd called me Sienna. Of course. *That's* who I was. How could I forget?

"Sienna?"



I moaned in response, barely able to utter a word, preferring the calm darkness of before.

“Try to open your eyes.”

This, I resisted with every fiber of my being. The murkiness, the disassociation, the dark...it called to me right now. I felt nestled in its mysterious embrace.



“Please, Sienna...we need to talk...it’s...it’s about the baby.”

The baby? A tendril of panic snaked its way from the base of my stomach to my chest to my throat...until I could hear an involuntary gasp escaping my lips.

“What... what are you talking about?” I managed.

My eyelids began to creep open, yearning for answers, but I couldn’t let them.

It was too bright, too harsh, too complicated out there...

In the dark, I could simply *be*. I could float in never-ending oblivion without a worry in the world. I could forget this woman, Jocelyn, forget my name was Sienna, forget the mention of a baby...



Couldn't I?

“Sienna, I'm...”

I heard a muffled sob from the voice.

Why was she crying?

What was happening out there that could possibly bring a grown woman, a healer who had seen plenty of death in her time, to tears?

Jocelyn was a healer. She was *my* healer. The pack's healer.

And my mate was the Alpha. Aiden was the Alpha. Aiden.

And I was a she-wolf named Sienna. Owner of a gallery. Aiden's mate.

Aiden's pregnant mate.

The *baby*.

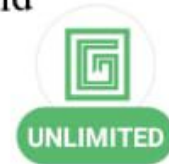
The baby was mine.

I couldn't stay in the dark any longer. I had finally remembered myself and everything that led up to this moment. Almost everything.



“Jocelyn,” I said, and at last, I opened my eyes.

Everything was fuzzy and bright, oh so horribly bright. Hospital-LED bright. And there, sitting hunched over my bed, was Jocelyn with tears in her eyes.



“What’s going on?” I asked, blinking, trying to adjust to the real world. “I don’t remember what happened...I shifted and then...”

“Sienna,” Jocelyn said, taking my hand. “I don’t know how to tell you this, but...I’m so sorry. You lost the baby.”

I slowly looked down at my stomach. There was no sign of a scar or anything wrong.

Jocelyn must have been mistaken.

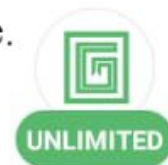
I slowly lifted my palms, noticing there were medical tubes pumping fluids into my bloodstream.

I laid my hands on my stomach, spreading my fingers, feeling for any sort of motion. It was too early to feel a foot or heartbeat, of course. But I searched for them anyway.

“That’s strange,” I said, frowning. “The baby must be hiding.”



Jocelyn's eyes widened as she grew pale.
"Sienna, did you not hear..."



"Did I mention that, a week ago, I could feel it inside me, stirring?" I asked. "I know he's only the size of a kidney bean, but...that's life for you. Maybe he's tired. Or she. We don't know the gender yet, after all."

Jocelyn laid a hand on mine. I didn't know why she was looking at me like that. Like I was crazy or something.

"You're not hearing me. The baby's not hiding or sleeping. It's gone. It's *gone*, Sienna."

Gone.

What did she mean by gone?

My baby wasn't gone.

My baby was right here, growing inside me, where it belonged.

"I don't know what you're talking about," I said, suddenly finding myself angry. "That's a terrible thing to say to a mother. Maybe you should leave, Jocelyn."

"Sienna! LOOK AT ME."



I lurched backward in my bed. I'd never heard Jocelyn raise her voice ever before.

Her spirit was so caring and so gentle that to hear that tone of voice, to see the severity of her expression now...it rattled me.

"You need to believe me," she said, wiping away a tear, trying to be stoic. "You need to accept what's happened."

"What happened?"



"You shifted and the baby...it couldn't take it."

Now, I remembered. Nina and Aiden, fighting. Jocelyn, paralyzed. Me, panicking, taking matters into my own hands.

Shifting.

Collapsing in pain.

My stomach. My child.

My fingers clutched at my stomach, pressing, scratching, searching for anything to prove Jocelyn wrong.

But now I knew she wasn't.



The truth was coming for me like a flash flood, drowning me where no person should drown—in the middle of the desert.

Alone and hopeless and *empty*. I was empty inside.

“Sienna,” Jocelyn said, watching me shudder. “Are you okay? Nurses! We need help in here!!!”



Suddenly, the machines in the room were beeping and my heart was pounding out of my chest and my brain was spinning. Everywhere, I felt pain and confusion and agony.

Everywhere but my womb.

There, I felt nothing. Because there was nothing left.

As nurses ran into the room and Jocelyn backed away, tears flowing again, the sound that left my mouth was an unnatural, mangled howl.

Not of a wolf.

Of a woman stripped of her greatest purpose.

A mother, no longer. A husk.



I howled and howled and howled as the doctors tried to sedate me, but none of their drugs were working, and still, I cried out to the night sky I couldn't see because only ugly LEDs looked down at me now, and I knew nothing but that sound.

Where there was supposed to be the sound of a baby's cry months from now, there would only be this.

This never-ending howl.



It would be my only voice now.

It would be the only sound I ever made or heard again.

Aiden

“GODDAMNIT!”

I tore through my house, ripping everything that stood in my path, unable to sit still, unable to process what was happening.

I flew into the nursery Sienna and I had been building. The crib. The little dresser. The little *everything*. It made me stick to my stomach, looking at it now.



I couldn't take it.

"NO!" I roared.

I took the crib in both hands, lifted it above my head, and threw it against a wall, watching as the wood shattered and split and crashed to the floor in a heap.

I ripped open the pages of hand-me-down baby books we'd been given by our parents, ripped the little outfits from the closet, and the room was nothing but wreckage, with me at the center, panting.

This was all my fault.

If I hadn't blown up at Nina, if I hadn't confronted her the way I did and forced Sienna to shift...

I put my head in my hands, rocking back and forth. I hadn't cried since the day Aaron, my brother, died. Alphas weren't supposed to cry.

There was no place for that kind of vulnerability when you were the leader of the pack. You needed to be strong. Always.

But right now I was no leader. I was just a man who had lost his child. A wolf who had lost his pup.

And, for the first time in years, I wept. I sobbed. I felt every tear burn against my cheeks, every gasp for air, all the spittle falling from my cracked lips.

I'd never known heartbreak like this was possible.

How was I ever supposed to go on?



How was I ever supposed to face my mate after what I'd done?

After all we'd lost?

Sienna

“Honey, are you okay?”

My mother sat beside my bed, holding my hand, but I barely registered her presence. Everybody had come to visit. My mother, my father, my sister.

Aiden.

But I didn't pay any attention to them when they spoke. Not even my mate. I felt like I was frozen in time and space, and no one could get through to me.



Aiden must've felt the same.

He couldn't stay in the hospital room or keep eye contact with me for very long. Every time, after a minute or so, he would find an excuse to leave.

I didn't blame him.



The room had the smell of death about it. Every second here was a reminder of what we'd lost. It was paralyzing agony for both of us.

Though I longed for my mate's comfort, I knew he was too broken up to offer any.

I saw his parents, Charlotte and Daniel, speaking with him outside the door, and an idea crossed my mind. I turned to my mother.

"Mom, will you ask Charlotte to come in? I want to speak with her."

My mother frowned, surprised. Charlotte and I had never been fond of one another. Why I would want to speak to her seemed to baffle my mother.

"Sienna, are you sure? Anything you need to say, I can..."



“There’s no one else I want to speak to.”

My mom looked a bit offended but gave me a curt nod and stood up, taking my father’s hand. His eyes glistened with pitiful tears.

“We’re here for you, Sienna. No matter what.”

I didn’t respond. This type of kindness only left me feeling more cold and empty and dead inside. With Charlotte, Aiden’s mother, I knew there would be no smiles. No kindness. No pretending.

I watched as my mother took Charlotte’s arm and spoke to her quietly. Aiden overheard them because he frowned, giving me a glance from the hallway door.

“You’re sure she asked for that?” he asked.

As if I wasn’t only a few feet away, listening to every word. My mother nodded, and Aiden turned away, even more perplexed. A second later, Charlotte stepped inside and shut the door behind her.

At last, it was quiet. Charlotte took a hesitant step forward, gaze as self-centered and unsympathetic as ever.

“You called for me?” she asked.



“Yes,” I said. “I want the truth, Charlotte.”

“That’s a first.”

Charlotte bit her designer glasses, looking down. For once, I could almost detect a hint of regret on her face. As if she was thinking, *Now’s not the time to be rude.*

“That’s all right,” I said. “I didn’t ask you to come in here because I expected maternal advice.”

“Then what?”

“When you came to dinner and fought with my parents, you kept speaking about my past, about my *geneology*, as if you knew something. Like you knew I was unfit to mother somehow.”

“I didn’t say that—”

“But you thought it. And look. You were proven right.”

Charlotte looked away. I had never seen her made uncomfortable by anything. I sat up in bed, looking at her intently.

“Charlotte,” I said, forcing her to make eye contact. “Tell me what you know. Why did



my parents, you kept speaking about my past, about my *geneology*, as if you knew something. Like you knew I was unfit to be a mother somehow.”

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“Charlotte,” I said, forcing her to make eye contact. “Tell me what you know. Why did this happen to me? Who am I? Really?”

There was a reason I’d lost this child.

It wasn’t just because I’d shifted.

I could feel it in my bones.

Charlotte took a deep breath, and I knew, at last, answers were coming.

Next Chapter

