



AIDEN

Sienna ran out of the healing cabin; I could hear her retching through the open door.

My entire body felt frozen. I stared at Nina in disbelief.

Josh was a murderer. He had killed Selene.

“Are you certain?” I asked her.

She nodded. “It all came crashing back just a minute ago. He saw Selene, saw that Selene had evidence of his plans. His face was...horrible,” she shuddered as she spoke.



As much as I couldn't bear to admit it, it all made a terrible kind of sense.

I waited for the familiar anger to surge its way through my veins, but instead there was only a deep grief.



Chapters



Display



Unmute



Comment



React



I'd known Joshua Daniels my entire life.
We'd grown up together. Fought and
laughed and run through the forest together.

Until he'd become something twisted and
monstrous.

Rowan sniffled next to me, still groggy from
being abruptly woken. I wrapped my arms
around my son's shoulders and pulled him
close.

Josh had sent men after Rowan. Men with
guns.

He had to be stopped. But how?



I was in no condition to challenge him for
the position of Alpha.

The very thought of returning to that pack of
conspiring, self-serving werewolves filled
me with disgust.

But he could not be allowed to remain.

What else can we do? I thought hard, trying
to concentrate despite my swirling emotions.



“Nina,” I said to the tired-looking woman sitting on the floor beside me, “where is the camera now?”

She thought for a moment, then shrugged. “The last thing I remember is giving the camera to Enzo. Then everything is just...black.”

“Where was he when you gave it to him? At the station? Could he have given it to another officer?”

“No, he wasn’t at the station. He was at that shitty motel over on Oak Street.”



“Could the camera still be there?” I pressed.

“How long has it been? Five days? They would have cleaned the room,” Nina shook her head again, her eyes drooping with exhaustion.

“But not well. You’ve seen that place. Bedbugs avoid it out of pride.”

It was a slim hope, but what other option did we have?



“I guess...” Nina trailed off.

“Do we have a better option?”

“Not really, no.” She climbed wearily to her feet. “If I head back tonight, I can be there tomorrow evening.”

“You’ve been traveling nonstop for days, Nina,” I said. “I want that camera as much as you, but you need a few hours’ sleep.”

She began to protest, but I cut her off.

“Besides, if the camera is in that hotel room it will still be there in the morning.”



MICHELLE

“Nicholas, would you please listen!” I cried to my eldest son. His arm was still in a cast from wrist to elbow, and a look of fierce defiance was on his pale face.

“I am listening! Laurie’s the one who keeps messing it up!” he screamed back at me, casting an accusatory glare at his four-year-old younger brother.



“Am not!” Laurence shouted back, even though I could clearly see the pencil he was using to jab into his brother’s back at regular intervals.

Baby Edmund, who would turn two next month, fell on his diapered bottom and began to wail.

An icy wind whipped through my hair as we stood on the front lawn of the Pack House in the cold afternoon sun.

I pinched my nose between my fingers and tried not to scream at my sons.



The ceremonial procession was happening in exactly one week and if it was anything like our afternoon practice sessions, it was going to be a disaster.

It didn’t help that Mia had already refused to allow her twin girls to participate in the parade, or that Nelson and Rhys had revoked their support days ago.

We would be walking with a pack of wolves I barely knew.



But the show must go on. I summoned a smile.

Besides, after the procession would be a Coronation Ball the likes of which the East Coast Pack had never seen.

“Let’s try again, boys!” I said. “It’s very simple. Nicholas, you’re oldest and you’ll be the next Alpha after your Daddy, so you walk right behind me.”

“Why does Nicky get to be Alpha! I want to be Alpha!” Laurence howled.

“Me Afa! Me Afa!” Edmund joined in, clapping his pudgy hands in delight.



“Nicholas will be Alpha because he’s oldest. That’s pack tradition, and it’s very important,” I told him, trying not to grit my teeth.

“But what if Nicky dies!?” Laurence said with wide blue eyes.

“Don’t ever say that!” I snapped at my son. His eyes filled with tears.



“And stop crying. Stop acting like a baby!” I barked, finally letting my frustration loose.

Taking his cue from his brother as always, Edmund started sobbing as well.

“Dumb babies,” Nicholas scoffed, kicking the dirt hard with his scuffed sneaker.

“Nicholas Daniels you shut your mouth right now!”

Instead of dissolving into tears, he shot me the dark, blazing look I was beginning to see all too often on his boyish face.



“Michelle! Over here!” a voice came from the distant trees. I looked over to see a man with an enormous telephoto camera on a tripod.

“Over here Michelle!” He called again as he began snapping photos of me surrounded by my unruly children.

My day had just gotten that much worse.

SIENNA



I didn't remember going to bed, but I guess at some point I must have dragged myself back to the guest lodge, because I woke up to the sun shining gently on my face through the window.

The moment I opened my eyes, the memories hit me like a physical blow.

Selene had died trying to protect Aiden and me. She had learned Josh's secret, and in trying to protect us she had lost her life.

I didn't even know what to feel anymore. I had run the gamut last night from disbelief to rage to sorrow and had finally landed in a chasm of deep, bottomless grief.

Now I mostly felt empty.



My eyes were puffy and sore from hours of crying. I rose from the bed and stumbled blearily to the small washbasin that sat on a corner table.

The cold lake water felt soothing against my swollen cheeks. My brain was foggy—like I was lost in a dream.



But the harsh, unyielding reality of the situation could not be denied.

Josh had killed Selene. There wasn't a shred of doubt left in my mind.

He had killed my sister. My head cleared and narrowed until it focused into one singular thought.

He would pay for what he had done to my family.

Energy, fueled by pure anger, flowed through me. I threw open the door to the guest lodge.

I stopped in the doorway; my eyes widened in awe.

The sun was setting over the forest: shimmering bands of pinks and purples shone over the waters of the lake.



A flock of geese were settling onto the surface, honking loudly at one another as they prepared for a rest after the day's long migration.



It was such a tranquil scene that I felt my clenched fists dropping to my sides.

No wonder the people of Home Hearth were so protective of this place.

My thoughts of revenge still swirled through my mind, but it was hard to focus on aggression when I caught sight of my son laughing gleefully with his grandmother at the lakeside.

Josh will get what's coming to him. Right now I needed to be with the family I had left.

I headed down the stone steps, and Rowan ran towards me when he saw me approach. His wiry legs tore up the ground beneath him.

He was going to be a runner someday. I smiled at the thought.



“Mommy!” he yelled with delight, throwing himself into my arms.

My mother came up behind him at a slower pace. “Sienna, I heard about last night.

Aiden and Tena filled me in on everything.”



Aiden and Tena filled me in on everything.”

Her eyes swam with tears. I went to my mom and hugged her tightly, shuddering with the effort not to cry.

I had to be strong for her. For everyone.

“Nina left a few hours ago. She said she was going to find the camera and bring it back,” she said softly.

Relief coursed through me. If anyone could find out where the evidence of Josh’s crime was hidden, it was Nina.

“Mommy, guess what me and Grandma found!” Rowan cried excitedly from my waist.



“What did you find?” I said, breaking the embrace and kneeling down to my son’s level.

“A giant bug!”

Of course. My son and his never-ending fascination with anything creepy or crawly.



“Wow!” I said out loud.

“Yeah, it’s super cool! Do you want to come see?” Rowan began tugging on my hand excitedly.

“Of course I do!” I answered with a bright smile.

The things we endure for our children.

My mom wiped the tears from her eyes and straightened her shoulders.

“I’ve already seen the giant bug,” she said, “so I’ll leave you two alone. I think I’ll go find Tena; he said something earlier about showing me the greenhouses.”



The sun was beginning to lose its luster as Rowan pulled me down toward the lake.

Shadows were slowly creeping over the water, and as I looked up, the first star of the night winked into being.

“Here! Look!” he said.

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He pointed towards a dark shape that was partially burrowed in the mud.

It was, indeed, a giant bug. A water beetle nearly the size of my palm.

Basically, it looked like an enormous cockroach, but my son crowed with happiness and poked a finger at its shiny shell.

I felt a rush of love for my clever, curious boy.

“Isn’t it a cool bug, Mommy?” he asked, looking for affirmation of his brilliant discovery.



“It’s the coolest bug I’ve ever seen,” I said with a firm nod.

He beamed at me and I folded him into my arms.

It was getting darker, and I shivered with cold.

“Let’s go home and get some dinner,” I whispered in Rowan’s ear.



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He ran away giggling, dashing back up the lakeside towards the stairs to the guest lodge.

Then he stopped dead in his tracks, his eyes fixed on the forest bordering the water.

I came up behind him.

“Mommy,” he said in a quiet voice, “is that another ghost?”

I followed his gaze.



Terror dropped like a stone into my stomach as a woman, coated in dirt and dried leaves, stumbled into the clearing.

Next Chapter

