



NINA

My heart stopped in my chest.

A dull ringing began echoing somewhere in my mind.

I rewound the video and played it from the beginning.

The faint, useless hope that I had somehow been mistaken was immediately squashed.

It was Josh.

Aiden's Beta and life-long friend.



Discussing “media spin” with Monica Birch, whom I thought wasn't allowed within fifty miles of Mahiganote.

I turned up the volume and listened, barely breathing.



Chapters



Display



Unmute



Comment



React



“I run one of the most popular blogs in New England, even if I have to hide under a pseudonym.

“You think I don’t know how to get people to believe what I tell them to believe?” the Monica on the video asked again with scorn.

“I really don’t care how you do it, but I need all the wolves in the Pack, hell I need every wolf in the *country* to see why this has to happen. It needs to be *justifiable*,” Josh replied in an angry hiss.

A sinister smile spread across Monica’s face. “Mr. Daniels, by the time ‘Robin Chamic’ is through, the whole world will see what a true leader looks like. And in return, you know what we agreed upon.”



My heart raced wildly in my chest. What they were talking about sounded an awful lot like...

Treason.

On the screen, Josh waved his hand dismissively.

“Yes, yes,” the beta said, “after the Yule Ball you’ll have exclusive access to me and to my mate. It was Michelle’s idea that we work together in the first place. She’s very excited about being back on television.”

“You’ll get your screaming hoards of fans back, don’t worry,” Josh continued.

The two shook hands, then Video-Monica turned and disappeared off camera.

On the screen, Josh clenched his fists.

“It’ll be worth it. It’ll be worth it,” he said, addressing the air around him.

“It’ll be worth it once I’m Alpha.”

At that moment Selene must have made some kind of sound, because Josh’s head suddenly snapped to the side.

He saw her.

I watched Josh’s face as waves of different emotions passed through him.



First, there was utter shock.

Then, dawning comprehension of exactly what Selene had seen. Of what she had *filmed*.

Then fear, as he realized he had been caught.

And finally, a black mask of hatred settled over his boyish features.

Here the video tilted and there was a blur of motion as Selene spun the phone around to show her face.

I gasped out loud when I saw her.



Selene was alive on that screen.

So wonderfully, vibrantly alive that it hit me like a physical blow.

Her eyes were wide with fright.

The screen went black.

The video was over.



Oh, Selene. I'm so sorry.

My grief quickly morphed into rage.

Joshua Daniels, what have you done?

Adrenaline coursed through me.

I hauled myself to my feet. My legs were shaking, but I shook off my nerves and hurriedly pulled on my coat and shoes.

I placed the camera, with its devastating cargo, gently back in the canvas bag, which I slung across my chest.

You're going to pay for this Josh.



I promise.

I thought back to something he had said on the recording.

"After the Yule Ball..."

Which was scheduled to begin in less than an hour.



Is that where Josh was planning to make his move?

Nina
AIDEN!

Nina
I GOT THE CARD TO WORK

Nina
Where are you?

Nina
Don't go to the Yule Ball!

Nina
Don't trust Josh.



Nina
Josh killed Selene!!

Nina
Aiden?

Nina
AIDEN!!!

My stomach twisted

My stomach twisted.

Was I already too late?

I had promised Aiden that I would never involve anyone else in our search for Selene's killer.

But he wasn't answering his phone.

If he was already at the Yule Ball, he was already in danger.

This was no longer the time to proceed with caution.

So I made my decision and headed out the door.



Ten minutes later, an acne-riddled young man pointed me in the direction of Agent Enzo's hotel room.

I knocked and a moment later the door opened, releasing an odor of stale sweat and alcohol into the corridor.

Agent Enzo barely registered my presence.

He crossed back to the scuffed and dented table that was serving as a desk and sat heavily onto a scuffed and sagging chair.

He didn't say a word.

He didn't even look at me.

My eyes flicked to the mostly-full bottle of whiskey that sat opened on the table.

Then back to Agent Enzo, who looked back at me with cold, calculating eyes.

“Agent Enzo, I have something you need to see.”



“Do you now?” His voice wasn't the slur I was expecting. It was sharp and cynical.

Okay. At least he wasn't drunk.

I shifted the camera bag off my shoulders and placed it on the table. Unzipping it, I carefully removed the Nikon and set it down.



“I have the SD card from Selene’s phone,” I said simply.

Agent Enzo was deadly silent as he took in my words.

I drew in a deep breath. “There’s a video. It shows a conversation between Joshua Daniels and Monica Birch. I think you need to watch it.”

I reached for the camera, but Enzo’s hand shot out.

“Are you telling me you have evidence of a crime, and you chose to keep it lying around in a goddamn digital camera!” His chiseled jaw was clenched tight.



My jaw dropped. “I...I had to. It’s cracked. I tried everything, like four different—”

He cut me off. “Okay, just shut your cakehole for a second and let me think!”

The nerve of this guy! But I didn’t know where else to turn, and he seemed to know what he was doing.

Enzo paused, opened a beer, and took a long drink.

My phone buzzed in my pocket, but I ignored it.

“Consider yourself lucky, Miss...sorry who are you?”

“Jessica,” the lie was on my lips immediately. “Jessica Jones.”

His mouth quirked up to one side. “Yes. I’m sure you are.”

My phone buzzed in my pocket again. My mouth was dry.



“Miss...Jones, I could have you arrested for concealing evidence. But you caught me in a good mood, so why don’t you just let me take it from here.”

With another swallow of beer, Enzo turned his back, dismissing me.

“You’re welcome,” I said sarcastically.



I couldn't help it.

But he had already forgotten about me, his intention focused solely on the camera in front of him.

Buzz. Buzz.

Frustrated, I curled my hands into fists.

I no longer had the SD card.

Aiden was going to be furious.

But he could be furious later, when he was still Alpha.

I left the door to Enzo's office open and stormed out of the police station.



Buzz. Buzz.

Wait, that could be Aiden.

I pulled my phone from my pocket so fast I almost dropped it.

It wasn't Aiden.



It was Jocelyn.

Jocelyn

jeremy is gone.

Jocelyn

jeremy is here

Jocelyn

help

Jocelyn

home

What the hell?

Something was wrong.



I stood in the parking lot, torn.

I needed to get to Aiden, to warn him about Josh's plan for the Yule Ball.

But I was seriously unsettled by those texts. How far had Jocelyn pushed herself in her ultimately fruitless attempt to save Jeremy?

I had to get to her.

Enzo has the camera, I told myself firmly.

Even if he's a drunk and a prick, he's still an agent of the TIB.

He'll know what to do. Better than you.

He'll call for backup and a battalion of officers will be at the Yule Ball in fifteen minutes.

I jumped in my car and drove to Jocelyn.

ENZO



Pouring two fingers of whiskey into the coffee mug on my desk, I used the camera to watch the video the curvy, dark-skinned she-wolf had given me.

It was short, less than ninety seconds long. But in that brief span of time, I was saved.

I sipped my drink and relished the taste of victory.

All those pencil-pushing douchewads back in Lumen would have to wipe the egg

off their face once I brought them Joshua Daniels.

Catching these sons-of-bitches was the only thing I had left.

Since they had torn my brother to shreds.

My first instinct was to go in guns blazing.

But first I would have to be careful.

Technically, I was no longer on the case.

The news had come down from my superiors at the TIB this morning.



That tramp of a lawyer had called and informed them I had denied Sienna Norwood her legal counsel.

How the hoity bitch had known about that, I still intended to find out.

I thought about calling the stuffed shirts up in Lumen, but decided to let them be the first to congratulate me instead when I showed up at the Yule Ball and arrested Joshua Daniels.



I thought about taking the camera with me,
but ultimately decided to tuck it in a gap
between the ancient cathode ray television
and the wall of the motel room.

Better safe than sorry.

I stood and the room tilted a bit before
righting itself.

The news of my redemption had made me
dizzy.

I shook my head to clear away the fog and
headed out of the motel.

No one spoke to me. No one ever did.



They were all a bunch of ball-sucking
bastards.

I walked over the dry grass toward my trusty
old Chevy.

Then stopped dead.

My car, my beautiful baby, was listing
heavily to one side.



They wouldn't...

They did!

One of those goddamned murderous slathering mangy mutts had slashed an ugly gash right through both of her driver's side tires.

“FUCKING WEREWOLVES”! I screamed at the night.

I dropped to my knees beside my car's ruined tires and slammed my fist into the pavement until I felt the skin crack over my knuckles.



This was the last straw.

They would pay for this.

I began stomping through the darkened forest toward the Pack House.

JOSH

Seizing power only happens through a combination of hard work, balls of steel, and

the ability to convince others that you know what is best for them.

But I'd be lying if I said that luck didn't also play a huge factor.

For example, it was sheer luck that I saw Selene in the forest that day. Sheer luck that I had been able to take care of the situation in time.

Bad luck for her, as it was, but Selene didn't have to die.

She could have handed over the phone, but she had refused.



And I couldn't let that video get out.

It would have destroyed months of careful planning, not to mention landed me behind bars for treason.

Like I said...luck.

Seizing power was also about listening to your instincts.



So, when my gut started shouting at me while I was on my way to the Yule Ball, I paid attention.

The night was cold and crisp, and I had decided to walk to the Pack House through the forest.

To savor these last moments of calm before the storm.

I was already wearing my hand-tailored tuxedo and the shining solid-gold cufflinks that Michelle had given me for our anniversary.

My hands were warm in black leather gloves.



Dry leaves whispered under the soles of my dress shoes, and waves of adrenaline were coursing through my body as I walked through the trees.

Soon, everything would be different.

Once I was Alpha.



Aiden had lost touch with his Pack so long ago, he wasn't able to see that he had lost their love.

And their respect.

I paused under a sprawling oak tree and leaned against the rough bark of its trunk.

It was all going to end tonight.

It was for the good of the Pack.

But that didn't mean I wasn't going to savor the taste of Aiden Norwood's defeat.

I still could barely believe it was finally happening.



The crashing stomp of heavy boots sounded from behind me.

Cautious as ever, I moved out of sight behind the oak and watched as Agent Anthony Enzo came into view.

I watched as he passed the oak tree that was serving as my hiding place.



His shoulders were hunched, and he was angrily stomping through the underbrush.

In a weird way, I was actually kind of grateful to Enzo.

After Selene's completely unnecessary death, I thought I was fucked.

Until this useless lout showed up and bungled everything perfectly.

Another stroke of luck.



But what was he doing heading toward the Pack House, when Gregory Singh had already informed me that Enzo had been suspended from the force?

That tickle of instinct told me to find out.

I stepped from behind the oak tree.

“Agent Enzo!” I called, waving cheerily.

He blinked at me, trying to see through the darkness with his pathetic human eyes.

When he realized who I was, his hand went immediately to his hip.

But the service pistol that was normally holstered there was absent.

He had been suspended from the force, after all.

I grinned.



Enzo hesitated, but continued as if he still had any authority here.

“Joshua Daniels you are under arrest for the murder of Selene Gibbs.” He kept a wary distance, knowing as I did that he was completely unarmed.

My first thought was to shift into my wolf form and rip his throat out with my bare fangs.

But shredding this tuxedo was not in the plan.

Plus, Michelle would kill me.



I sighed heavily.

I eased off my tight-fitting tuxedo jacket and folded it carefully across a tree limb.

Then, like a charging bull I ran at Agent Enzo.

He reacted faster than I had imagined, quick enough to dodge my first assault.



He turned to face me, curling his hands into fists and raising them into a classic boxer's pose.

I ran at him again. Enzo threw a punch that went wild and made contact with nothing but air as I tackled him to the ground.

He struggled, lashing out with fists and knees and feet, but I was faster.

I locked my hands, still in their leather gloves, around Enzo's neck and began to squeeze.

The agent's face turned a satisfying shade of purple, and he pulled at my hands with all



his might.

But the strength of a man is nothing compared to the strength of a werewolf.

I shifted, just slightly, into my wolf form.

Just enough to feel that primal surge of energy flow through my body.

I tightened my grip.



Enzo's hands slapped weakly at mine.

I gritted my teeth as his eyes rolled back into his head.

I felt a crunching beneath my hands as I crushed his windpipe.

He went limp.

I stayed like that, with my hands around the throat of the dead detective, for I don't know how many minutes.

Eventually my racing heart slowed, though it continued beating erratically in my chest.



Then all the strength in my limbs gave out,
and I began shaking uncontrollably.

What had just happened?

It had all been so quick.

My back brushed up against the rough bark
of the oak tree.

When had I scrambled away from Enzo's
body?

The body.



Fuck.

I didn't have time to deal with the body.

Which meant another potential crime scene.
This one of a federal agent.

Fuck fuck fuck.

This wasn't supposed to happen.

No one was supposed to have gotten hurt.



But it was too late to turn back now.

Things had already gone too far.

They're counting on you, Josh.

I would have to deal with Enzo tomorrow.

Things would be much different tomorrow.

When I was Alpha.

The weak, shaky feeling began to leave my bones.

When I was Alpha.



When Aiden Norwood would finally be forced to see me for who I really was.

Powerful.

Respected.

A leader.

I took a deep breath to settle myself.

Then another.

Pausing to retrieve my jacket, I left Anthony Enzo where he lay dead on the ground.

I headed to the Pack House.

Michelle was waiting for me outside the back entrance. Her eyes widened with surprise and alarm as she took in my sweaty face, the faint traces of dirt on my pants.

“What happened?” she asked, urgently.

“A complication. Don’t worry my love. I took care of it.” I pulled my mate close and kissed her softly.

She immediately began swatting at the patches of soil on my clothes.

I tried not to picture Enzo’s corpse.

The time had come.

I had my arm out to Michelle, and she took it with a secretive smile.

“Deady?” she asked



“What happened?” she asked, urgently.

“A complication. Don’t worry my love. I took care of it.” I pulled my mate close and kissed her softly.

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“Ready?” she asked.



“Ready.”

Our lips came together one last time before we proceeded arm-and-arm into the Yule Ball.

Next Chapter

