



SIENNA

The ceremonial procession and the masquerade ball afterwards were scheduled for the first Saturday of the new year.

This gave us a few much-needed nights to plan and rest before setting events into motion.



On that morning, I awoke to the thick *thwack thwack* sound of an axe being driven into wood.

I smiled from my bed in the guest lodge and stretched luxuriously.

Aiden had shown amazing improvement over the past few days and was now sharing the main cabin of the lodge with Rowan and me. My mom had moved Vanessa and River into the smaller cabin.

After more than ten days, we had truly



Chapters



Display



Unmute



Comment



React



begun to settle in to life at Home Hearth.

I pulled on the red fleece parka that someone had unearthed from a large box of used clothing.

My entire family had warm clothes on their backs thanks to these people.



Aiden was outside, his powerful muscles coiled as he swung the heavy axe in a wide arc over his shoulder.

It thudded deep into the piece of wood resting on an old stump, which snapped cleanly in half.

I watched him for a moment. His normally short dark hair was shaggy on the back of his neck, and there was a thick new growth of beard across his chiseled jaw.

He was sweating with exertion. His jacket lay in a crumpled heap near the woodpile, and his tight black t-shirt was stretched tight over his arms and chest.

A shiver of desire ran through my body,
mingled with joy at the sight of my mate



... of some rain through my hair,

mingled with joy at the sight of my mate looking strong and healthy in the morning sun.

I felt my nipples tighten beneath my sweater and I gasped as the delicious, fiery heat of the haze roared to life in my core.

He raised the axe again, and I could see beads of perspiration forming on his brow.



I wanted to run my tongue along his jaw and taste the saltiness of his sweat.

I shoved my lusty thoughts down reluctantly.

There was something important I needed to discuss with my mate.

“Looking good, Paul Bunyan,” I said teasingly, extending a cup of coffee towards Aiden. He took it, wiping his brow with a calloused hand.

He'd stopped using the crutch yesterday, but he still walked with a noticeable limp that worried me.



He noticed my furrowed brow and scowled.
“Not again, Sienna. I’m coming. That’s
final.”

I rolled my eyes but decided not to rekindle
our earlier argument.

We had argued back and forth for hours.



Nina and I had outlined the plan that would
allow us to enter the Pack House on the
night of the Masquerade Ball.

We had mapped out the path that would take
us from the secret servants’ entrance on the
western side up to the booth that controlled
the enormous projectors that had been
installed on the main floor.

Nina and I had planned every last detail,
except that we needed a third person to act
as a lookout in case something went wrong.

Gloria Escarra, the fierce-looking young
woman with the gun, had volunteered. So
had Yuki Kato. Nina had turned them both
down.

“This isn’t your fight. We can’t risk losing our best hunters, now can we?”

Which left Aiden or my mother.

My mate was the obvious choice, but that didn’t mean I had to like it.

Now Aiden came to me, taking pains to walk as normally as possible. He wrapped me into his arms and kissed my lips.

That insistent fire still raged through my veins. I kissed him back hungrily.



We hadn’t made love since his injury. Repressed desire was raging through both of us.

His hands traveled down my waist to cup my ass.

I moaned as I felt his bulge press more urgently against me.

“This is it, Sienna. After tonight, everyone will know the truth,” he whispered into my hair.



I nodded and met his clear green eyes. My fingers travelled down to unbuckle his belt and pull down his zipper.

“We still have an hour,” I said, reaching one hand into his jeans and wrapping it around his swollen member. “Let’s go inside.”

Aiden shook his head and grinned devilishly.

He took a quick look around, then kissed me again, moving me backwards until I was pressed against the wall of the cabin.

He pinned my arms above my head with one muscular arm.

He unbuttoned my jeans and slid them down my thighs along with my panties, all the way to the leaf-strewn ground.

With the other he reached between my thighs to my sex, which was already dripping wet.

I spread my legs a little and he placed two fingers at my soaking entrance.



He kissed me again, still holding my arms high above my head.

I gasped as he slid his fingers inside.

“God you feel amazing,” he breathed against my neck as he moved his fingers in and out.

I cried out, then broke off when I remembered we were outside, where anyone could hear us.

Aiden released my arms and quickly pulled his jeans off.



Still wearing his scuffed work boots and t-shirt, he lifted me, and I wrapped my legs around his waist.

Despite the recent injury, he held my weight as effortlessly as always.

One arm was wrapped around me, pressing me into the wall.

He used the other hand to position his cock against my wet heat.

With one driving thrust he buried himself deep, stretching me open.

I threw my head back and moaned low in my throat.

The winter air was cold on my bare thighs, but my entire body burned with heat as he pressed me more insistently against the wooden cabin.

He thrust again, filling me up completely.

I sank my teeth into his shoulder in an effort not to cry out.



Aiden's head was buried in my hair. He uttered a choked groan and began quickening his pace, pounding into me as I clung to his waist and back.

My passion crested and I flung one arm up against the scratchy wooden planks of the cabin wall.

I gritted my teeth against the scream that desperately fought to get out as I exploded around his cock.



Stars exploded in my vision as wave after wave of pleasure roared through me.

Aiden continued pounding rhythmically, his muscles straining as his own orgasm rose within him.

His thrust once more, powerfully, driving me against the wall with the force of his climax.

Our breathing came in rough pants as we hung there for a moment, our passion briefly sated.



Aiden gently set me down. My head spun pleasantly with the aftereffects of the last few minutes as I reached down to tug to my jeans back up.

Aiden's eyes still blazed with heat, and I wanted nothing more than to let him drag me into the guest lodge for an entire day of blissful, ignorant ecstasy.

But I tugged my sweater back into place and met his look with a reluctant shake of my head.



We had work to do.

MICHELLE

Throngs of people cheered and waved as my family and I proudly made our way down the center street of Mahiganote.

Josh and the boys were dapper and elegant in matching Hugo Boss suits of gray cashmere. My mate led the way, his cheeks rosy in the January cold.

Behind him was Nicholas who, I saw with a frown, had already managed to cover his shoes in mud.

He walked importantly behind his father, with his head held high.

He would be Alpha someday.

My heart filled with fierce pride at the thought.

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and marching them alongside me.

Edmund's fat thumb was shoved in his mouth. Laurence was looking at the crowds of people that lined the streets.

They were held back by wooden sawhorses which had been erected last night, and by our newly expanded security teams, who patrolled the streets with gleaming black pistols holstered at their sides.

There'd been threats of protest—even threats of violence—reported by the reporters on *InfoWolves*.



Josh and Gregory had responded to these vile terrorists by increasing the number of active Hunter Squads to three for the procession.

They would be stationed at every entrance to the Pack House, Thanda Singh had already assured me.

Still, it did make what should have been a celebratory parade through the adoring streets feel a little like a military march.



An angry-looking man in a yellow baseball cap elbowed his way through the crowds. In his arms he carried a white poster board bleeding red ink:

THIRTY MISSING ALREADY! JOSHUA DANIELS IS A KILLER!

The armed officers of the Hunter Squad immediately hopped over the barricade and seized the man, but it was too late. Josh's eyes had gone to the sign.

He blanched. A hundred people holding cell phones saw the sudden guilty look that flashed over his face.

A reporter with a blonde ponytail called out from the other side of the road.

“Alpha Daniels,” she called, “is it true that you've reopened the prison at Lorton Reformatory as a holding camp for supporters of Aiden Norwood?”

My sons looked around in confusion as the crowds listened to the reporter's words. Most of them did nothing, just continued cheering as if she hadn't spoken



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But a few exchanged pointed glances, as if she had confirmed a suspicion.

My family and I walked on. I could see Josh's hands clenched into fists at his side.

I caught the eye of Officer Hadley, one of the captains on the Hunter Squad. He came immediately to my side.

"Take care of that reporter, please," I whispered sweetly to him.



"Consider it done, ma'am," he answered.

The ivory lace of my mask covered my face from brow to nose, reducing my vision and sending a delicious thrill of anticipation through my body.

My sons had been put into Violette's care after the procession, which had thankfully gone off without a further hitch after that insulting incident with the reporter.



I hadn't seen her footage on any of the many flat-screen TVs that lined the front entrance to the Pack House, so I assumed that Hadley had carried out my instructions.

Yards of pink fabric swirled around my rose-colored, high-heeled slippers. Underneath were another five layers of crinoline petticoats.

The dress draped off my shoulders in cascades of ivory lace, and around my neck was a black ribbon choker with a brilliant pigeon's blood ruby at the center.



I'd had a dressmaker design this gown after Christine Daaé's dress in *Phantom of the Opera*. The whole theme of the night was to be a spectacular Masquerade Ball.

Josh had asked and asked if we could push back the date, but I just couldn't wait to throw my very first glamorous event—with myself in the spotlight.

And I could think of no better way than the grandest, most expensive party that the East Coast Pack had ever witnessed.



Men and women in extravagant costumes were loosely gathered around the vast corridor leading to the gallery, which we'd reinvented as a ballroom.

The light from the televisions shone well above our heads, so that everyone could fix their attention on the television or the party as they chose.



Most people were choosing to enjoy the ball, with the loosened inhibitions that came from being in disguise.

Already in a dark corner I spied a woman in a medieval princess gown passionately kissing a man dressed as a pirate.

I smiled. This night was certainly going to be interesting.

Monica Birch, who had neglected to wear a costume and instead wore a simple black pantsuit, ran up to me on her clicking heels.

“Is everything ready?” I asked her. We'd actually become rather close over the past few weeks.



I'd heard nothing at all from Mia and Erica, and they and their families had not attended the procession.

I'd told Josh to make attendance mandatory, but as usual he had been too busy to listen.

“Yes, the cameras will go live across the Pack House to view your official state entrance,” Monica said with a nod.



“Is Josh ready?” I responded.

“Alpha Daniels is waiting for you outside on the terrace,” she said smoothly.

As she spoke, I rounded the corner and spotted him. He was wearing a stylish black tuxedo and a white half-mask that only covered the left side of his face.

I winced from the window as he withdrew a silver flask from his hip pocket and took a long pull.

He thought no one had noticed his increased drinking, but we had. People were already whispering about it.



We need to give them something else to talk about. Something more interesting.

My velvet slippers were soft on the stone steps as I went down to meet my mate.

SIENNA



For hours, we waited in the narrow corridor of the third floor of the Pack House. Long ago this had probably been servant's quarters, but now it was dim, dusty, and full of cobwebs.

Aiden and I had kissed Rowan's forehead before leaving him and the girls with my mother and heading back down the rolling hills towards Mahiganote.

We'd told him we would be back in just a few hours, but I could see in his eyes that he did not believe our words.

It had only been twelve days, but everything looked surreal and unfamiliar as we had approached the Pack House many hours later.

Thanda Singh had been waiting in the dawn light, standing to open the door to the servant's staircase before we could even knock.



Nina had gone to Thanda, but instead of kissing or embracing, they had simply rested their foreheads together for a long moment.

I averted my eyes, focusing on the heavy canvas bag I'd carried through the forest.

Nina had haltingly explained what occurred between her and Gregory Singh's daughter.

The conviction in her eyes was enough to convince Aiden, who had formed a deep bond of trust with the former spy.

I still had my doubts, but we had no choice but to trust Thanda if this plan had any chance of succeeding.

And judging by the look on Nina's face, she was close to delirious with happiness at finding her mate at last.

Aiden and I had spent the entire day closeted

the utter chaos that had enveloped us since Selene's death that in a way these stolen hours felt like a blessing.

We'd talked and laughed about the past, sitting on the dusty rugs wrapped in each other's arms against the chilly air.



We'd packed a thermos of tea and a bag of sandwiches, courtesy of Angie.

It was the strangest, most unexpected picnic we'd ever had.

Neither of us mentioned the future.

It was too uncertain.

It all rested on tonight.

There was an almost undetectable knock on the door to our hiding place, and Nina's dark head came around the corner.

It was time.

From the canvas duffel bag, we withdrew two old-fashioned women's dresses.



Aiden pulled on a red-checked flannel jacket and suspenders over blue jeans and workbooks. With his newly acquired Paul Bunyan beard, it made for an easy and effective lumberjack costume.

I pulled back my thick red hair and covered it with a wide-brimmed black hat.



I hated how much it narrowed my vision, but my flaming hair was too easily noticeable in a house filled with enemies.

Nina removed a thin black walking stick from the bottom of the bag. We'd found it amidst the piles of clothes in Angie's trunk.

She stood, dressed now in a pale blue Victorian dress complete with button-up boots.

I was her mirror in lilac purple.

She *thwapped* the walking stick once against the open palm of her hand.

“Shall we?”

The three of us stood quietly together for a



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The three of us stood quietly together for a moment.

The calm before the storm.

We turned to go, Nina leading the way through a narrow door that opened onto a small closet.

She swung the door open wide, then her eyes widened in shock as it swung open to reveal a uniformed officer carrying a black assault rifle.

Next Chapter

