



## THANDA

Stifling a yawn, I turned towards the corridor to the executive wing of the Pack House. In each hand was a hot cup of coffee: one for the new Alpha and one for my father, his appointed Beta.

I was an Ivy-League educated lawyer who had graduated at the top of her class.

Lately, I was being treated more like a common chai wallah.



But the rules had been made clear to me from my earliest days.

Father's orders were to be obeyed without question.

My allegiance had been sworn from the day he agreed to give me his name, even though my mother was not his mate.



Chapters



Display



Unmute



Comment



React



I turned the corner onto the executive wing and stopped dead in my tracks.

I cocked my head to one side, trying to understand exactly what I was seeing.

A short woman with gorgeous, shining black skin was standing in the hall, her head bent towards the open door of my father's office.

*A spy.*

I smiled. My father would certainly reward me for this.



The woman turned. She saw me.

Our eyes met.

The satisfied smile died on my face as realization dawned.

A magnetic pull, like an invisible cord woven of the strongest steel, drew me towards this unfamiliar woman.

We stared at one another for a moment that lasted an eternity.



The wooden clunk of a chair being moved came from the open door to my father's office.

Someone was coming.

The dark-skinned woman's eyes widened with fear. Faster than I could blink she ran, bolting past me and down the dimly lit corridor.

I opened my mouth to call out to her, but my voice died in my throat.



She vanished through a slightly open door at the end of the hall.

A split second later my father's gray-streaked head popped out of his office.

"Ah, Thanda, there you are," he said, "What in the world took you so long?"

Immediately a mask of cool detachment fell upon my features.

I'd had years of practice at mastering my expressions.



“Sorry, Father,” I said with a nod. “I had to make a fresh pot of coffee. Why don’t I give you these and I’ll go fetch a third cup for myself?”

I extended the steaming mugs; he took them with an expression of distaste.

He lowered his voice to a bare whisper. “Hurry back. There are many things to discuss. The new Alpha is proving to be...difficult.”



I nodded. Having dismissed me, my father took the cups back into his office.

My heart hammered in my chest. I had only moments.

I went to the door at the end of the hall where the beautiful woman had disappeared.

It was empty. But a narrow wooden door was open barely an inch at the back of the closet.

It led to a dusty staircase, which branched to the upper and lower levels of the Pack House.



The woman was nowhere to be seen.

I didn't even know her name.

But she was my mate.

## SIENNA

I was awoken by the cheerful chirping of birdsong. For a brief, wonderful moment I had no idea where I was.



Then my eyes sprang open and I sat upright as the memories of the last few, nightmarish days came crashing back to me.

Aiden lying beaten at Josh's feet.

The men with guns coming to take my son.

The never-ending trudge through the forest.

Our arrival at Home Hearth.

I looked around the guest lodge. The other beds were empty.

Adrenaline flooded my system and I



scrambled out of bed.

Then sat back down as a wave of dizziness washed over me.

When was the last time I had eaten?

As if on cue, the door to the lodge banged open and Rowan stepped inside.

His little face was screwed up with concentration as he carried a large tray into the room.



The mouth-watering aroma of bacon filled the lodge.

Behind Rowan came my mother, carefully watching him as he set the wooden tray down on a nearby table.

In her hands were a dented coffeepot and two chipped mugs.

“Mommy, you’re awake!” Rowan cried. He ran into my arms and I buried my nose in his black curls, inhaling the sweet little-boy scent of his skin.



He was safe.

*We* were safe.

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A short while later, I felt like a new woman.

I had stuffed myself with three helpings of scrambled eggs and bacon, then my mom showed me where a cabin had been converted into a row of simple camp-showers.



Even without hot water, it felt amazing to scrub off the dirt and sweat that had ground its way into my entire body during our mad rush through the forest.

I headed towards the healing cabin, a lightness to my steps that I hadn't felt in days.

Lily Lowell was sitting on the enclosed porch of the cabin. An enormous pile of green leaves and roots were in front of her and she was sorting through them.

“Where do you get all these herbs?” I asked,

climbing the short flight of stairs to the porch.

She looked up. “Good morning, dear. Glad to see you looking better.

“Later today, if there’s time, I’ll take you to the greenhouse and introduce you to Tena. He’ll love to meet you. Our Tena can never resist showing off.”

My head brimmed with more questions, but only one really mattered. “How’s Aiden?”

Lily smiled up at me, but I saw something sad in her eyes.

Oh god, what had happened?



She must have sensed my rising panic because she held up a hand.

“He’s just fine, dear,” she reassured. “What’s broken in the body, I can usually mend. What’s broken in the heart...well, that will just take a little more time.”

“What do you mean?”





“Your young man has suffered an enormous blow, Sienna. The wolfsbane is out of his system and his leg is healing, but his whole world has been turned upside down.”

I nodded. Of course.

“He needs you, dear. Even if he doesn’t know it yet. He needs you badly. Why don’t you go sit with him awhile.”

Lily turned back to her herbs and I entered the healing cabin.

It was dark inside; all the curtains were drawn. Aiden was lying on a bed in the corner.

His face was turned away. He didn’t look up when I entered.

“Aiden?” I said quietly.

No response. I approached the bed.

The wound on his leg was wrapped in thick layers of gauze that stretched from hip to knee. But overall, he also looked as though a good night’s sleep had done him well.



Gratitude for Lily's healing skills filled me.  
What would we have done without her?

"Aiden?" I asked again. "It's me, Sienna."

Still no answer. I went to sit on the side of his bed.

He turned to look at me and his eyes were filled with pain.

"Oh, Aiden." I didn't know what to say.

How to take this pain from him.



"I was—I was so scared you were—" I trailed off, unable to speak the words aloud.

"I'm still here," he finally responded. His voice was a rusty cough. "Not that I'm much good to anyone."

I bowed my head. I knew my mate; there was nothing I could say to heal his shredded pride.

I leaned forward and placed a gentle kiss on Aiden's lips. He closed his eyes and rolled onto his side.



onto his side.

I eased myself onto the narrow space on the bed and leaned in close, placing another kiss on the side of his jaw.

“I’m so sorry, Freckles,” he whispered, eyes focused on the knots and whirls of the cabin walls.

“Never. You never have to be sorry,” I breathed against the back of his neck, running my fingers along the rippling muscles of his shoulders.



There was a time when this light touch would have been enough to trigger a passionate reaction from my mate.

But he held his breath and remained rigid beneath my fingers.

I let my hands go still, then wrapped them around his broad shoulders and pulled him close, much like I did for Rowan after a bad dream.

“I love you, Aiden,” I whispered against his back



back.

I felt his answering nod. His shoulders shook with restrained emotion.

We stayed like that for a long time, breathing together and wondering what the future had in store.

**Michelle**

My big moment is 2day!

**Michelle**

I got u both press badges

**Michelle**

If u wanted 2 come see...

**Mia**

...



**Erica**

ARE YOU SERIOUS!!

**Erica**

AFTER WHAT U DID TO SIENNA AND AIDEN!

**Erica**

**Erica**

FUCK OFF

**Michelle**

Okay I didn t do anything.

**Michelle**

JOsh was totally in his rights to challenge Aiden.

**Mia**

You really think thta makes it okay...dont u?

**Mia**

Tehy are our FRIEDNS

**Erica**

I seriously can't fucking believe you



**Michelle**

u guys r supposed to be my friends...

**Erica**

SIENNA WAS SUPPOSED TO BE UR FRIEND MICHELLE!

**Erica**

Just...leave us alone.

**Michelle**

Mia??

**Michelle**

Please?

**Mia**

NOt this time, Michelle.

**Mia**

You're on yoru own.

**Erica**

I HOPE IT WS FUCKING WORTH  
IT YOU HEARTLESS BITCH

**MICHELLE**



I sat on the silk-upholstered bench of my vanity table, applying a few final touches of makeup.

The horrible messages from my so-called friends glared at me from the screen of my phone.

phone.

Whatever. I didn't need them. Erica was a dried-up old spinster, and Mia had always been jealous of my success.

Nevertheless, a tear trailed down the side of my face, marring the perfection of my carefully contoured cheeks. I brushed it away.

They were just a bunch of catty bitches.

This was going to be my moment of glory, and nothing was going to spoil it.

A knock sounded on the door to my office and I turned to see Monica Birch enter the room, followed by a heavysset cameraman



“Are you ready, Mrs. Daniels?” Monica said, her eyes gleaming with excitement.

I rose from the bench, smoothing the pink Merino wool of my Jackie O-inspired suit. My hair was carefully coiffed into a smooth chignon under a Chanel pillbox hat.



Showtime.

“Yes, Monica. I think I’m ready,” I said with a final approving look in the mirror.

I pushed all thoughts of my former friends from my mind and summoned a wide, confident smile.

Today I was going to be center stage as Monica broadcast an all-access tour of the Pack House and detailed some of the plans that would soon be coming.

I had decided to redecorate the entire Pack House to showcase the power and strength of Josh’s leadership.



The renovations had just begun, but ornate sculptures and handcrafted pieces of art had already been installed along the corridors of the first floor.

Soon the executive floor would also undergo a transformation, until the entire Pack House shone with a new and glittering splendor.

Everything was top of the line. We could afford it now.





I walked into the main entrance hall of the Pack House, which had already been lit by dozens of tall, hot lamps.

An “X” marked in tape indicated where I would stand.

I took a deep breath and stepped in front of the cameras. The heat from the lamps made my skin itch under the wool of my suit.

“We roll in ten,” said the chubby cameraman, sweat already running down his face.

I wanted to wrinkle my nose at his disheveled appearance, but the camera was rolling, and this was my moment.



The red “record” light came on and I felt a rush of anticipation.

“Welcome everyone, to the East Coast Pack House,” I said with an easy smile. “I’m Michelle Daniels, the mate of the East Coast Alpha, Josh Daniels.

“I’m here today to give you an inside look

at the East Coast Pack and all the exciting changes that will make life better for all the wolves under our new Alpha.”

I took a deep breath and felt my smile become more natural.

“Follow me.”

## SIENNA

I jolted awake with a start. The already dark room was now pitch black.

I must have fallen asleep in the healing cabin.



I could feel Aiden’s rhythmic breathing beside me, and I was careful not to disturb him as I climbed out of bed.

What time was it? I needed to check on Rowan.

Inching the door to the cabin open, I crept outside.

It was the middle of the night, judging by the rising moon, which sat high in the sky.

the waning moon, which sat high in the sky surrounded by a thick blanket of stars.

The light shone on the black expanse of water down at the lake.

Something moved in the darkness by the dock. I rubbed my eyes, struggling to make out anything in the night.

A small figure was standing on the wooden dock that stretched out into the lake.

For no reason that I could identify, my pulse quickened.



I felt a surge of fear.

I made my way down the uneven stone path to the water, my eyes fixed on the dark silhouette that stood alone against the darkness.

I could see a thick tangle of curls on its head.

*Rowan!?*

I ran headless of the rough stones that



I ran, heedless of the rough stones that bordered the path.

*What is he doing out here? Where is my mother?*

I didn't want to frighten him, not when he was standing so perilously close to the edge of the lake.

"Rowan?" I said in a loud whisper. "Honey, what are you doing out here?"

He didn't turn at the sound of my voice.



Was he sleepwalking? That would be a new and terrifying development.

"Rowan? Let's go back to bed, sweetheart."

"Mommy? Can you see him?" My son's voice quaked with fright, and I felt his fear seep into my bones.

"Can I see who, Rowan?" I asked, not wanting to hear the answer.

"The man, Mommy. The man with the purple

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"The man, Mommy. The man with the purple face." He still didn't look at me, his eyes fixed on a point some ten feet ahead—over the water.

"I can't see anyone, honey. Are you sure it's not just a bad dream?"

"He followed us. I told him to go away, but he followed us all the way here."

Next Chapter

