



## JOSH

I flicked through the channels of the enormous 60" television I'd had installed in the Alpha's office.

My mate's face shone back at me from a video clip of the Pack House tour.



I had asked Michelle how it had gone, but she'd seemed preoccupied, busily discussing the upcoming procession with Monica Birch.

In a few days' time, my entire family and I would be on national television as we paraded through the streets of Mahiganote.

I'd barely seen my sons since taking power. I hoped they knew what was expected of them.

I turned the television to *InfoWolves*, which



Chapters



Display



Unmute



Comment



React



was currently broadcasting a loud and heated discussion about my new status as Alpha.

Michelle and Monica were supposed to have taken control of the media coverage, but somehow secret information was still being leaked.

Right now, the talking heads were debating a recently released statement on Yapper from the handle @RoguePackHouse.

Rage poured through me. *We have a rat.*



I was also confused. What prison camps?

I swiveled in my leather office chair, facing away from the infuriating newscast and looking instead at the broad expanse of lawn that surrounded the Pack House.

Gregory Singh was standing near the marble fountain at the bottom of the terraced stairs.

His daughter was with him, poised as usual in a tight-fitting purple skirt and white blouse.



blouse.

They were always together.

Always whispering.

What were they planning?

An icy trickle ran down my spine despite the heat from the fireplace.

I swiveled back to face the television. A new headline had appeared in red at the bottom of the screen.



## **WHO'S REALLY LEADING THE EAST COAST PACK?**

Above the glaring words was a picture of me next to a gigantic question mark.

### **THANDA**

“It’s too soon,” I said to my father as we stood beneath the marble fountain of the Pack House.



“Josh has been in charge for less than a week,” I continued, “You need to give things more time to settle down.”

My father sneered. “You really think Joshua Daniels is in charge of this pack?”

I fought the urge to roll my eyes. My father hated any expression of sarcasm.

“That’s exactly my point!” I hissed. “We must allow Josh to gradually take over. Getting rid of detractors this early... it attracts too much attention.”



“That’s enough, Thanda,” Father said in a razor-edged tone. I met his angry glare directly.

“Do not stick your nose in where it doesn’t belong. The Alpha and I are determined to remove a certain group of...undesirables from the pack,” he said, his lips curled in disgust.

He stepped closer and I could smell the sharp scent of his aftershave.

“All you need to concern yourself with



“All you need to concern yourself with, *daughter*, is doing as you’re told. Which means moving the legal paperwork through the appropriate channels. Do you understand?”

His voice was silky with menace.

I dropped my gaze in submission.

“Good,” he said. He turned and began walking up the wide steps of the back lawn, leaving me standing in the chilly mist from the fountain.



*Damn him.*

I knew exactly what sort of “undesirables” he wanted to have removed from the pack.

Part humans. People like Sienna, with special abilities.

People who were different in any way were considered a threat to my father.

Including people like me.

Father had never mentioned the fact that I



Father had never mentioned the fact that I was unmated at twenty-eight years old.

I'm sure he preferred it that way. No divided loyalties.

If he ever found out about the woman in the corridor last night...

Not just a woman. *My mate*.

His wrath would be swift and furious.

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Many long, tedious hours later, I finally climbed the stairs to my apartment. For a moment I rested my head tiredly against the wooden door.

I unlocked the door and shouted in surprise before quickly covering my mouth with a shaking hand.

The woman, the beautiful ebony-skinned woman from the Pack House, was sitting on my sofa.

Immediately I felt the connection between us



Immediately I felt the connection between us rise to the surface.

I saw a burning intensity in her eyes and knew she was feeling the same.

## NINA

What was I doing here?

I was in a relationship with a strong, beautiful woman whom I loved.

A woman I still couldn't find.



I needed to be out there, looking for Jocelyn.

I needed to get back to Home Hearth with the news about Robert's location.

If we were going to free him from the well-guarded dungeons in the Pack House, we were going to have to come back in force.

*So why am I here, watching the woman from last night as her eyes widen in recognition?*



Why had I risked capture by sneaking into the security guard's booth during a shift change and scrolling through the computer's personnel files until I saw the address listed under her photograph.

This was crazy.

But I had to know for sure.

Before I broke my girlfriend's heart, I needed to know if the woman standing before me was truly my mate.



As soon as her eyes met mine, I was lost in their dark brown depths.

Conflicting waves of guilt and joy coursed through me. I didn't know what to say, what to do.

*How can I do this to Jocelyn?*

*How can I do anything else?*

“Who are you?” the tall woman said, closing the door behind her and sitting across from me in a squashy leather chair.





She crossed one slim ankle over the other, and my mouth went dry. I swallowed and attempted to speak.

“Nina,” I finally managed. “Nina Castillo.”

“I’m Thanda Singh,” she said primly. “I’m pleased to meet you.”

Her voice was polite, but her face was beet red under her bronzed cheeks.



The sheer ridiculousness of the situation hit me.

I couldn’t help it. A snort of laughter came through my nose. I winced, afraid Thanda would think I was making fun of her.

But she gave a low, pleasing laugh and my heart thrilled to the sound of it.

*Fuck. This isn't right.*

I took a deep breath to steady myself.

“How did you get in here?” she asked with a raised eyebrow.



Ah yes. The breaking and entering.

With a sheepish look I said, “I kinda borrowed the security booth’s database while the guard was taking a leak...”

She smirked, leaning forward and placing her elbows on her knees.

“My father would be interested to hear that his increased security measures were so ineffective.”



“Who is your father?”

Thanda looked astonished, as if this were the first time someone hadn’t known who her family was.

“Gregory Singh. He’s the new Beta for the pack.”

Ah yes. The hawk-faced man from the conference room. I guess Josh was already busy filling the new posts in his administration.

A furtive look crossed Thanda’s face. “Are



you sure no one saw you come in here?  
If my father knew about this... he's very  
powerful.”

“You're afraid of him.” It wasn't a question.

“He doesn't approve of...nontraditional  
mating bonds. He says it weakens the pack  
as a whole,” Thanda said, her eyes downcast.

My lips curled in distaste. Even now there  
were still so many who fought against  
anyone who was different.



As if there hadn't been same-sex mating  
bonds for as long as there have been  
werewolves.

The only difference was we were no longer  
afraid to hide who we truly were.

Poor Thanda. I couldn't imagine the  
heartbreak she suffered daily from her  
father's ignorance.

“Has he never suspected?”

Thanda shook her head. A few strands of her  
chocolate brown hair escaped her tight bun,



falling to frame her face.

“I’ve just never been in a relationship before. He never asks, I never mention it. Perfect, right?” Her words were slashed with bitterness.

She stood and kicked off her black pumps. Twisting her hands nervously she came to sit beside me.

“Until I saw you last night in the Pack House,” she said, “I just assumed I would always be alone. I had made my peace with loneliness. But then...”

But then our eyes had locked and the immovable, inexplicable link of the mating bond snapped into place.

Clearly Thanda had been no better prepared than I for what had happened last night.

Seated next to me on the ivory sofa, Thanda reached out a trembling hand and laid it on mine.

Her touch sent shivers racing through me. I longed to run my fingers over the delicate



longed to run my fingers over the delicate skin of her wrist.

*No. This isn't right. I have to find Jocelyn first. I owe her that much.*

I gently removed my hand from beneath Thanda's.

She looked devastated.

“Please...it's not...” How could I possibly begin to explain?

Thanda had already moved to the far side of the couch, her eyes averted. “No, I totally understood. I shouldn't have—”

Her hurt expression was too much. I stood and knelt on the floor in front of her, meeting her gaze.

“It's not that. There's just...there's someone I need to speak with first. I need to find her. I think she might be in trouble.”

“Who?” she asked, looking up.

I considered. Thanda was a high-ranking



I considered. Thanda was a high-ranking member of the Council. If anyone knew where Jocelyn could be...

“Her name is Jocelyn White. She was the Healer for the Pack before...well, before.”

I didn't want to say, “before your father helped violently overthrow my friends.”



Thanda nodded. “I've heard the name. Josh says she hasn't been seen for days. She was the one watching over Jeremy Gibbs before he died, right?”

My heart sank. “I haven't seen her in days either. But she's very important to me, and I need to help her.”

Thanda nodded again. Her expression cleared, and she paused thoughtfully. “If I hear anything, I'll let you know.”

“How?” I asked. I had no phone, no internet at Home Hearth.

She chewed her bottom lip for a moment. “Can you come back here? When can I see you again?”



“I have no idea,” I answered honestly. “But I’ll return as soon as I can.”

I stood to go, and Thanda rose as well.

She leaned towards me. I could smell the intoxicating lavender scent of her hair.

She hesitated an inch from my lips and I closed the distance, pressing a gentle kiss on her soft mouth.



Thanda’s lips felt soft and deliciously enticing beneath mine.

She tasted like cinnamon.

Her breasts pressed lightly against mine, and I lifted a hand to cup one in an open palm.

I felt Thanda’s inward gasp as she kissed me back more urgently.

Heat rushed over me. I felt dizzy with the nearness of her.

Her arm moved to encircle my waist and for an instant we melted together.



*If I don't leave now, I'll stay here forever.*

I wanted to do just that, to stay here in this room with Thanda Singh.

But I made myself break away from her, though I was nearly panting with desire.



“I’ll come back,” I promised her, placing one more kiss on her soft lips.

“You’d better,” she returned with a smirk.

Before I could allow myself to reconsider, I left her apartment, careful to check as I exited that there were no watching eyes on the quiet street.

Every step that took me farther from my mate thudded heavily in my chest.

## SIENNA

The gibbous moon hung low in the sky over the lake.

After so many sleepless nights, it had become my constant companion.





Rowan's episode from last night joined the countless others that worried my mind.

His fearful talk of the "purple-faced man" made my blood run cold.

Who, or *what*, was my son seeing?



It had happened too many times now for me to brush it off as a childish figment of the imagination.

I sighed, my breath misting in the frosty night air.

Rowan had spent the day quietly playing beside Aiden.

Spending time with his son had roused my mate out of his melancholy thoughts, and the two had idled away several hours playing Go Fish and Old Maid.

I turned back to the healing cabin. Aiden was sitting upright on his bed next to Rowan, who had found a picture book in the box of battered toys Lily kept in the cabin.



Aiden was quietly reading to him about different people who work in a town.

“Fred the Fireman rescues people from dangerous fires. He is very brave and strong.”

Rowan was snuggled up beside his father, his green eyes fixed on the pages in front of him.



“Debbie the Doctor helps people who are sick or hurt. She works at the hospital.”

I smiled, feeling a wave of relief. After all this, at least we were still a family.

Aiden turned the page and Rowan flinched away from the book; his eyes squinted tightly shut.

Aiden looked up at me and shrugged in confusion.

I moved toward the bed and turned the book to face me.

It showed a picture of a police officer on one side and a picture of a nurse on the other



side and a picture of a nurse on the other.

Nothing remotely threatening.

“Rowan, what’s wrong?” I asked.

“The man in the picture looks like the purple-faced man.”



Aiden and I exchanged a look. I’d filled him in on last night’s events this afternoon.

“The purple-faced man is a policeman?” I asked.

“He isn’t dressed like a policeman, but he told me he was one,” Rowan said tearfully.

“What else did he tell you?” Aiden questioned further.

“He said that he got killed. He said I had to get the camera.”

None of this was making any sense.

I tried another approach. “If he wasn’t dressed like a policeman, what was he

dressed like? Was he old like Grandpa or young like Daddy?”

Rowan stopped to think. “Young like Daddy. He had a brown coat, but it was all ripped up.”

He paused again, then said in a slow, scared voice, “He says to tell you he’s sorry for thinking you killed Aunt Sellie.”

He *says*. Present tense.



“He says his name is Enzo.”

Enzo?

“Enzo?” I suggested. My mouth was dry.

*But that didn't make any sense...*

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“Can...can you see the purple-faced man now?” I asked Rowan, my voice shaking.

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“He’s standing right there.”

Next Chapter

