



AIDEN

I was standing in front of Dogstar when the limo pulled up and Sienna got out.



She gave the other occupants a wave and then straightened, facing me. Fortunately, there wasn't a camera or journalist in sight.

I grabbed her hands the second the limo pulled out of sight. "Tell me what's wrong right now, Sienna. Don't make me wait another second."

She shook her head. "I'm sorry I worried you. It's not a big deal. Well—I mean. It kind of is..."

"Sienna?" I was becoming truly worried now.

"Can we please go in? It's cold."

I held her hand as we entered the burger restaurant. Her fingers were like ice.

I rubbed them between my hands, kicking myself for abandoning her yet again.

And for nothing. The stupid sludge had turned out to be a dead end.

The host took us to a booth, and I slid in next to Sienna.



She glanced at me and then looked away.

With an effort of will, I didn't press her. Just waited.

She slid her fingers through mine, watching our hands entwine as she did.



“So I had this... problem... the other day. At the festival.”

I kept my mouth closed, listening.

“I went outside for some air. I needed a break.”
Sienna kept her eyes on the table.

“And I thought maybe a run would help, but when I tried to shift... I couldn't.”

I blinked. “You couldn't?”

She nodded and met my eyes. “But Hanh says it's okay. It's just temporary—because of the stress and all. From the attack. It's like... minor PTSD.”

My heart clenched. *That fucking bastard vampyre is going to pay.*

I'd tear that scumsucker limb from limb for what he'd done to my mate.



Sienna took a deep breath. “But that’s not all he checked.”

Anger had been building to a crest in my veins but at her words, I paused.



“Your mother made this comment, about how people get pregnant during the haze. And then Michelle kinda piled on, and I started to get nervous ’cause I mean... we have been sexually active...”

She still wasn’t meeting my eyes.

“And you asked Hanh to see why you aren’t?” I guessed.

With a slow nod, she said, “I did.”

“And what did he find?”

“That’s what’s more concerning,” Sienna said.

“Concerning how?”

Sienna swallowed, then raised her beautiful, clear blue eyes to meet mine.

“There’s a chance I might be infertile.”



JOSH

Taking sips from my flask of whiskey, I drove west, through the Cherokee Forest to Knoxville.

The needles on my Rolex led me to the Jalwitz Museum of History.

I drove past it at first, but the needles turned me back.

Once in the parking lot, they eased back into all directions, no longer pointing anywhere specific.

I had arrived.

Konstantin was here.

Michelle, I found him.

Aiden thought I couldn't do it, but I did.

And now I'm going to kill him.

For you, my love.

Adrenaline filled me.

Claws threatened to burst from my fingers.



Fangs pushed against my lips.

The urge to shift gripped me. To tear into the museum and destroy everything in my path.



As I left the Bronco in the parking lot and approached the museum, my brow creased with concern.

I had expected for the windows to be dark—it was late Sunday evening, after all.

But what I had not expected to see was crime scene tape.

It surrounded the building and crisscrossed the front door.

Is Konstantin hiding out in a museum that's a crime scene?

Even with the whiskey dulling my brain, that didn't seem right to me.

I considered calling Aiden.

The situation was too weird. Something was off.

The watch had led me here.



It had to mean that Konstantin was inside.

Maybe he'd already hurt someone.

Maybe when the cops had responded to an emergency call, Konstantin had hidden somewhere within the museum.



As I debated what to do, I was reminded of the pain and heartache of seeing Michelle in the hospital—fighting for her life.

I'd almost lost her.

That *thing* had almost taken her from me.

My anger began to skyrocket.

That does it. I'm going in there.

I was going to find where that bastard was hiding.

I'd make sure he never hurt anyone again.

SIENNA

We didn't talk much when the food came.

Neither of us knew quite what to say.

Aiden sat back in the booth. He folded his hands on the table.

“Sienna, no matter what Hanh said, you know I love you—I’m the luckiest man alive to be mated to you.”

But he didn’t get it.



“I’m the luckiest woman alive to be mated to *you*, but if I *am* infertile, that’s a real problem,” I said, tears in my throat.

Aiden shook his head, wiping his mouth.

“All of this, the show, the festival... part of me was trying to show that I had turned over a new leaf. That I was mature enough to be the Alpha’s mate.”

Aiden met my eyes and raised his eyebrows quizzically.

“The press. The traditions. I’ve been resistant.”

“So that’s why you hopped on that insane bandwagon? Is that why you called my mother?”

“That was partially Monica’s idea,” I admitted. “And it wasn’t only because of that. I was also trying to watch out for Michelle. But I think it was a mistake. She doesn’t want me there.”



Aiden sighed. “Sienna, fuck that stupid show. And as far as what Hanh said, I don’t believe it for a second.”

“But what if it is true? What if I can’t have children. Can’t provide heirs for the pack. Can you imagine what people will say?”

“Since when do you care what anyone says?” Aiden asked with a frown.



“Since they started watching every move I make!”

Thinking back, I knew I used to be more confident about bucking the system. I’d kept my virginity for years—through all the hazes—despite everyone’s expectations.

But I’d also hidden the truth of that.

“The whole world is watching me,” I confessed. “And now I’m going to let everyone down. I’m going to fail in the one thing the Alpha’s mate has to do above all else! Produce the Alpha’s heirs.”

“Okay, easy, Anne Boleyn. Let’s slow down,” Aiden said, dropping a couple of bills on the table. “Let’s get out of here. Go for a walk.”

We abandoned our half-eaten burgers and left the restaurant.





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Dark Mode



Chapters

Aiden took my hand and led me into the winding, wooded paths of Mahiganote City Park.

“Sienna, we don’t know if Hanh’s even right, do we? After all, he’s only Jocelyn’s assistant. His abilities aren’t anywhere near as powerful as Jocelyn’s are.”



As Jocelyn’s *were*, I realized.

My heart clenched with pain for my friend. I couldn’t imagine what she was going through.

But Aiden did have a point. Hanh was a dedicated healer, but he wasn’t nearly as talented as Jocelyn.

“No,” I conceded as I took in the frosted scene. Snow lay on the ground in icy patches.

“And if it does turn out we’re infertile—”

His use of “we” touched my heart.

“—we’ll confront it. Together.”

But even though he was saying all the right things, I couldn’t take it.

I pulled away, facing him again.

“It’s all wrong!” I exclaimed. “I’m all wrong! You deserve so much better!”

Aiden’s eyes darkened, and he grabbed my arms, pulling me to him in a hard kiss.

“Never say that!” he whispered gruffly against my lips.

He kissed me again, and even though the winter haze had ended, my body came alight with desire.

I dug my nails into his shoulders, kissing him back, my lips demanding more.

He pressed my back into a tree, my cashmere jacket thick enough to protect me from the rough bark.

But right then, I wanted it rough.



I wanted to feel everything. None of Aiden’s gentleness. None of his tender caresses.

I was so *angry* at myself.

I wanted punishment.

Biting at his lips, I provoked him, teased him.



Aiden grinned and made a low growling noise in his throat.

His hand plunged into my silk slacks, fingers pushing against my panties.

I was wet for him, and I wanted him to take me—right here.

Uncaring that the ground was cold, that small piles of snow surrounded the base of the trees, I dragged him down on top of me, pulling open his coat and the shirt beneath it.

The loose slacks bunched down as Aiden's hands played with my panties.

It wasn't enough. I wanted more.



I freed him from his jeans, wrapping one hand around his hot, hard shaft. Then, in one swift move, I bent down, wrapping my lips around the tip of him.

Aiden let out a surprised gasp as I took him in deep.

He pushed me back against the hard earth and I met his eyes. They were dark and stormy.

He'd caught my mood and matched my own aggression with dark passion.



His hands shifted to claws, and he tore through the panties, tossing them aside.

Then he grasped my thighs, the sharp tips of his claws pricking into my skin.

Spreading my legs, his dark eyes fixed on mine, he penetrated me.

He felt huge, his girth widening me like never before.

I cried out, arching my back, heedless of the snow in my hair.

His claws still dug into the sides of my thighs as he thrust into me.



He groaned, his voice mingling with my whimpers as we rutted, wild in the icy trees.

Freeing a leg entirely from the slacks, I bent it up, wrapped it around him, and brought him closer.

He plunged deeper.

A tightening within me brought another groan from him, and that was all I needed.

I came, arching my back again, clawing at his chest, a cry erupting from my throat.



His hips moved faster, and a moment later, he gasped as I felt him spilling into me.

His body loosened, and he went to wrap his arms around me.

But even as the pleasure in my body faded, it felt wrong.

What am I doing? Running from my problems, like I always did.

Letting myself forget how screwed up everything is.

How I'm all wrong.

I pulled away from him.

Aiden's eyebrows drew together, his face concerned.

Yanking up my slacks, I tried to think of something to say, to reassure him nothing was wrong, but my mind was blank.

Then my phone buzzed, and I looked at the number.

Monica Birch.



I picked up. “Yes?”

“Sienna! Total fiasco! My idiot cameraman failed to record one of the house visits. We have to reshoot it right away so it can go live tonight.”

Looking at Aiden, I said, “I’m at Mahiganote Park. Come pick me up at the south entrance.”

“Sienna...” Aiden said, still sitting on the ground half-naked.

I ended the phone call. “I’m sorry, Aiden. A thing with the show. I’ll see you at home later, alright?”

“Sienna, are you okay?” Aiden asked.



I shrugged. “Not really... but... I don’t know. Can we talk more about this later? I’m just not feeling very—”

“No explanation needed,” he said, reaching for my hand from where he sat. “Whenever you’re feeling up to it.”

My heart swelled. It meant so much that my mate didn’t pressure me.

I wanted to tell him right then and there everything I was going through, but I didn’t want to worry him any more than I already had—at least for now, anyway.





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Mustering my most composed face, I leaned down and gave him a kiss on the forehead. “I’m fine. I’ll see you later.”

And I fled before he could see the tears springing to my eyes.

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