



AIDEN

I sat on a bench in the park, watching Rowan solemnly build a tower out of dried sticks and leaves.

It was a gorgeous early winter afternoon. We should have been enjoying the last little bit of warmth the sun had to offer.

Instead, my son and I were silent and preoccupied. He had barely spoken a word since this morning, when he had awoken to find his mother gone.



Sienna and I always tried not to lie to Rowan, so I told him only that Mommy had to go talk with the police again.

I couldn't bear to tell him the truth.

In jail.

My mate is in jail and there is nothing I can do.



Chapters



Display



Unmute



Comment



React



Nothing except try to stay strong for Sienna and take care of Rowan until we figured out how to get her out of there.

When I had suggested with false cheer that we go to the park, my son had shrugged miserably.

I was beginning to have misgivings about the idea myself.

The grassy field was filled with clusters of parents and children, all of whom were basking in the late afternoon sunshine.



I could see Sienna's friend Mia with her mate and twin girls having a picnic near the duck pond.

Nelson's son Amir was laughing with Nicholas Daniels, Josh's kid, as they happily stomped through the mud left by the recent rains.

Rowan was sitting alone under a cluster of willow trees, idly building his stick tower higher and higher.

The fact was not lost on me that a few days earlier, Rowan would have been splashing in the mud right alongside the other boys.



We'd been at the park for almost forty-five minutes, and not one of Rowan's friends had asked him to play with them.

None of their parents came to speak with me, either.

It had been less than eight hours since Sienna had been taken away in handcuffs by Agent Enzo, but it had probably taken fewer than eight minutes for news of her arrest to begin spreading through the Pack.

Everyone was keeping a wary distance.



I didn't really care if my Pack was gossiping about *me* behind my back, but the fact that it was affecting the happiness of *my son* made my claws itch to spring from beneath my skin.

To distract myself, I checked my phone, hoping for a text from Nina.

Nothing. Of course.

Nothing but more vile lies being spread by Monica Birch and her band of jackals.

Asking Nina to find the missing SD card from Selene's phone was nothing more than a wild-goose chase, and we both knew it.



Even if Selene's killer hadn't taken it with him, the forensic investigators would surely have found it in their exhaustive search of the Pack House.

I just couldn't think of anywhere else to start.

All we had to go on was one enigmatic text that had already led to a dead-end and a tiny sliver of blue plastic that could be anywhere in a ten-mile radius.

If it still existed at all.



Fuck.

What are we going to do?

I braced my arms on my knees and lowered my head into my hands. I stayed like that for a long moment, just breathing.

I stared at the ants as they swarmed through the dry grass at my feet, trying to process everything that was happening.

Trying to see the path forward.

I was shaken from my gloomy thoughts by the sound of taunting laughter.



Looking up, I saw Nicholas and Amir standing over by Rowan. Nicholas was pointing at Rowan and saying something that I couldn't make out.

Amir, Nelson's six-year-old son, was laughing along with Nicolas but looked uncomfortable when Rowan started to rise to his feet.

I stood as well, but did not immediately intervene. I liked to give Rowan the chance to settle small differences with his friends for himself.

He would need the negotiating skills for when he became Alpha after me.



My son was small but wiry, and his tiny fists were clenched in anger as he faced down the bigger boys.

Rowan had never been a violent child, and I was completely shocked when he suddenly shoved Nicholas Daniels in the chest.

The older boy stumbled back a step, no longer laughing.

Now I was walking toward the children. "Rowan!" I called out, but he either didn't hear me or chose not to listen.



Josh's son pushed Rowan back, hard.

Rowan lost his balance and fell to the ground, landing right on top of his carefully built stick tower.

His face turned a tomato red and I saw him fighting back tears.

"Hey!" I shouted at Nicholas. Now other parents began peering over from their picnic blankets, trying to identify the source of the commotion.



Nicholas looked back at me and I saw immediate regret in his eyes as he realized he had been caught.

Not a big deal. I can smooth this over.

As I stomped through the mud toward the children, a strange smell filled the air.

Like ozone.

Or lightning about to strike.

No.

Panic rising, I looked at my son.



Rowan had gone completely rigid on the dry grass. His eyes were fixed on the boy who had pushed him.

The crackling, burning smell intensified.

Without warning, Nicholas Daniels rose a full two feet into the air.

His blonde hair swirled around him in an eerie halo.

His face was an immobile mask of fear.



Then, faster than I could react, Nicholas was flung backwards with incredible force.

His arm hit the trunk of a willow tree and I heard a sickening crack as the bone snapped.

He came to a stop about twenty feet away.

All eyes were on Nicholas. His face was deathly white with shock as he clutched his broken arm.

Then, collectively, they turned to look at my son.

Rowan lay unconscious on the muddy grass.

I sank into one of the hard wooden chairs that lined the kitchen table.

My hands were shaking uncontrollably. I placed them flat on the table in front of me and tried to quiet the hammering in my chest.

I had managed to get Rowan out of the park and back home, but the damage was done.

After a long moment of silent, boiling tension, the quiet park had erupted into sheer pandemonium.

Screaming parents and children started running mindlessly around the sunny park.



Others began taking photos of Nicholas, or recording videos describing what they had just seen.

I stood protectively over my son, blocking him from the hungry eyes of people and their cameras.

Nicholas's crying was soft, so soft it surprised me at first and I allowed myself to hope that perhaps the boy wasn't badly hurt after all.

But the unnatural angle of his arm could not



be denied.

Violette, Josh and Michelle's au pair, had started crying and shouting in French, tears streaming down her cheeks.

I had no idea what she was saying, but the frightened, accusatory look in her eye as she watched me lift Rowan's limp form off the ground needed no interpretation.

Nor did I need to look around to see all of the other parents, even Nelson and Mia, watching us warily.



Their suspicious glares were hot on my back as I silently carried Rowan back to the car and buckled his unconscious frame into his booster seat.

They were all anxiously clutching their own children, as if half-expecting Rowan to suddenly wake up and attack them too.

What was worse was that I was afraid of the same thing.

I was afraid for my son, but now there was a tiny, hateful crevice in my mind that was afraid *of* him as well.

I slumped onto the kitchen table, all the pent-up energy leaving my body in a rush



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Myself, Sienna, all of us had been so wrapped up in the shock and grief of Selene's murder that we had failed to acknowledge Rowan's increasingly strange behavior.

The way he seems to see things in his dreams, things he can't possibly know.

Insisting that Selene's speaking to him.



That terrible spirit-wolf at the funeral...

And now this.

Not only were these “occurrences” becoming more frequent, they were becoming stronger as well.

We had to do something.

I have to do something.

Sienna and I had always planned on dealing with Rowan's abilities gently if he ever developed them.

We had talked about training Rowan as he grew up, so that he could learn to control his



powers gradually.

He had been such a happy, normal baby. And he grew into a happy, normal toddler.

But now...

We are running out of time.



I couldn't put my finger on exactly how I knew, but every instinct I had was howling that something terrible was approaching.

I was going to have to truly make Rowan understand the seriousness of his actions in a way that ensured he would always remember.

And it would have to be now.

I ran my hands through my hair, wishing there was a better way.

Maybe there was, but I simply didn't have the time to find it.

I was going to have to scare my son.

ROWAN



In my dreams I was running.

Running through the forest so fast it felt like flying and when I looked down, instead of my normal feet I had white wolf paws.

I liked when I dreamed about being a wolf.

I liked how fast I could run, way faster than when I was awake.

Then Aunt Sellie was in my dream. She looked sad and tired.



She always looked sad and tired now.

Aunt Sellie wanted to show me something so I followed her, but I didn't really want to go.

She always showed me the same thing. And it made me feel scared.

I could see the Pack House, where Daddy worked, and I could see the big stairs at the back.

I shut my wolf eyes because I didn't want to see, but Aunt Sellie said I had to look 'cause it was **VERY IMPORTANT** so I opened my eyes just the tiniest bit.



Dream Aunt Sellie was standing next to another Aunt Sellie. This one was lying on the ground like she was sleeping, only I knew 'cause Mommy told me that she wasn't sleeping. She was DEAD.

And DEAD means you go away forever. Like my goldfish I had when I was a baby.

But my goldfish didn't come to my dreams and Aunt Sellie does.

Now she was pointing, and I could see Nicky and he was crying, and I was sorry, but it was too late.



I didn't mean to hurt him, but I did.

My wolf came out and hurt Nicky.

I wanted to say I was sorry, but Nicky's nanny was screaming and the words were strange but in my dream I could understand them.

She said I was BAD.

She said I was a MONSTER.

She said people were going to take me away.



Just like Mommy.

Then I woke up and I was in my bed and
Daddy was there.

“Rowan,” he said in a deep, grownup voice,
“I need to talk to you.”

His face was like a thundercloud.

“What’s wrong, Garoo?” I asked.

“You hurt Nicholas,” Daddy said, “you
broke his arm.”



I nodded and I wanted to cry but I wasn’t a
baby anymore, so I tried not to.

“I’m sorry Daddy. I didn’t mean to—”

“Rowan it **DOESN’T MATTER!**” Daddy
shouted.

Daddy never shouted at me.

His face was angry, but it was also scared,
and he was still shouting, “You broke his
ARM, Rowan! You didn’t touch him, but I
saw you! Everyone saw you! What did you
DO?”



I wanted to tell Daddy about my wolf and how the wolf was so strong, so much stronger than me.

And sometimes the wolf got angry like when all those people with cameras were making Mommy mad.

Or when Nicky teased me and said that my Mommy would never come home.

But I didn't know how.



Now Daddy was on my bed and he grabbed me by my shoulders. It didn't hurt but I couldn't move, and Daddy's face was really close to mine.

“Rowan, you can never do anything like that again. Do you understand me? NEVER!”

His fingers dug into my shoulders and now it did hurt a little. I could see how scared Daddy was and I couldn't help it.

I started to cry and cry.

Then Daddy let go and he pulled me into a hug. I was still crying, and Daddy brushed my hair with his hand and squeezed me tighter. “I'm sorry, Rowan. I love you,” he said.



But it didn't matter, and I couldn't stop crying.

Because his eyes had looked the same as Nicky's nanny in my dream.

And even though his words were different, I knew he was saying the same thing.

I was BAD.

I was a MONSTER.



And that meant they were going to come take me away. Just like Mommy.

AIDEN

My son's chest heaved and shook as he sobbed uncontrollably in my arms.

Aiden Norwood, you are a disgusting excuse for a wolf.

But I didn't know another way. This ability, this —*power*— was too far beyond my understanding.

And my mate wasn't here to help.



I sat on Rowan's bed for a long time, gently smoothing his soft black curls.

Eventually, his pitiful sobs trailed off and his breathing became slow and measured.

He'd cried himself to sleep.

Trying to disturb him as little as possible, I extracted myself from Rowan's sleeping form and tucked him gently back under the blankets.



Of course, he would still be exhausted after everything that had happened.

With a deep sigh, I stood and watching my son innocently sleeping under his red Elmo sheets.

He was only five years old. He shouldn't have to carry such burdens yet.

A flash of color caught my eye.

In the corner, Sienna had installed a small art station, so Rowan could draw or paint whenever he wanted.

Lexa usually kept this area tidy and organized, but a piece of paper lay partially

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For no reason I could identify, my pulse began racing.

I crossed to the small, child-sized table and picked up the large piece of paper and saw what it contained.

Then I looked back at my son, and that dark crevice of doubt that had appeared earlier in my mind expanded into a chasm.

Next Chapter

