

## SIENNA

None of us were trained guerrilla fighters, and it showed.

Our sabotage of the bridge over the James River at the base of Chaffin's Bluff had succeeded in stopping the line of prison vans: seven of them in all.



We had no formation as we attacked, however.

Many members of the Makadewa collective had hunting rifles, being non-werewolves, and they triggered warning shots into the sky.

“Hold your fire!” Yuki shouted, gripping a gun of her own, but only some listened.

Some of the werewolves shifted, pouncing in front of the trucks and snarling. One red

roan leapt onto a van's roof and howled.

The guards poured out of the Transits and a couple shifted as well, but when the gunshots sounded, most gripped their own weapons and assumed combat stances.

My heart pounded as my head whipped back and forth, trying to take in everything at once. At my side, Nina did the same.

“Everybody get down! Nobody move!” bellowed a large shaven-headed guard as he leapt out of the front of one of the trucks. He held a huge assault rifle.

“Freeze!” I shouted, imbuing my voice with all the dominance I could muster.

*Damn, I wish Aiden was here.*

“Put down your weapons!” I ordered the prison guards. “Release the prisoners and no one gets hurt!”

The effect of my dominance caused several of the guards to respond, putting their weapons at their feet and lifting their hands. One of those who had shifted returned to



One of those who had shifted returned to naked human form.

“Pick up your damn weapons!” the bald guard roared.

The dominated werewolves looked from me to him. Some started leaning to pick up their guns.

“Stop!” I bellowed.



Fear and anger fueled me, and a small part of me marveled at what I was doing.

*I'm acting like I'm in charge here.*

Hands hesitated over black weapons.

*This whole thing could go to shit in the blink of an eye.*

*I have to do something.*

“Release the prisoners now!” I ordered, mustering my Deity power.

As the bald guard bared his teeth in

frustration, I thrust out my arms, setting my power loose.

“You curs better fucking *pick up your weapons!*” he bawled.

Summoning the roots of every tree within a fifty-foot radius of our position, I directed them towards the various guards.

Tena and I had been training.



“You!” the bald guard shouted at me. “Hit the ground now!”

He held up a remote.

I didn't stop bringing the roots, but I waited to send them out of the ground.

“See this?” he bellowed. “I touch a button and I activate a collar! I touch this red button and I activate every collar in my van!”

“What the hell is he talking about?” Nina demanded.

None of our people seemed to have an

answer

answer.

I held the roots in place.

A couple of other guards produced remotes, holding them high for us to see.

Not all of them did, though—I had successfully dominated them.



Of the seven vans, three had guards wielding remotes.

They all stared at me intensely, almost unblinking.

Beneath the earth, I pushed the roots to grow—thin, vine-like.

“Get ready,” I said between clenched teeth to Nina and Yuki.

“For *what?*” Yuki asked.

“You may have to shoot one of them,” I said.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw her move her rifle closer to position.

“Stop!” the bald man barked, spotting the gesture.

*Rip!*

The roots tore out of the ground, fast as lightning, wrapping tight around the wrists of the three guards who held remotes.



I saw the bald guard's thumb move towards the red button, but the remote dropped before he touched it as the root twisted.

He cried out in pain.

Having neutralized the remotes, I unleashed the rest of the lurking roots.

In moments, the guards were all tangled.

The bald guard kept roaring and struggling, so at last I tightened a root around his throat, releasing when his eyes rolled up into his lids.

*My first kill.*

*Holy shit, Sienna. You just fucking KILLED*

*someone.*

There was no time to dwell on it, though.

We rushed the vans, opening the side doors with keys taken from the guards.

People poured out of the vans, nine in each of the first five, and six in the following two. They all wore strange collars.



I searched the faces, afraid.

*What if Dad isn't one of them after all?*

Then I saw him.

*Dad!*

*It was worth it. All of this.*

He looked exhausted. So thin!

*I would kill again, to save someone I love. I know I would.*

I ran to him, wrapping my arms around him and squeezing tight.

“Daddy!” I exclaimed.

His arms folded around me and I felt him lean against me, his fatigue a weight he transferred to my shoulders.

I welcomed it.

“Oh Dad, I’ve got you. You’re safe now.”

He shuddered in my embrace.



“I’m going to take you home to Mom, and you can let us take care of you now.”

“Sienna,” he breathed. “I never thought you’d be the one to save me.”

I pulled back and gave him a fierce smile.

“I kind of surprised myself, Dad,” I confided.

He gave me a weary grin in return. “I can’t tell you what it means to see you again.

“Thank you.”



## JOSH

The video Monica was showing me ended and the screen on the TV in my office went dark.

The room was silent, which almost never happened these days.

Monica sat in one of my Navajo-print armchairs and I sat on the couch. It was just us two.



I blinked at the screen for a moment before turning to her.

“Well that was a shitstorm,” I said.

Monica met my eyes and gave me a curt nod.

“I’ll be frank, Josh,” she said. “If I was still at *Pack News* I’d have already broken this story. That’s some great TV.

“But my career is tied to yours now, my Alpha. I can’t let this ever see the light of day.”



I let out a loud breath of air.

“A band of rebels blow up a bridge and surround your prison vans...” Monica mused, eyebrows raised in appreciation.

She gave a little laugh.

“They’ll compose ballads about it.”



I closed my eyes and rubbed my temples.

“Sienna Mercer-Norwood,” Monica said, chuckling quietly.

*Should have killed her at the Yule Ball.*

*Should have finished Aiden off, and just killed Sienna right then and there.*

*Why the fuck didn't I just kill them both when I had the chance?*

“Was Aiden there?” I asked.

Monica shook her head. “I didn’t see him.”

Strange.

In the past, Aiden never would have let Sienna go do something so dangerous on her own.

*Is he unwell?*

*Is it too much to hope that maybe he'll die and solve all my problems for me?*

*Probably.*



I let out a groan and stood up. I needed to pace.

“You’ll delete the video,” I said. It was not a question.

Monica’s eyes widened just a bit and then she said, “Of course, my Alpha.”

I peered at her. “Do not lie to me, Birch.”

Monica smirked. “You caught me,” she admitted. “I can’t delete footage like that.”

“If you can’t, I’ll find someone who can. Your cameraman,” I suggested.

Monica called her over. “Curtis?”

Monica rolled her eyes. "Curtis?"

"If that's his name."

The door of my office opened and Helena came in.

"My Alpha," she said.



Something about her expression... she was pleased about something. Something I wasn't going to like.

"What is it, Helena?" I asked, bracing myself.

She didn't smile, or otherwise show her enjoyment, but there was a light in her eyes...

"You really should see this," she said, crossing to me with her phone in her extended hand.

I took it and immediately recognized what was playing: Monica's footage of the attack on the convoy.

My eyes widened and I glared at Monica

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“You said you wouldn’t release it!”

Monica frowned and stood, coming over to look.

“I didn’t!” she said.

“Then what the fuck am I looking at?”



Blood pounded in my head. I felt sick.

Monica stared from me to the phone. “I swear, Josh, I didn’t release it!”

“You’re a lying bitch!” I spat, backing her up against a wall.

“I’m *not*! Please, Alpha, look—the video is unedited. There’s no voice over or titles or music or anything. I would *never* release a video like this—so rough—”

I was breathing heavily. Monica looked terrified.

*She thinks I’ll have her arrested.*

*She’s not wrong.*

*She's not wrong.*

*But she makes a good point.*

*The video is too rough to be something she would have deliberately put out there.*

And one thing you could count on with Monica. She'd never release a video in secret. She was driven to self-promote.



*It's a sad day when the only thing I can trust is Monica Birch's self-interest.*

“Well,” I said. “if you didn't release the video, who did?”

## THANDA

Seeing Nina on the video shot of the attack on the prisoner transfer cemented it all for me.

**Thanda**

Nina, I need to meet with you.

**Thanda**

I have an offer to make.

**Thanda**

Not about you and me. About information.

**Thanda**

I will only discuss it in person.



**Nina**

...

**Nina**

where

I squeezed my eyes shut, mouthing "Yes!"

**Thanda**

you know Show and Tail?

**Nina**

the strip club?????

**Thanda**

yes

**Nina**

I can't believe you've even heard of Show and Tail 😬

**Thanda**

I am a mature adult, I have eyes, and I have driven the I-64 once or twice

**Nina**

...ok...



**Nina**

WHY Show and Tail???

**Thanda**

Because no one would ever expect me to go there.

**Nina**

Good point 😄

**Nina**

when

**Thanda**

are you close by?


**Nina**

I can be there in forty-five minutes

**Thanda**



Thanda

See you then 

I got to the club first.

Call me eager.



I'd never visited "Show and Tail" before, of course, and the way things were going with Values Watch's influence, it might not even be around much longer.

I wasn't exactly well-versed in that kind of environment, so I took it in with some fascination as I entered the club.

The music pounded: loud and insistent. The light was very low, except for a three-sectioned stage where crystal poles featured mostly-nude women cavorting.

The place smelled strongly of alcohol—beer, whiskey—and faintly of perspiration.

On the stage, the blonde dancer on the left removed the last of her lingerie, showing more of her anatomy than I had ever expected to see in a public setting.

My cheeks flushed.

*How silly. As if I've never seen a woman's private bits.*

*Though these are a bit different as they lo*  
*to be entirely shaved...*



Something about the stage, the lights, the way she opened her legs and displayed her nether region—it looked like a red mouth—good god.

*This was probably not the best idea I've ever had.*

“Hey,” came Nina’s voice at my shoulder.  
“She’s pretty good.”

My heart lurched.

My cheeks burned.

“Uh, yes,” I managed. “It must take a great deal of practice and... um, upper body strength... to do... that.”

Nina laughed, and my heart leapt at the

sound.

“I can’t believe you picked this place,” she said.

“Neither can I,” I confessed.



She grinned at me and took my arm, leading me to a booth in the back along the wall adjacent to some with curtained doorways.

“Have you been here before?” I asked.

Nina shook her head but peeked at me out of the side of her eyes. “But I’ve been to places like this.”

*Of course you have. You wicked rogue.*

A hot blossom of desire bloomed in my own private bits.

Nina was a step ahead, reaching the booth before me.

As she slid into it, she met my eyes, and I saw that her lips were parted, her breathing coming faster.

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The booth’s bench curved round, I was pleased to see, allowing a couple to sit opposite one another, or scoot together and watch the show.

I scooted.

Nina did as well, slipping her hand onto my thigh.