

SIENNA

Our ID card burning protest had started out peaceful, but that did not last.



Even as the sound of the distant military vehicles reached my ears, the much closer sound of breaking glass startled me.

I whirled around.

Running down the south side of the street was a small group of people clad in black from head to toe—they looked like ninjas, I thought with bewilderment.

At intervals one or more stopped and smashed storefront windows using crowbars.

Meanwhile, my people kept chanting.

“HEY HEY! HO HO! JOSH DANIELS HAS GOT TO GO!”

The shattering of glass on the north side of the street made me whip around.

More ninjas.

What in the actual fuck is going on?



They broke another two display windows.

Did they come out because we're here?

How did they have time to get all outfitted?

Three of them surrounded a parked car and started rocking it.

How did they know we were coming?

The sound of an electrically amplified voice in the distance started up.

“ATTENTION CITIZENS OF MAHIGANOTE. PLEASE REMAIN INSIDE FOR YOUR SAFETY. THIS IS NOT A TEST.”

The three men rocking the car lifted it and flipped it over. The ensuing crash was

deafening.

“What do we do?” Gloria shouted at me.

Between the howling, the distant amplified voice, the chanting, and the breakage, the level of noise was unbelievable.



Then I spotted one of the ninjas holding a liquor bottle with a rag in it.

My eyes widened as they lit the end of the rag and tossed it into an already broken storefront window.

“STOP!” I shouted, and began to run at them.

Some of our activists stopped chanting and followed me.

The next thing I knew, I was ducking a ninja’s punch.

How the hell did my life get so weird?

I tackled the black-clad vandal and yanked off the ski mask that covered their head.

Meanwhile, the howler kept howling and the protesters kept chanting.

“THE ECP DEMANDS TO STAY FREE!”

The face under the mask was a young man.

It was no one I recognized.



“Who the fuck are you?!” I demanded.

The man punched me in the ribs. The blow made me cry out in pain.

He threw me off of him and ran.

I got up on one elbow, but I was in no shape to run after him.

Down the street, another ninja-vandal threw a flaming bottle into a store. The first store was already blazing a few feet away from me.

With effort I got to my feet, clutching my ribs and looking around, trying to figure out what to do.

Several of my people were brawling with ninjas. On the other side of the square, the car the vandals had flipped was burning.

And meanwhile, our own bonfire made the largest flames.

I looked at the car again.



There were protesters too close to it.

“Get away from the car!” I shouted, starting to move.

They couldn’t hear me.

“THE ECP DEMANDS TO STAY FREE!
THE ECP DEMANDS TO STAY FREE!”

“*Get away from the car!*” I shouted, running.

I waved my arms and several of them saw me coming.

“*GET AWAY FROM THE CAR!*”

As I herded them away from it, it blew.

My feet lifted off the pavement and I hit the ground so hard all the air left my body.

A ringing started in my ears.

A moment later I began to cough and gasp.

Around me, the protesters I'd urged out of the way had also fallen.

I blinked as I realized several were injured—they had shrapnel from the car imbedded in their legs, arms, torsos. One woman had a long cut across her face.

“Shit!” I choked.



I'm so sorry, Aiden.

You were right to be afraid.

I should have listened.

All I heard was ringing.

Everything hurt.

The shockwave that had knocked me off my

feet reverberated through every aching bone.

I'm too old for this.

As the ringing began to subside, I heard the cries and moans of the injured.

With effort, I stood.

Making my way over to the nearest wounded man, I checked around. No one seemed to be unconscious or bleeding too badly.

But I couldn't really say who needed medical attention the most.



The one with the long gash across her face?

The one with the triangular chunk of metal jutting out from between his chest and his shoulder?

The one with a shard the size of a short sword in his thigh?

If I'm going to make a habit of this sort of thing, I'm going to have to take a course in first aid and medical triage.

Yuki rushed from one injured person to the next.

The *thwump thwump thwump* of a helicopter joined the grinding sound of armored Humvees as the Hunter Squads arrived on the scene.

The amplified male voice called, “GET DOWN ON THE GROUND! SPREAD YOUR HANDS AND LEGS! GET DOWN ON THE GROUND!”

Sirens joined the cacophony. Firefighters were on their way.



I stood still and stretched out my arms—the bone pain throbbed, but I had to protect my people.

There were a few trees in the square, in openings surrounded by cobblestones, so I reached out for their roots.

The pain in my bones flared and I cried out, crumpling in on myself.

“Sienna!” Yuki exclaimed, rushing to my



side.

Agony. I should not have tried to use my power again so soon.

I gasped and moaned, rocking.

Gloria grabbed me under the arms and I yelped in pain.

Distantly, I perceived soldiers pouring out of the Humvees.

I was helpless.

We were captured.



JOCELYN

I struggled for control, managing only to stop the progress of the body a few times. Always, Jeremy regained the upper hand, and pushed us on, heading for the office of the Alpha.

Being a passenger in my own body was a nightmare.

Jeremy took us into the shaft that ran through the south wall of the central corridor of the second floor.

We had to exit it again further down and be in the open for a few moments in order to access the crawl space that would take us to Josh's office.

I was afraid we'd get spotted, and for good reason.

The puffy-eyed Texan and the fair-haired Virginian came out of what used to be Nelson's office, down the west end of the corridor, just after we emerged.

It was pure luck that they didn't see us closing the wall panel behind us.



Luck held out: Jeremy was so startled to be seen, he lost control of my body.

"Hey!" the Texan called. "Who the hell are you?"

I bet I look just lovely, my hair full of cobwebs and my clothes a total mess.



“Um, I’m Lexa Holst,” I said, the Norwood’s former nanny the only person who came to mind.

“Do you have an appointment with someone?” the blond asked.

Both of them walked down the hall, closing the distance between us.

“I—I wanted to talk to the Delta,” I managed.

The blond’s stride hitched almost imperceptibly.

Ah, so he’s the new Delta.



“I’ve been homeless for three months!” I exclaimed, marching towards him.

“Why haven’t you been running the outreach program Nelson King used to lead?” I pressed.

“Well, I’ll have to speak with my staff about it...” the blond man said.

“What’s your name? You’re not the one that took Delta King’s place!”

The two men had stopped walking and now the blond took a step back.

“I’m Delta Carrick,” he said, but I could tell from his face he was desperate to escape me now.

The Texan ditched his colleague, slipping away back down the hall.

I maintained my aggressive attitude, stepping towards Carrick.



“I wanna know, what’re you going to do? I can’t keep going the way I have! Sleeping on the street! Never knowing where my next meal is coming from!”

Carrick took another step back.

“I know, why don’t you make an appointment with my assistant...” he said.
“I’ll just go find her.”

He turned and fled down the hall away from me

me.

Wow, Josh. You've really got some ballsy people working for you.

With a quick glance around to make sure no one else would see me, I pulled open the nearest camouflaged door and slipped back into the hidden passage.

Sorry, Jer. We are going to find Aiden right now!

I headed down the secret staircase and out into the open for a brief moment.



No one caught me.

So far, so good.

Back into the walls, this time the southern wall of the west wing's lower corridor.

I would be passing several councilman's offices soon, and then, I was out of the Pack House.

I considered going back to the stairs and taking them down to the tunnel that



and taking them down to the tunnel that burrowed below the grounds, but that one headed south. And I needed to go west.

It would be quicker to get out through the west wing, then shift into my wolf form and run back to Makadewa Forest.

I passed the Zeta's office, the sound of a loud television seeping in through the wall.

Just the Gamma's office to go, and I'd be out.

The TV faded the further I went. I had made it most of the way when I heard her voice.

Nina.



I stopped.

What am I doing? I have to get to Aiden.

I listened, but she wasn't talking anymore.

I don't have time for this.

I started to move, and then she spoke again.

“But he doesn’t suspect you’re spying for us?” Nina asked.

“No,” another woman’s voice answered.

My body stilled.

“Well, that’s something at least,” Nina said.

“The result is the same. I won’t be any use to anyone now that he’s sending me away.”

There was something about their voices.

A deep sadness.

I pressed the edges of a panel and, with great care, popped it open.

I saw them immediately.



Nina and Thanda Singh.

They were sitting on a blue couch, in each other’s arms.

“We have to hurry,” Thanda said. “I have files to give you.”

“Let’s stay like this just a minute or two more?”

The yearning in Nina’s voice...

The way she looked at Thanda, and Thanda looked at her.

Oh no.

They’re mates.

It was like being punched in the heart.

Again?

Why do I always lose my lovers like this?

Is there something... unmateable... about me?

All the air in my lungs left me.



My throat closed.

I pulled the panel shut and leaned back against the wall, reeling.

Jeremy took over.