



## SIENNA

Safely locked away in my gallery, I retreated to my personal studio in the back to work on a new piece. Painting was always the best way to clear my head.

I placed an apron over my dress to avoid getting any paint splatter on it. Selene would kill me if she knew I was even within fifty feet of my studio wearing one of her originals.

With my phone shut off and no windows around me, I felt truly isolated from the rest of the world, and that was exactly what I needed right now.

All of my paintings represented happy memories, not the fucked-up shit that had been running through my head lately.

It was nice to have a reminder that things would get better eventually.

*Things will only get worse.*

“No,” I said, shaking my head. “That’s not true.”

Okay, I just needed to focus, stay out of my own head.

Suddenly, being in an isolated box with only my thoughts to keep me company seemed like the



thoughts to keep me company seemed like the worst idea I could've had.



My phone started buzzing, but that was impossible. I'd turned it off.

I cautiously reached for it and opened the messages.

**Konstantin**

I'm in your head, Sienna.

**Konstantin**

I quite like it in here.

**Konstantin**

I think I'll stay awhile...

I threw my phone across the room and spun around, but I was still alone.

"Get out of my head," I screamed. "I didn't give you permission."

*"Oh, but you did. Many times. And you still haven't given me what I need."*

*"So now I'm just going to take it."*

I stumbled backward, tripping over some canvases and falling into a bucket of paint.



My beautiful dress was ruined—stained a dark shade of red.

No, wait, this wasn't paint...

*It's blood!*

I screamed as I tried to wipe it away, but moments later, there was nothing on me at all.

*"You don't even know what's real anymore."*

Konstantin's laugh echoed in my head.

*"This will all be over if you just let me have control. I'll unlock parts of you that you never even knew existed."*

"Never," I shouted. "This is MY mind, and I will NOT give you access to it."

*"I've tried to play nice, Sienna, but that's over now. I'm not giving you a choice."*

My legs went wobbly as the room began spinning.

*No, I'm not letting him in again.*

*Think, Sienna... how can you block him?*



*They're your memories.*

*They're YOUR memories.*

The paintings. Maybe if I focused on the memories from my paintings it would force him into my good memories—and keep me in control.

I started running around the studio, rounding up paintings that represented the best times in my life and setting them side by side against the wall.

*“You're weak, and you're alone. Whatever foolish plan this is, it won't work. You'll only fail again.”*

Given the way Konstantin started hissing, I could tell he was getting nervous.

I grabbed the first painting, my childhood home, and closed my eyes.

*God, I hope this works.*

“You want in?” I yelled. “Then come the fuck in.”

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*I was standing in my old bedroom at Mom and Dad's house. I watched myself sitting on the bed crying as my dad comforted me.*



*When was this memory? Was it last year?*

*"It's okay," Dad said, rubbing my back. "It's perfectly fine to feel the way you do."*

*"No, it's not," I heard myself say creakily. "I'm a dominant. Dominants don't let stupid things like this get to them."*

*Now I remembered—the night Aiden had left me alone in the woods.*

*"I don't think what you're feeling is stupid, Sienna," Dad said. "And dominant or not, everyone has a heart."*

*"You know, when we first brought you home, I could tell right away that you were special. You had this confidence about everything you did, even as a baby."*

*"Watching you grow up, I've seen that confidence manifest in everything from how you carry yourself to your art. Having a cry doesn't take that away from you, Sienna. You're still the strongest werewolf I know."*

*A warm feeling began to radiate throughout my body. It felt good—no, not just good, powerful. I'd never felt this power before.*

*The room faded into watercolors, and as it washed away, I found myself drifting someplace else.*





*Aiden's house. The room I was staying in before we were mated.*

*"There's something between us. Neither of us can deny it. I felt it when I marked you, but I even felt it the first time I saw you, back on the riverbank," Aiden said, pulling me onto his lap.*

*I felt jealous of her, getting to feel his warm embrace, but even just watching this memory play out made me feel more powerful.*

*"You remember that?" memory me asked, a little incredulous.*

*"Of course I do," Aiden said quietly. "I felt your power even then. Your scent radiated a strength and sensuality that I couldn't resist."*

*"I didn't radiate any strength tonight. I was weak."*

*"Stop. What I said a minute ago... I was wrong. Let me tell you something. Your scent hit me the moment I walked into that dinner party. It's not something that happens in human form, so you threw me off-balance.*

*"The haze hit me, and I had to follow you, to find out more about you, to just be in your presence.*

*"I've never been so overcome by anything more*

*powerful in my life. That's your strength, the kind of power you have over me. That's why I marked you."*

*Aiden's words hit me like a lightning bolt, and I was catapulted through dripping paint that began forming a new landscape.*

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*I was in a moonlit clearing in the woods. A quiet stream ran through it as two wolves wrestled with each other playfully.*

*Oh my God, this was...*

*Our first run.*

*I watched as Aiden let out a visceral howl and sank his teeth into my wolf's shoulder, right where my mark would've been in human form—the final act of a run between potential mates.*

*I remembered that night like it was yesterday. Every single detail.*

*It was the most intimate and intense night of my entire life.*

*I watched as Aiden and I shifted and waded into the water to wash each other. That moment was perfect.*



*The same feeling I had in my heart then... I felt it now.*

*The moment I first fell in love with Aiden.*

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*I was suddenly back in the gallery.*

*Was it over?*

*Where was Konstantin?*

*The walls—they were all empty. The art was gone.*

*No, this must've been another memory.*

*A bell jingled as the gallery door flew open, and I observed myself walking into the empty space with Aiden.*

*“Aiden Norwood, what are we doing here?”*

*“Sienna Mercer-Norwood, I thought you'd wanna see your new gallery.”*

*Memory Sienna squealed in delight and started running around the gallery, passing right through me in the process.*





*“Happy one-week anniversary, Sienna.” Aiden smiled.*

*“I can’t believe you did this...for me,” I said.*

*“I’d do anything for you.”*

*I mouthed the words along with him, and my heart swelled with power.*

*It was as if I had unlocked something from deep within myself.*

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*I was suddenly in another space, some kind of laboratory, and so was Konstantin, but he was dressed differently—and acting as if I wasn’t there.*

*Was this another memory? Something about this felt different from the other ones.*

*A door opened, and a woman entered the room, greeting Konstantin.*

*“We’ve almost deciphered the runes. Then we’ll understand. We’ll know how to harness the power.”*

*“That’s reason to celebrate, Vanessa.” Konstantin’s mouth curled into a smile.*



*I let out a yelp as I turned to look at the woman, but no one would have heard it anyway.*

*For a moment, I thought I was staring at myself. This woman had fiery-red hair, just like mine, and the same intense eyes. With the way she moved across the room, I was sure she was a dominant like me too.*

*"I suppose it is," she responded in a distant tone. Her expression dropped as she turned away.*

*Her eyes were no longer fierce. They were filled with sadness.*



*It suddenly dawned on me—this woman... was she my...*

*"Mom?" I called out into the empty air.*

*"What we're doing... it's blasphemy. The deities will smite us all if we don't abandon this madness," she said.*

*My mother walked straight toward me, and I flinched as she passed through me as if I were a ghost.*

*When I turned around, she was rocking something in front of her. As I moved to get a closer look, I gasped.*

*It was a baby, in a crib.*

*It was me.*

*This WAS my memory.*

*“Vanessa, the deities can't touch us if we succeed,” Konstantin rebutted, slinking around her like a snake. “We'll have just as much power as them.”*

*“I won't risk the life of my child,” she asserted. “No amount of power is worth her life.”*



*I walked over to my mother, the mirror image of myself, and tried to hold her hand, to comfort her, but I just phased right through her again.*

*“Doesn't your mate—her father—have a say in this?”*

*“Konstantin... he's not the father,” she said, stifling her tears.*

*“Then... who? Who is it?” he asked, aghast.*

*“Her father is... Rowan.”*

*Konstantin's reaction was extreme. He knocked a shelf of glass vials to the floor as he nearly fell*

*over.*



*over.*

*As my mother broke down further, a smile spread across Konstantin's face.*

*"Vanessa, don't you see, this is perfect. Your daughter holds the key to everything we've been working toward."*

*"No, I'll never let her be involved in this." She glared. "Never."*

*As I reached out to her again, I was sucked out of the room and into the darkness.*



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I was back in my studio—for real this time. All the paintings I had gathered were still sitting against the wall.

*What the fuck just happened?*

Had I finally been able to tap into the memories I'd been suppressing?

One thing was certain—Konstantin knew my mother. He'd been lying to me since he'd met me.

They'd been working together on something, but she'd wanted out.



She'd wanted to protect me.

*But from who?*

*My father?*

Who was Rowan?

I walked over to a painting lying on the ground and propped it up on an easel.

*When did I paint this? When I was in my memories?*



It was a portrait of a beautiful woman with fiery-red hair, flowing over her shoulders—my birth mother.

I closed my eyes one more time, and I heard her voice.

*"I won't risk the life of my child. No amount of power is worth her life."*

I opened my eyes, and I felt like they were glowing. I was radiating a level of power that I'd never felt before.

I didn't know what this was, but it wasn't standard-issue werewolf. I was sure of that.



As I returned my gaze to my mother's portrait, her face started to melt away. The oil paints I'd used were dripping onto the floor in a puddle, and as her flesh melted, her visage was replaced by a rotting skeleton.

Konstantin's laugh began echoing in my head again.

*"Was that trip down memory lane supposed to weaken me somehow? Or did you just want to show me the pathetic hallmarks of your short life?"*

"Honestly, Konstantin... that wasn't for you."



I summoned forth all of the power I could muster—all the strength I'd gotten from the people who believed in me, protected me, loved me—and I unleashed it like a cyclone.

My paintings flew all around the room as I felt Konstantin's presence finally leave my body.

I vomited him up onto a canvas in a pile of black sludge.

*"You think you've won? I'll just come back and make things even more difficult. And not just for you—for your friends and family too. I'll make them suffer."*

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*"You think you've won? I'll just come back and make things even more difficult. And not just for you—for your friends and family too. I'll make them suffer."*

"GET OUT!"



A wind blew through my devastated gallery, and after a moment, I felt only stillness.

My mind felt like it had been purged of a poison.

I collapsed to the floor, significantly lighter, but still burdened by a dark shadow.

Konstantin was finally gone...

*But for how long?*

Next Chapter