



JOSH

“Hello everyone. Thank you for coming today,” I said to my council, gathered around the table in the Pack House Dining Room.

At the end opposite me and the windows, a 120-inch flat screen played *InfoWolves* footage of a skirmish between anti-ID rabble rousers and counter-protesters, which had occurred yesterday in downtown Mahiganote.



They were just getting to the good part, where the Hunter Squad showed up.

Pulling my eyes away from the images, I waved at Carrick to stand up. “Please welcome Brett Carrick, our newest Head of Social Welfare.

“As you know, Garcia turned out to be behind the ‘RoguePackHouse’ Yapper



Chapters



Display



Unmute



Comment



React



account. Disloyalty will not be tolerated in this administration,” I reminded them all.

And if saying so didn't send the message, Garcia leaving the Pack House in cuffs two days ago had better have done it.

“Singh will give us our updates,” I said, taking a seat.

Singh stood, smoothed his tie, and set glasses on the end of his nose.

He read, “Issuance of our new IDs has progressed as expected.”



Good. No more non-werewolves and half-breeds passing as full werewolves.

Restoring order one step at a time. Soon, we'll have back our sense of hierarchy.

Singh continued, “We've got the machines installed at the DMVs everywhere in the ECP territory. The grace period for people to acquire them ends in two weeks.”

There were nods.

“As discussed, once the grace period has ended, we will send Squads door to door,” Singh said. “After all, we must support those who are unable to leave the house to take care of registration for whatever reason.”

Leo Vasquez, the Epsilon, in charge of everything to do with money and business affairs, made a little huffing noise.

I raised my eyebrows at him. He cast his eyes down.

“No, please, did you have something to say?” I challenged him.



“I apologize, my Alpha. It’s my job to be concerned about pack finances,” Vasquez said.

“And?” I snapped.

“I have already raised my concerns about recent spending on Hunter Squads, among other things—*many* other things—at our last meeting,” Vasquez said, eyes still lowered.

But that didn't stop you from raising them again, now, did it Vasquez?

again now, did it Vasquez?

Rhys never disrespected Aiden like this.

Vasquez better watch himself.

“Moving on,” I barked at Singh.

“Our motion to install a Howler at the traditional points around town carried last week, and I’m happy to announce that we have already found eleven men out of the necessary forty-eight to cover the Mahiganote metropolitan area in shifts,” Singh said.



If Vasquez objected to spending money on hiring Howlers, he kept it to himself.

Singh continued, “They will man their posts in three shifts, and, on full moon nights, they will howl in a *rubato* chorus from moonrise to moonset.”

“Ah,” sighed Carrick. “That will be thrilling.”

“Alright,” I said.



“Then, there’s the matter of the abolishment of the TIB,” Singh said. “The Alpha Council meets on Wednesday to finalize the repeal of the TIB Amendment to the Territorial Treaty.”

“Another win, my Alpha,” said Carrick. He was going to be a brown-noser, that much was obvious.

“I want to know about the search,” I growled.

A small muscle in Singh’s cheek jumped. I saw it. I’m sharp, and I catch things like that.

“Still no leads?” I demanded.



“My Alpha, we have five Squads on the case, since I added an additional unit three weeks ago,” Singh reminded me. “We have questioned everyone on the lists you helped us generate who might know the Norwoods’ hideout—”

“And imprisoned almost everyone on that list for refusing to cooperate,” said Vasquez.

Turning, I laid a glare on him that made his

Turning, I laid a glare on him that made his otherwise bronze face blanch.

“My Alpha,” he whined. “It is not my intention to show any disrespect, but the cost of building the new prison—”

“Has already been discussed!” I snarled.

“Be that as it may,” Singh said smoothly, “the result is the same. We are no closer to finding them than four months ago, when you were so moved to be merciful and allow them to leave.”

He might have prettied up the words, but I knew a dig when I heard one.

I glared at him, but Singh acted like he didn't notice.

Fine. It *had* been a bad mistake, letting Aiden survive.

But if there's one thing they say about me: I may make mistakes, but I'll rectify them—sooner or later.



MICHELLE



There were over two hundred more mentions in my notifications, and all of them looked like they were along the same lines.

But that wasn't even the worst part.

“Helena! Get in here!” I shouted at the top of my lungs.

She'd better hustle that ass pronto. I know that bitch can hear me.

Helena's desk was in the assistants' office, right beside my office. It used to be Sienna's, but now it was *mine*.

I'd almost taken Beatrice's office—the former press secretary for the pack—when I thought I'd keep that job. But Josh insisted he'd have someone take over Beatrice's PR spot.

A guy.

The Values Watch was so sexist. They wanted only men in high ranking positions.

When the decision came down Josh told me, “Don’t worry about it, babe. You just look good for the camera. Let someone else worry about managing the press.”

Yeah, great.



Helena finally came in.

“Is that intercom button on the fritz again?” she smiled at me.

Don’t give me that passive aggressive bullshit. I’ll fire you, you fake little twit.

“Helena, I have lost another four hundred and fifty-seven followers, just since yesterday!” I said. I gave my computer screen a sharp gesture.

Helena glanced at it. “That protest downtown,” she said, pretending to be troubled for me. “It’s all over Yapper.”



“I didn’t have anything to do with that! Why are they blaming *me*?”

Helena shrugged and lifted up a thick stack of envelopes of varying sizes and colors, held together with a rubber band.

“This week’s fan mail,” she said, “maybe that will cheer you up? Or should I screen it first?”



“Give it here,” I said, reaching out.

Before the door closed behind Helena, I had the first letter open, ready for the glowing praise I’d received when Josh first took the Alpha position.

Most people who send actual letters were older, so a return to tradition was just what they wanted.

My eyes scanned the handwritten lines and I blinked.

Fucking bitch. You and your mate are gonna die like dogs for the shit you’re doing. We’re free wolves. We have our claws, and we have our guns. We aren’t afraid of you, and you bet your mangy asses we aren’t going to register or get one of those new ID cards. Fuck you.



“What?” I breathed.

Why is everyone so pissed about some stupid ID cards? And why do they think I have anything to do with them?

This can't go on. It's so time. Time to remind them I'm a queen. A sexy, gorgeous queen.

I tapped my mousepad, opening a folder of old photos.

Maybe a nice pic on Yapper...



No, not that one, I look too drunk... That one's hot, but it's two years old... Ew. Sienna!

I closed that folder and opened my video files.

“OH!” I gasped. I found the perfect thing.

Wow, this is hot. But maybe... too hot?

It's risky, for sure.

But nothing worth doing is without risk!



“This is it.”

SIENNA

“Have you seen this?” Yuki demanded, slapping the newspaper down on the dining table in front of me and Aiden.

ID CARDS TO FEATURE BLOODLINE



Codes include WW for “werewolf,” HW for “half-werewolf,” H for “human,” and VY for “vampyre,” along with five other designations...

Aiden glanced at the headline and snorted, then looked away, his eyes seeking out the window to find the figures of the kids playing as Mom supervised.

“This is fascism!” Yuki exclaimed.

I nodded. “Yes, yes, it is.”

Giving Aiden another look, I continued, “This is how it starts. Once everyone



has ID cards, what then? They make non-werewolves sit at the back of the bus?”

“Or worse,” Yuki growled.

A group of people burst into the canteen, talking loudly amongst themselves.

My heart sank as I recognized Gloria and Ivan among them.



“There they are!” Gloria announced, pointing at my table.

I reached under the edge and gripped Aiden’s hand, and he turned and gave me a wink.

Yuki straightened as the crowd marched over. There were a lot of faces I hadn’t seen before.

More new people fleeing from Mahiganote. I wondered what Tena thought of that.

“You!” one of the new faces shouted at me. It was a young woman with blonde hair and an arched nose. “The two of you! How could you let this happen?”



you let this happen?”

Yuki crossed her arms over her chest, and I stood up. Aiden remained seated.

“And what, exactly, are you accusing us of ‘letting happen’?” I asked.

“You’re the reason that bratty wannabe dictator is Alpha!” an older man with scruffy sideburns declared, pointing at Aiden. “You wanna tell me why you couldn’t beat that dickhead in a fight?”



“He’s got five Hunter Squads looking for you people!” the blonde cut in.

Jesus, five?

“Five! They raided my hair salon two days ago because *you* got your hair done there last spring!” she continued, glaring at me. “They trashed the place! And you bet no one is going to come to my salon to get their hair cut now!”

I held up my palms. “I am truly sorry—”

“Sorry nothing!” a short brown-skinned



“They trashed the place! And you bet no one is going to come to my salon to get their hair cut now!”

I held up my palms. “I am truly sorry—”

“Sorry nothing!” a short, brown-skinned man snapped. “How selfish do you have to be, hiding out here while they tear apart homes and businesses looking for you! I should turn you in myself!”

“He should have killed you in that fight!” sideburns said to Aiden. “That’s the way it’s supposed to go.”

The facial hair was fluffing, and the man’s eyes shifted to gold.

Behind him, two more members of the crowd hunched as their wolves began to come to the fore.

This was going to get ugly.

Next Chapter

