

Chapter 6

"This rhubarb pie is simply divine," gushed Josie from her spot across from Melanie.

Josie was the widowed mother of the Sinclair brothers. Her husband had been alpha of the Crimson Phoenix Pack. Now the Alpha was Xavier but he was off attending college with his mate in New York. Xavier was nishing up his masters in public policy while Rose was in a training program for pack doctors. Tony was lling in for Xavier along with help from the Council of Elders. Brad, sitting next to his mother, nodded in agreement, his cheeks full of pie as he munched away happily.

Throughout dinner, Melanie hadn't talked much with Josie aside from a reserved 'hello'. Josie seemed much more interested in Selene, the girl Dylan was thinking about taking for a chosen mate.

"Melanie made it from scratch," Selene said enthusiastically, trying to keep up conversation with Josie.

Josie's eyes zeroed in on Melanie as if seeing her for the rst time. Melanie looked at Josie shyly. Brad had a coughing t and had to gulp down half his glass of water to keep from choking.

"I made it from my own herbs and vegetables I grow in my garden. I wanted to make something for Ricky's celebration dinner and Dylan always loves the rhubarb pie I make," Melanie informed.

"That's wonderful," Josie said with a smile as she looked at Melanie.

Melanie became all too keenly aware of Brad next to Josie pushing his pie away. Josie seemed to catch the action and glare at her son before looking back to Melanie and smiling at her.

"You know, I have a small greenhouse that's completely in shambles-" Josie began.

"Mom!" Brad interrupted but was cut off when Josie elbowed him. He let out a discreet 'oomph'.

"I was wondering if you'd be kind enough to take some time out and maybe give me a few pointers on how to x it up?" Josie queried sweetly.

Brad looked at his mother in horror, wondering if this was all a bad dream. That greenhouse had been there since they'd moved out of the alpha mansion and into their new home which was made for the late alphas widow. Not once had Josie ever expressed any interest in it.

"You never cared about xing it up before," Brad couldn't help but say crabbily.

"I never knew someone with a talent like Melanie's before," Josie said sharply, glaring at Brad as if daring him to challenge her.

"What all of a sudden you're trying to be a gardener now?" Brad scoffed.

"I'm trying to learn a new skill," Josie replied pointedly and looked at Melanie. "Don't mind him dear, he's always rude. Though I could have sworn I'd raised him better."

Melanie couldn't help but laugh behind her hand, shooting Brad a triumphant look.

"Don't worry, for what's it's worth I think there is no one more gentlemanly than Beta Tony. Dylan's a close second," Melanie looked towards Dylan and Tony, who were seated at the head of the table and couldn't hear the conversation, with a smile before looking back at Josie. "You can't blame yourself if one of your sons didn't take advantage of your impeccable upbringing."

"Laying it on a bit think there aren't you Mel?" Brad sneered. "Can't even smell all the burnt toast over all your buttering up."

Josie gasped in outrage.

"Brad Edmund Sinclair!" Josie admonished.

Melanie simply rolled her eyes.

"It's O.K. really. He's just jealous I actually have a skill, unlike him."

"What, talking to plants?" Brad scoffed. "Sorry I like having real friends to hang out with."

"We don't all like to party and drink until we black out," Melanie responded.

"At least I get invited to parties," Brad shot back.

"I get invited to parties," Melanie retorted with a sniff.

"Yeah, parties my brother throws and only because he feels obligated to invite you because you're Selene's younger sister. No one from school ever wants you at their parties," Brad sneered.

There was pin drop silence as Melanie thought wildly that Brad was right. No one from school ever did invite her to parties.

"You know what," Melanie said in a steely voice. "I don't care if I get invited to parties or not because my life doesn't revolve around other people's opinions of me. You like to pretend you're a bad boy and don't care about what people think of you. But that's not true. You let every decision you make be dictated by 'what will my friends think?'"

Brad let out a low growl as his eyes glowed yellow brie. Melanie's words had hit way too close. If only she knew how right she was. The entire reason Brad wanted to reject her was centered around the exact premise of 'my friends will never let me hear the end of it if she's my mate.'

Surprised over the emergence of Brad's wolf, Melanie leaned back in her chair. Brad got up abruptly, excusing himself from the table.

Josie was holding a hand to her chest, disbelief evident across her features.

"I knew you two didn't get along," Josie murmured. "But this is more serious than I thought..." she trailed off pensively.

"Sorry," Melanie said hastily. "Things tend to get out of control when we start arguing," Melanie tried to explain weakly. "I suppose it's not a good idea for me to come over and look at the greenhouse. No use risking another argument--"

"No,no,no," cut in Josie. "You'll be my guest and I'll make sure he behaves Besides he's barely even around as it is, always up to no good with his friends or partying at Dylan's."

Josie caste a speculative glance towards where Brad had disappeared, the wheels in her head turning furiously. She suddenly looked towards Melanie.

"Dear, I'm guessing you haven't shifted yet, have you?"

Melanie, taken by surprise by such a question told Josie her birthday wasn't until December. Seemingly satished, Josie began asking Melanie what other vegetables grew in her garden.

* * *

"It's Melanie isn't it?" Dylan queried later that night as Brad, Kyle and Dylan sat in his front lawn. "You're wolf was all over here earlier."

"Melanie's what?" Kyle asked, looking curiously between his two brothers.

Kyle hadn't been at Ricky's beta ceremony, arriving after the celebratory dinner. Kyle was only one year older than Brad. He could care less about being a ranked wolf in their pack. He'd already made it clear that once he graduated high school, he wanted to become a lone wolf and travel the world.

"My mate," Brad grumbled out, taking a swig of his dark beer.

There was a moment of stunned silence before Kyle dissolved into a t of laughter. Brad gave him an angry shove, not caring that it made Kyle spill his beer across the lawn.

"Oh that's poetic justice all right," Kyle chortled.

"Yea let's all laugh over the fact that my mate is miss know-it-all," Brad said in exasperation, crossing his arms. "This highly embarrassing piece of information doesn't leave this lawn."

"She's actually pretty cool you know," Dylan said casually. "She hangs out with me and Selene. You just don't see it because you guys are too caught up in your high school cliques."

"Maybe the moon goddess just mixed things up by accident. It's Selene and Dylan who are supposed to be mates. The wrong sister got paired with the wrong brother," Kyle said teasingly. "Serves you right for making fun of her all the time."

"Shut up!" Brad exclaimed furiously, pushing Kyle again. He then looked at Dylan hopefully. "Maybe this all really is a mix-up?"

Dylan shook his head sadly.

"I think the moon goddess has her reasons bro. I don't know what they are but I really think you need to give Melanie a chance."

Brad shook his head furiously.

"No way. I can't even stand being in the same room with her! She's so annoying!"

Dylan tilted his head to the side curiously.

"Why exactly do you nd her so annoying?"

"Because-because-" Brad spluttered, his brain recounting all the things he hated about her. "it's Melanie!" he ended lamely, crossing his arms. "She's a loser! I've hated her since our rst day of kindergarten!"

Brad thought back to how mesmerized he'd been by her black hair the rst time he'd seen it. He'd always heard hair was never really black, but just a really dark brown. But looking at Melanie's raven locks, he couldn't help but reach a hand out to touch it. And then she'd gotten upset at him for thinking her hair might be fake. He hadn't meant to pull her hair. He'd just wanted to feel it.

Dylan and Kyle laughed at Brad's reasoning.

"Maybe you've just had a crush on her all this time and are in denial," Kyle said with smirk.

"No way!" Brad snapped vehemently, getting up and brushing grass off his pants. There was no way he'd ever had a crush on Melanie the teacher's pet. "I'm going for a run," he grumbled.

Brad changed into his metallic grey wolf and ran off, leaving Kyle and Dylan laughing and calling after him to just accept his mate.