

Chapter 4

Serena Basco

I had to be careful with how I presented myself for this dinner. I didn't want to draw any attention to myself, so I donned a my plainest dress: a long sleeve mustard yellow maxi ensemble that covered my skin and most importantly, my bracelet. I knew it wouldn't do me any good; after all, I was going to be called first as the highest-ranking female present. Then the daughters of the other alphas would be called, and so on.

My friends and I had dressed up early and were now in the pack hall setting up the equipment and doing sound checks. Paolo and Christopher were dressed impeccably in suits and ties. Jane donned a lovely silver cocktail dress and Melanie, a black silk pantsuit that was studded at the waist.

Slowly, wolves started milling in and the dinner began. My father made a small speech acknowledging the presence of the visiting Prince. He welcomed the wolves from other packs, and said something about how everyone needed to work together because of the conflict with the rogues.

From the corner of my eye, I spied Christopher carrying a du el bag and placing it underneath one of the bu et tables. I smirked.

The du el bag contained about a thousand dollars in singles.

We had an ongoing betting pool on who was going to get picked tonight, and it was girls versus boys.

Paolo had it all on an excel sheet that we could all access online. The girls and I were pretty confident with our choices—we saw ourselves as more observant than the guys. They weren't to be underestimated, though; they made some pretty risky bets regarding an Alpha's son from the Blue Rise pack in the South.

I was determined to win the bet. The girls and I were going to use the money to go shopping. The losers would also be subject to any dare the winners were going to give.

We planned on making the guys wear bikinis when winter came and take pictures of them freezing their asses o .

We all sat down on one circular table, chatting with each other as we waited for Mrs. Haggis to call us so we could start. I saw Erica from the corner of my eye sitting at the Alpha's table trying to engage the Prince in conversation. To my satisfaction, Prince Jonathon appeared to be as stoic and serious as ever.

A few male wolves tried to talk with me, but with the help of my friends I brushed them o as politely as I could.

There was one Alpha who lingered too long for comfort, though. Alpha Theodore from the West. He was persistent, asking me a lot of question, trying to engage me in conversation. I began to eat noisily and chew loudly, being as rude and gross as I could. Eventually, he gave up and le , but I saw his eyes flash amber. I had angered his wolf with my rejection.

He was going to be a problem when the ceremony came.

"Think I could take him?" I muttered, my eyes flitting over my friends. They hesitated.

"If it comes to that, your best shot will be to hit at his pressure points —disable his legs. He's a strong warrior." Christopher said. I nodded.

"No, I can do this. I mean, he's a Silver rank. I'm Gold. That means I'm stronger, right?" I asked. They nodded eagerly, but I could see the nervousness in their eyes.

They were nervous for me.

But I saw the underlying emotion. It was always the elephant in the room, something that no one ever said out loud for fear of being accused of treason.

No one knew why I had been given a Gold Rank.

During training, I was always average. I wasn't feral, or animalistic. I wasn't the best fighter.

Even my friends don't really believe I deserved it, they didn't believe I was strong enough. That thought stung, but I was also inclined to believe it.

I was nobody before this bracelet.

Of course, no one wanted to fight me or challenge me after I got my Gold Ranking. They were all scared that I showed o some magical hidden kung Fu strength that I had not unleashed before.

They all tried asking me what I did inside the arena during The Evaluation, but each time they did, I could never bring myself to answer. I couldn't describe what happened inside—I didn't have the right words.

"Wait, what happens again when more than one wolf wants to claim you and you want to fight? Do you join them in the fighting pit?" Jane asked, rubbing her hands over her arms in an attempt to stave o the cold. Paolo immediately shrugged o his jacket and put it over her.

"No, I take on the last man standing. Right?" I asked Paolo for confirmation. He nodded.

"Correct. If you lose, you're his mate." Paolo said.

"As if this claiming isn't sexist enough." Melanie growled lowly. I nodded in agreement.

Suddenly, I felt a wrinkly hand shaking my shoulder.

"Serena, you and your friends need to put on music now." Mrs. Haggis's warm, broccoli-smelling breath washed over me and I resisted the urge to gag.

"Will do, Mrs. Haggis." Christopher said, winking at her. Mrs. Haggis smiled, and I snorted. She always had a so spot for the gorgeous Christopher.

We all stood up and made our way towards the elevated platform that we commandeered as a stage.

This was going to be a show, all right.

I smiled brightly at my dad as I held the microphone. His eyes narrowed, as if he sensed that I was going to get into mischief.

"Hey everyone. I'm Serena, that's Melanie on guitar, Paolo on keyboard, Jane on tambourine and Christopher on drums. We don't have a band name yet so please email me all suggestions." I said into the microphone. My dad grit his teeth in disapproval. I smirked at him.

"We're going to be providing background music for all you lovely wolves so enjoy your dinner and enjoy our music." I said. I winked at Christopher and smirked at Mrs. Haggis who was watching us suspiciously from below.

We handpicked this first song just for you, you miserable old hag.

They started playing and I opened my mouth to sing.

"THIS IS A SHOUT OUT TO MY EX!" I cried out. Mrs. Haggis gasped as the younger wolves whooped at the familiar song.

"HEARD HE IN LOVE WITH SOME OTHER CHICK!"

Mrs. Haggis was mortified. I continued singing as she gathered her skirts and made her way up to us.

"I HOPE SHE GETTING BETTER SEX!"

Suddenly, the microphone was grabbed from my hand and I resisted the urge to laugh.

"Miss Basco! This is not an appropriate song for The Claiming! You should sing a song about love!" Mrs. Haggis cried.

A lot of wolves were beginning to chuckle. I smiled and resisted the urge to laugh. I looked back at my friends and they were all sniggering.

"Love? Oh...guys do we have any songs about Love?" I asked, causing them to laugh harder. Mrs. Haggis was still trying to stave me, fuming. My father stood up angrily.

Christopher sensed the tension and suddenly strummed his guitar, moving to stand beside me. I recognized the notes.

"Don't worry Mrs. Haggis. This is a lovely song about love."

Christopher said as he played the intro notes to perfection. Mrs. Haggis nodded and went back to her seat.

"Can I just say something crazy?" I began to sing, motioning to Christopher.

"I love crazy." He replied.

"All my life has been a series of doors in my face, and then suddenly I bump into you..." I sang.

Mrs. Haggis seemed pleased with our choice. It was PG, and it had the word Love in the title. I must admit, I always found the song Love is an Open Door to be tacky or cheesy, but here right now, singing it with my friends, I suddenly loved the song.

My eyes suddenly locked with Prince Jonathon's, and I could swear there was a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. Suddenly, he stood up and made his way to the exit of the room, he appeared to be headed towards the field where The Claiming Ceremony would be held. Erica didn't notice because she was too busy flirting with some guy.

As the song ended, Christopher and I handed the microphone to Melanie and Jane. It was their turn now. Melanie was going to be singing Freddy My Love from Grease.

I excused myself from my friends; they could take it from here. I wasn't due to sing again for a few more sets.

Curiositygetting the better of me, I followed Prince Jonathon's trail.