

Chapter 6

Serena Basco

I stepped out into the cold evening, feeling comforted with my friends standing near me. I wasn't going to feel that way for long, in a while all the girls were going to be ushered into lines and the males would go to the other side.

Let the pageant begin.

I spied Erica giggling with her friends in the middle of the line. My father was sitting with Uncle Jasper, Aunt Marianne and Prince Jonathon in the seats set up for them in the front. My father and Prince Jonathon looked to be deep in conversation. Aunt Marianne was motioning at Erica to fix her dress, and Uncle Jasper gave me a comforting smile.

I hugged Paolo and Christopher goodbye as they made their way over to the seats for the males. Melanie and Jane kissed me good luck before they walked over to where Erica was, taking their place in the line. I could see Erica and her friends sneering at Melanie and Jane and I resisted the urge to throw a rock at her.

Fight me if you must, but mess with my friends, you got to get gone.

I took my place at the front of all the female wolves. Priya Patel was behind me, her silver bracelet looking gorgeous against her dark skin. She looked pretty in a matching silver dress, her hair braided down her back like she was a goddess.

"Nervous?" She asked, smiling at me.

"Hell yeah." I whispered back. She shrugged at me playfully.

"Some of the girls are betting you're gonna fight." She said. I tilted my head at her, shocked at this.

I didn't think anyone paid enough attention for me to actually bet on me.

"Really? How much is the betting pool going for?" I asked, chuckling.

"I have you on 50 bucks." She teased. I shivered at the cold.

"Way to put the pressure on me." I joked. Priya laughed, the sound twinkling through the night.

"Hey, I'd be honored if I could hold on to your earrings." Priya giggled. I laughed along with her.

We were interrupted by the sound of a trumpet. I looked to the right and saw that a bonfire was being lit behind the fighting pit. My father stood up and cleared his throat.

"I, Alpha Santino Basco of the Eastern Claw pack, hereby open this year's Claiming Ceremony. May the Moon Goddess bless our unions." My father declared.

"We praise the Moon Goddess." We all murmured in reply.

As Pack Matron, Mrs. Haggis would be the one calling all the names. I was nervous—to be called first out of a hundred or so girls didn't give me a good feeling.

"Serena Basco of the Eastern Claw pack, daughter of Alpha Santino Basco. Gold Rank." Mrs. Haggis called out.

I nervously stepped forward as rehearsed.

"I claim the Alpha's daughter." I looked to the right and narrowed my eyes. It was the big, burly Alpha Theodore. I curled my lips in disgust.

"I claim the Alpha's daughter." My eyes shifted to the left of him—it was a warrior from somewhere in the South.

"I claim the Alpha's daughter." I think his name was Daniel? He was the son of an Alpha from the North.

Two more stepped forward, a beta and another warrior. I began to pray to the moon goddess for strength. I could see my father standing up, looking at the scene with narrowed eyes. For a moment, Evan stood and we locked eyes, but he looked away and sat back on his chair. I sighed in disappointment.

Uncle Jasper stepped forward to be the referee.

"There is to be no killing. Last man standing wins the Alpha's daughter as a mate."

And with that, the fight began.

It was a violent, bloody fight. Claw against fur, wolf against wolf, blood spurting everywhere. I looked at the scene in horror—somehow, I had inspired this. I felt ashamed. I was against bloodshed and violence and yet this horror was because of me.

I was close to puking.

Suddenly, I felt a warm hand encase my own and I looked at Priya as she tried to give me some sort of comfort.

The fight earned gasps and cheers, and I closed my eyes. Priya's hand would occasionally tighten and loosen against my hold.

Suddenly, loud cheers erupted. I opened my eyes and saw Alpha Theodore grinning triumphantly while the other wolves were slumped down. Some shorts were thrown his way and he clothed himself. Medics gathered the other wolves up and took them to the fighting pit.

Alpha Theodore stepped forward towards my direction and grinned at me, his canines showing. I shook my head.

Oh hell no.

I smirked at Priya as I reached my hand to my ears, taking off my earrings. She gasped but received them anyway. I nodded at my Uncle Jasper who closed his eyes and grit his teeth.

I stepped forward and lifted the red string that closed off the fighting pit. I entered the pit and looked at Alpha Theodore challengingly.

I could hear people gasping in surprise when they realized what I intended to do. I looked back and flashed my eyes at Melanie and Jane, who could only smile encouragingly. I sought out Christopher and Paolo, both nodded at me, silently telling me to do well. For a moment, I locked eyes with Evan again and I looked at him with yearning.

This was supposed to be your job.

Then, I looked at my father, my only living parent. He was gripping the arms of his chair tightly. I wondered what he must feel right now.

I am an Alpha's daughter.

I remembered Prince Jonathon.

You have a choice.

I took a deep breath and shouted.

"I, SERENA BASCO, CHAL—"

"I CLAIM THE ALPHA'S DAUGHTER!"

A roar was heard. Suddenly, there was a whoosh of wind and a flash of black fur with sprinkles of gray. A large wolf, larger than all the others who had fought tonight, landed on all fours in the middle of the arena.

Prince Jonathon.

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