

Chapter 1

Alyssa watched with sad eyes as Xavier walked away with Rose. The man she'd loved with all her heart and the only male that had ever actually seen her as a person was married to someone else today. He was mated to another through the mating ceremony he'd just had. But if she was honest, she didn't love him. Not really. But he was the one boy her father approved of. For some reason, Alistair kept egging her on to be with Xavier. To pull him away from his mate. And if there was one power on this entire Earth Alyssa always bent too, it was her father. Maybe if she did whatever he wanted her too, he'd nally love her. He'd see her as the daughter he'd always wanted. Not the disappointment he always told her she was.

She suddenly stiffened as the familiar scent of rain danced across her nose. Foot steps and the tether that tied her to him told her that her mate was approaching. She turned to see him emerge from behind the stairs. He'd apparently been hiding in the shadows at a safe distance.

Concern itted across her features as she took in his pale face and the bags under his eyes. He looked sick. What was wrong with him?

"How long have you known?" Dylan asked her, his deep blue eyes with gray ecks in them boring holes into her.

"It doesn't matter," Alyssa replied snappishly, stealing her resolve.

She would have to hurt him. There was no way she could accept him as her mate.

She had to be strong. She had to resist the pull. And truthfully, it wasn't that hard. She did not view him as a prospective lover at all. But she did feel a erce possessiveness that made her want to shield him away from all that was dangerous. She stared him down rmly as he glared back at her, rage evident in his eyes. It was all too clear that now he knew she'd known before him. He'd probably only found out today when he saw her at his brother's mating ceremony. Alyssa hadn't seen him until today after his rst turn. But she'd known since the moment she'd laid eyes on him four years ago. Her wolf had told her that Dylan was her mate. But all her wolf wanted was to protect him. There was no physical attraction.

Alyssa shuddered, Xavier was Dylan's brother and her ex-boyfriend. For the two of them to become mates was beyond bizarre on multiple levels.

Dylan angrily reached for Xavier's untouched drink. Alyssa's azure eyes widened as she realized he was about to partake in underage drinking. She fought her wolf that wanted to pull the drink away from Dylan. But she couldn't stop the protests forming on her lips.

"You really shouldn't be-" Alyssa began, but stopped short as Dylan swiftly downed the entire glass of champagne in one gulp.

"Now-" Dylan began testily after swallowing. "-why didn't you tell me?"

"What is there to tell?" Alyssa asked hysterically. "You're four years younger than !! The rst time I met you, you were 14! I was 18!" Alyssa's voice cracked. Her wolf was whimpering, asking her to wait for her mate. The moon goddess had a plan. But Alyssa didn't want anything to do with a sick plan like that. "You're a child!" Alyssa spat contemptuously. "A little boy!"

Dylan took a few steps back with wide eyes as if she'd physically hit him with her comments. It took him a minute to regroup as his wolf felt the pain and yearned to be near Alyssa's wolf.

"You could have told me," Dylan began testily. "I would have agreed to reject you," he nally said in a small voice. "It's not like I want Xavier's seconds. And I'm 16 now," Dylan added, crossing his arms pointedly. In the werewolf world, he was an adult at 16. She couldn't call him a little boy!

Alyssa's lips curled into a sneer.

"You are still too young for me to ever take you seriously. I don't want to be with someone four years behind me. Every time I hung out with your family, I felt it. I felt the pull to protect you. I hated it," Alyssa said in disgust. "And I know...I know you felt something. You watched me all the time. It's why I was always mean to you, because I knew you had feelings. You just didn't know it was because we were mates!"

"That's why you should have told me!" Dylan roared out angrily, his eyes ickering to yellow.

In the blink of an eye, he'd fallen to the ground, clutching his stomach.

"Ahhhh!" he yelled, eyes scrunched up as waves of immense pain shot through him.

Alyssa fell to the oor next to him, panic-stricken. Her wolf took over entirely, trying to touch him and gure out where he'd been hurt.

"Dylan!" Alyssa exclaimed frantically. "No...no...no..." Alyssa cried out, hurting from seeing him in pain. She kept looking over him, trying to nd out where he was hurt. But it seemed like he wasn't hurt at all...

She couldn't stand to watch him writhing on the oor and every molecule in her body cried out to save him. She was supposed to protect him, take care of him. She had to save him. Her eyes nally zeroed in on the glass he'd drank from. The glass had originally been meant for Xavier.

"HELP!" Alyssa called out in tears as she realized that Dylan had been poisoned. "HELP! SOMEBODY PLEASE HELP!"

It was her fault. If she'd listened to her wolf and taken his drink away, he wouldn't be in this situation. She screamed in anguish, her wolf joining her.

The guests attending the mating ceremony would come. She knew for a fact that the pack doctor was also in attendance.

"Hold on, please.." Alyssa whispered, tears dripping down her cheeks. Someone will come.

Dylan clutched his stomach and screamed out in pain again.

"HEEEELPPPPPP!" Alyssa yelled again frantically.

Alyssa woke up with a start in a cold sweat. Another nightmare. This time about Dylan when he'd been poisoned. From her left side, there was a slight movement as the bedside lamp was turned. Soft murmurs and warm hands came around her shoulders.

"Are you all right, love?" asked a cool masculine voice with a strong British accent.

Alyssa leaned back against him. She was here and safe. Dylan was ne now. He'd recovered and this was something that had happened practically 6 years ago.

"I just had another nightmare, Parker," Alyssa mumbled.

He kissed her temple, one hand closing over her left in assurance. He traced the engagement ring he'd given her almost as if to remind him of what had transpired earlier tonight.

"Do you need anything?" he asked affectionately.

Alyssa shook her head.

"Just hold me," she whimpered.

Parker complied, taking her into his arms and lying back down in bed.

"Was it about your father?" he asked quietly.

"I don't want to talk about it," Alyssa's small voice spoke into the dark room.

Parker kept silent, rubbing his back until he dozed off. Alyssa stayed up, staring over Parker's shoulder and into the dark room. She'd been dating Parker, a fellow lawyer, for the past year. They'd been friends in law school and around the end of their last year, ended up sleeping together. Things progressed into a relationship eventually. They'd both gotten their J.D.s together and studied to pass the bar together. Last night, during their victory dinner of nally becoming practicing lawyers, he'd proposed to her and she'd accepted.

He was everything she'd always wanted. Sophisticated, smart and an all-around respectable guy. He was also human. He had no idea she was actually a werewolf. And that was ne with Alyssa. She'd never really gotten along with her wolf anyway. And ever since Dylan had rejected her and she'd accepted, her wolf had all but disappeared. Of course there was a price to pay for ignoring your wolf. And Alyssa was paying for it. But she didn't care.

For her, the reminder of being a wolf was a reminder that the moon goddess had given her a completely unsuitable mate.

Alyssa did her best to close her eyes and fall back asleep, but the only thing she could see were a pair of dark blue eyes staring back at her as a boy she was supposed to protect writhed in pain.