

## 2 Before the Fall

"This place hasn't changed at all," the Luna looked around with distaste. "Here," she shoved her fur coat towards me. "That's mink and fox tail. I expect you to take better care of hanging it than you have these awful drapes."

"Ma'am," one of the omegas rushed over and took the coat from me. "I'll take that for you."

"Thank you, Caroline," I smiled at the omega, then xed the visitors with a leveled look. "It seems our guests have forgotten who I am since we last met?"

"Indeed," Alpha Marvin looked me up and down, a scowl on his severe and wrinkled face. "I thought you might be another one of those harlot warriors your pack keeps as pets. I had forgotten the future alpha here had the misfortune of being mated to one."

I grit my teeth, trying my best to ignore the snide smirks of the women before me.

"All things are better with experience," the son, Kevin, gave me a sickly smile, his eyes lingering on my neckline. "I am very much looking forward to the hospitality shown to me by the future Luna of the Fire Moon Pack."

"I'm sure the current Luna's hospitality will more than suce," I shot back, keeping my cool expression. Caroline pressed her lips together to keep from smiling, an action not missed by Kevin. His smile turned sour, roughly tossing his coat on top of the growing pile in the omega's hands.

"Ah, my friend," Alpha Carlton appeared before I could insult the visiting family any more. Luna Klarissa glided along beside him with her usual unguenuine smile, her arm tightly wrapped around her mate's. "I see you've put on a few pounds," Alpha Carlton jabbed, shaking the disgruntled Alpha Marvin's hand. "But your beautiful Luna looks as radiant as ever," he bent to kiss Luna Bernice on the cheek.

Luna Bernice smiled slyly, uttering her fake eyelashes at my father-in-law. Luna Klarissa's smile faltered, but Alpha Marvin didn't seem the least bit phased that another Alpha just slobbered all over his Luna's face. The entire hierarchy in both packs are devious, selsh cretins, which disgusts me to no end. It annoys me that I blindly pledged my loyalty to such a dishonorable family before I knew better. It took me being a part of this life for me to see it for what it truly was. A hypocritic sham.

When Cameron appeared in the foyer, the reception between him and Odette was similar to the way his father had greeted her mother. Only, Cameron had the nerve to look over at me as he kissed Odette's cheek, then glanced at me again as she giggled and offered him a kiss in return. Instead of the cheek, her kiss was on the corner of his mouth. She followed it with a soft, "Whoops," as their parents laughed snobbishly.

Cameron just stared at me afterward, his smile turning to a cold glare when I didn't react. If he thought that would bother me, it didn't. Cortina was a mewling mess, inwardly wishing he wouldn't show that level of intimacy with another she-wolf, but she didn't say a word. It was a usual occurrence. He may irt, but we hadn't felt betrayal pains so he never took it too far. I could care less about Cameron and his wandering eyes. As long as his wolf was faithful, as long as they didn't hurt Cortina, I would tolerate the disrespect.

For now.

Dinner was a show. I sat quietly, nibbling on course after course of the food I hated. How come every time Luna Klarissa hosted one of these events she insisted on serving seafood? Not just one or two dishes, but every single dish was heavy in seafood. It started with caviar on cucumbers and crackers that were tasteless, which I hate. We had the usual scallops which were served at nearly every meal, seeing that they were the Luna's favorite, then a seared tuna salad that I had to pick around to get the parts not touching the offensive sh. The smell of the bisque, which I'm sure had lobster in it, almost made me puke. That would have added to the show if I had managed to throw up. It would have served Luna Klarissa right. I couldn't even attempt to sip at it, which caused Luna Klarissa to scowl towards me. She knows I hate seafood and I'm sure she does this just to get a reaction out of me. The main course was sea bass and steamed artichokes. Why couldn't we eat normal food, like meatloaf or chicken? I missed living with the other warrior women. I bet they're eating something like burgers and fries or pizza tonight. Something cheap but lling and normal.

Odette spent much of the dinner openly irting with Cameron. He didn't ward off her advances, smiling back at everything she said. He answered her every question with a ourish, and would then look at me from the corner of his eye as if to see my reaction.

I had no reaction, not even when I dropped my napkin and saw Odette rubbing her foot against his. He was not reciprocating that action, but he wasn't avoiding her either. As I sat back up, my face stayed stoic, and I acted as if I didn't see a thing, even though Cameron was staring at me, looking displeased as he always did.

That pissed Cortina off. She growled in my head, and I swear the asshole sitting beside me smiled like he could hear her. He hasn't said a single word to me all evening, letting Odette take up his attention, but he still has the nerve to try and rile up my wolf.

Kevin tried to talk with me, but I kept my answers curt, not falling into any of his innuendos, or reacting to his passive-aggressive comments. Even when his mom joined in on the banter about my lesser background as an orphaned warrior, and how lucky I should count myself to have Cameron as my mate, I didn't react. I didn't even agree. I just smiled tightly and continued to pick around the artichoke on my plate.

This seemed to irritate my mate. He glared, his jaw tense and his large arms barely concealed by his dress shirt were exed at his side on the arm of his chair. He was just staring at me. He was waiting for some reaction. When he didn't get one, he then leaned forward towards Odette to talk in hushed whispers. She did a lot of that over-exaggerated giggling, even going as far as resting her hand on his arm. She would give me looks every once in a while to see if I was affected with a smirking grin. Cameron was taking this too far this time. Cortina was snarling viciously inside of me, and I could feel his wolf trying to calm her, but Cameron didn't seem to care. He was grinning right along with Odette. It was becoming harder not to react in defense of my wolf.

"Excuse me," I said, standing up from the table after the last plates were taken. No one even acknowledged me. The desserts will be served with wine and coffee in the sitting room after this, so it was the perfect opportunity to go up to our room to calm Cortina down. She was getting violent in her thoughts towards Odette, and I didn't want her to slip out. Not tonight. I have done a stellar job of keeping myself calm and together tonight. I don't want to bring any attention to myself for the Alpha and Luna to condemn me for later.

"Why is he hurting us?" Cortina cried. "Rome doesn't hurt us. Why does he?"

"Because he's a selsh asshole," I told her. "He always has been. If he could f\*\*k other girls and get away with it, I'm sure he would, no matter what his wolf said."

"That's what I don't understand," Cortina said, pacing in my mind. "Rome said they wanted us. Just us. Both of them. Why doesn't his human act like it too?"

I would never say this to Cortina, not unless she saw the truth herself, but I don't think Rome is being truthful with her. I think he is trying to pacify her, to keep her attached. Cameron has never shown any sign that he cared for me. Cortina was just blinded by the bond and Cameron's wolf is trying to keep her that way. If he wants to keep her naively happy, so be it, but the rst time that Cameron's antics truly hurt my wolf, I'm gone. I would reject him and run away in an instant. I'm actually waiting for that day, hoping for it, because once Cortina isn't blinded by the fate bond, I know that she will see him for what he truly is.

"Chloe," the bastard himself chose that moment to mind link me, making it the rst time he had even spoken to me all day. "You were not dismissed for the evening."

"I know," I growled, "I'll be right back down. Excuse me for peeing."

He grunted lowly, but closed the mind link with distaste at my crudeness. f\*\*k him. I wouldn't have had to come up here and hide to calm my wolf if he wasn't such a philandering bastard.

I took my time coming out, my feet aching from the high-heeled stilleto shoes. My legs can't move apart very far because of the constricting dress, so I'm dreading going down the stairs again. I'm debating taking the elevator, which I never do because I'm not a weak little pansy like Luna Klarissa, but when I come around the hall to the stairs Odette is standing there, seemingly waiting for me.

"There you are," she smiled sweetly, but the smile didn't reach her eyes. I tried to just walk past her after giving her a tight smile in return, but she wouldn't let me. She linked her arm with mine and pulled me tight. If I were to throw her off, it would be trouble for me, so I had to just endure. "You looked a bit unsettled at dinner. I thought I would come to check on you."

"I'm ne," I lied.

"Oh, how could you be," she grinned mockingly, her matte pink lips stretching over her bleached teeth. "I would be completely disturbed if my mate were so engrossed with their past ing."

Cortina snarled in my head, but I've had plenty of practice hiding her turmoil. I keep my face cold and passive. "Considering it's a past ing, not a current one, I'm not disturbed in the least." Cortina's rage bleeds into my intolerance a bit, so I turned a smile towards Odette and said, "It must be so much harder for you to see the one you covet only using you to try to get a reaction out of me. If I were in your shoes, then I might feel disturbed."

Her phony smile falls from her face. "How dare you, you lowborn mutt w\*\*\*e. I am the daughter of an alpha, not a tool."

"We are all tools," I sighed. "In the game of Alphas, we are pawns for their egos and authority. You can't be so blinded by your lust for a mated Alpha as to not see that. You can't truly be that stupid."

She growled, jerking away from me. I snickered, continuing to walk down the stairs on my own. If she wants to stay behind and stew in her denial, that's ne by me. I would rather get this night over with so I can hide from my mate and rest. After the last night with Cameron roughly handling me until I passed out, and then spending the entire day with his mother planning this little dinner to watch my mate irt with another she-wolf on my anniversary, I wanted nothing more than to endure the last of this so I could be excused to nd somewhere to just sleep for a long time. Maybe in the library, or in the billiards hall that Cameron and his friends only use on Sundays after the pack runs.

Life as Cameron's mate is nothing to covet. I don't know why the woman wants him.

As I'm daydreaming about the places I could hide to sleep without Cameron attacking me like he does every night, I hear Odette grunting from frustration behind me. I just ignore her. I'm being careful as I descend the steps, having quite a ways to go with the killer shoes and tight dress. I was looking down, lost in my thoughts, focused on each step, so I didn't feel her behind me until her hands were on my back, pushing me with more strength than I thought she had.

The air moved past me, and it was like time stood still. I looked back to see her malicious face set in a venomous sneer. When time seemed to move again, and I realized my constraint in a body towards the marbled oor, it wasn't a call for help I sent out to Cameron, but a curse.

"I hate you," I wailed. "I f\*\*\*\*\*g hate you."

Those were my last thoughts, last words before my head met the hard oor and everything went black.