



Chapter 10



I'm grabbing coffee in the Fenris building lobby—overpriced espresso that tastes vaguely of corporate desperation—when the air shifts. That particular tension that means trouble just walked through the door.

Lia Blackwood sweeps through the revolving doors in designer everything. Chanel suit, Louboutin heels, enough diamonds to fund a small country's GDP.

She makes a beeline straight for me.

I have exactly three seconds to brace before her voice cuts through the morning crowd, pitched to carry. "There you are. The runaway finally crawled back."

Every head in the lobby turns. At least thirty people, most of them Fenris employees who definitely don't need front-row seats to my family drama.

Lia's playing to an audience and she knows it.

"Eight years and you come slinking back to what—work for my fiancé?" She flashes the massive ruby engagement ring, makes sure everyone within a ten-foot radius gets a good look. "Kieran is MINE. Has been for eight years while you were off playing house with some random man's bastards."

The words are surgical. Designed to humiliate, to remind everyone listening that I'm the family shame who got knocked up and disappeared.

I keep my expression neutral, voice professional. "Lia. Didn't realize you frequented corporate offices."

"Oh, I don't usually." She moves closer, that predatory smile I know too well. "But when I heard you were here, working so closely with Kieran..."

She laughs, sharp and cruel. "Just wanted to remind you how this ends. You ran away like a coward once. You'll do it again. It's what you do."

I should walk away. Should grab my coffee and take the high road, be the bigger person.

But eight years of survival have sharpened my edges into weapons.

"Tell me, sister—what kind of man keeps you engaged for eight years without actually marrying you?"

The question lands. I watch her perfect mask crack for just a second before fury floods in.

"We're waiting for the right time." Her voice climbs, defensive. "His father insists on traditional pack customs, timing with the moon cycles —"

"Or maybe," I cut her off, voice still professional but edged with steel, "he doesn't actually want to marry you."

The lobby has gone completely silent. Everyone pretending to check their phones, get their coffee, do literally anything except openly stare at the Blackwood sisters having it out in public.

They're absolutely listening though.

"You know nothing about our relationship." Lia's scrambling now, justifications tumbling out faster than she can organize them. "Kieran wants everything perfect for me—the venue, the ceremony, building the business first so we can—"

She's grasping. "Pack politics are complicated. His father has

requirements. We're doing this the RIGHT way, not rushing like some desperate—"

"Eight years isn't rushing, Lia." My words are quiet but they cut deep. "A man who actually wanted to marry you would have done it by now."

negotiation. But Lia either doesn't notice or refuses to acknowledge it.

"Call me later." She sweeps toward the exit, pausing just long enough to deliver her parting shot. "We still have the venue walkthrough on Saturday."

Then she's gone, leaving a cloud of expensive perfume and barely contained desperation hanging in her wake.

radiating off him.

"Thalia—" His voice is low, meant only for me.

"I have a call." I don't look at him, don't let myself get pulled into whatever explanation or justification he's about to offer.

Because the truth is simple: Lia just announced to an entire lobby of people that she's planning a wedding with him. And he didn't correct her.

Didn't tell her they were done. Didn't mention that he'd ended things.

