

Chapter 2 Shattered Loyalty

9-11 minutes

Freya

After a quiet weekend, Monday morning arrived with cruel punctuality.

I stepped into Stone Lake Tower at eight sharp, my heels clicking across the marble floor. From the outside, nothing had changed—same glass walls, same sharp-suited executives bowing their heads when they saw me, the Gamma who kept the Alpha's empire from collapsing under its own weight.

Inside, though, I was already halfway gone. The resignation papers had been signed. My place here was a countdown, not a future.

Still, old habits died hard. I poured myself into my work, lining up Jasper's schedule, preparing notes for the board meeting that afternoon, and running through the usual tasks that only I could do with precision. By nine, I was heading toward his office with a folder in hand.

The door was ajar. I pushed it open an inch, intending to announce myself—then froze.

Mia was curled up on Jasper's lap, delicate as porcelain, feeding him half of a cookie.

The alpha who once mocked germaphobes, who refused to share drinks even with his Beta, took the bite with a smile. Worse, he kissed her fingertips after. Tenderly. Worshipfully.

There's an old saying in our world: a fated mate carries a bond stronger than anything else. Once two wolves meet, nothing can keep them apart—except the cruelty of rejection. I'd never believed a bond could change someone's very nature. But watching him now, I had no choice but to believe. My eyes burned, and my wolf whimpered inside me. Eight years—what had those been worth?

I wanted to scream the question at Jasper. Instead, I stood tall, forcing myself to hold on to the last threads of dignity I still had.

"You said you were craving these yesterday," he murmured, his voice softer than I had ever heard it. "So I stood in line for three hours this morning. Worth it?"

Mia's laughter rang out, bright and sweet. "Mmm, perfect. Sweet but not cloying. You used to trek across the city just to get these. Now you're literally running a corporation, Jasper. Can't you just send someone?"

She wiggled her foot, and he massaged her ankle with practiced care. The look on his face was pure devotion.

"Anything that matters to you," he said, brushing her hair back from her cheek, "I handle myself. Always."

She leaned in, arms twining around his neck, and kissed him like he was her world. He kissed her back, completely lost in her.

My breath caught. Pain clawed its way up my chest, sharp and merciless. My fingernails dug into my palms until the skin broke. Warm blood pooled in my hands, the only thing tethering me to reality.

The meeting clock ticked on. Swallowing hard, I straightened my spine, forced my face into a mask, and rapped lightly on the door.

"Alpha Kane," I said, my voice low but steady. "Your meeting's about to start."

Jasper tensed. His shoulders shifted as if he meant to stand—but Mia tugged him back down, lips curving into a pout.

"Don't go yet. Five more minutes?" she coaxed, wide-eyed, her tone dripping with playful sweetness.

Her plea melted him instantly.

"Push the meeting back two hours," he called out, not even looking at me.

My breath caught. "Alpha, the CEOs are already waiting—"

"God, Jasper," Mia cut in with a laugh, "your gamma is such a buzzkill. Can't she take a hint?"

The air thickened. Jasper's gaze snapped to me, cold steel.

"I said two hours. Nothing comes before Mia. Got it?"

The finality in his tone left me no space to argue. I bowed my head. "Yes,Alpha."

The conference room was a storm when I walked in.

Three powerful CEOs sat stiff-backed,fury barely contained. They didn't dare insult Jasper outright,so they turned on me instead.

"This is an insult,Gamma."

"We cleared our mornings for this? Your Alpha treats us like fools?"

I lowered my head and absorbed every strike. Defending him would only invite worse.

Two hours later,Jasper finally arrived—with Mia on his arm,radiant and smug. The meeting resumed. For him,it was nothing. For me,it was humiliation that burned to the bone.

When it ended,I staggered into the hall,desperate for air.

"Freya,right?" Mia's voice chimed.

I turned. She leaned in the doorway,all sugar and silk. "Jasper says you make the best coffee. Everyone looks half-dead after that marathon. Be a doll and whip up some for the whole floor? Mine with ice,no sugar."

Her smile was sweet. Her eyes were poison.

"Yes,ma'am," I murmured.

It took nearly two hours. Four hundred cups. My hands shook,raw from grinding and pouring. By the time I carried the last tray,my body screamed for rest.

I set Mia's cup before her. She lifted it,took a sip—then her face twisted.

"This?" she shrieked. "This is what you call coffee?"

Before I could answer,she hurled the mug straight at me.

But this time,I didn't curl up.

My hand shot out, catching the mug midair. It shattered in my grip, shards slicing into my palm. Blood dripped down my wrist, but I didn't flinch.

Gasps rippled across the office.

Mia froze, shock flashing before rage twisted her features. She grabbed another cup, but I straightened to my full height. "Enough," I growled. My voice was low, edged with steel. "You don't get to treat me like trash just because you hide behind his title."

The room went deathly silent. Even Mia faltered, her wolf instinctively recoiling under my Gamma dominance.

But then she whimpered, soft and fragile, and tilted her face toward Jasper's office.

The door slammed open. Jasper emerged, fury crackling in every step.

"Freya," he snarled, disbelief and rage laced together, "you dare bare your fangs at my mate?"

I lifted my bleeding hand, shards glittering against the red. "I dare defend myself. I've been your Gamma for four years. I have earned at least that much."

Our eyes locked. For one heartbeat, something unreadable flickered in his gaze—shock, maybe even respect. But then it was gone. He turned to Mia, pulling her into his arms.

"I felt uncomfortable, Jasper," Mia whispered pitifully, clutching her stomach. "I asked for warmth, and she gave me ice."

Tears welled. Her performance was flawless.

Jasper's jaw clenched. He looked at me like I was a stranger. "Four years, and you can't manage a simple coffee order? Or do you have a problem with Mia?"

I opened my mouth. "Alpha—"

"Enough." His command cracked like a whip. "Dock her month's pay. Strip her bonus. She'll apologize at next week's all-hands."

Jasper's verdict fell like a blade. The office went silent, waiting for me to bow my head and obey.

But I didn't bow.

I straightened, blood dripping down my hand, and let out a laugh that scraped raw from my throat. It silenced even my wolf inside me.

"Dock my pay?" I repeated, my voice ringing clear. "Tell me, Alpha—what pay? What bonus? What contract?"

His brows furrowed. "What the hell are you—"

"I was never your employee, Jasper." I cut him off, my voice sharp as broken glass. "I was your Gamma because I chose to serve the Stone Lake Pack. I belonged here because I believed in loyalty, not because you owned me. And now..."

I drew a deep breath, "...now I no longer belong to this pack."

I lifted my chin, eyes blazing. "I resign my Gamma title. I withdraw from the Stone Lake Pack. Effective immediately."

Mia's face drained of color. "You—you can't just—"

I turned on her, stepping close enough that she stumbled back. Then my palm cracked across her cheek with a sound that echoed through the room.

Her gasp barely left her lips before I pivoted and struck Jasper across the face too. The force of it rocked him back a step.

"Those," I said coldly, flexing my stinging hand, "are for every year I bled for you, every night I thought loyalty meant something, every shred of dignity I swallowed while you looked through me as if I were invisible."

Jasper's wolf flared, fury sparking in his eyes—but I didn't flinch.

I swept my gaze across the stunned office, my wolf's aura pressing down on every single one of them. Then, through the crowd, I caught a familiar face.

I smiled at Beta Timothy. "The paperwork and transition are already complete. Let the pack know: Freya has left Stone Lake."

And then I walked away, head high, bloodied but unbroken. The shards crunched under my heels like punctuation marks.

Behind me, the Alpha of Stone Lake stood frozen, cheek burning from my handprint.