

Chapter 5 Marry me

9-12 minutes

Freya

I froze, my blood turning to ice in my veins. "What?" The single word escaped my lips barely above a whisper.

Silvano sat up. His amber eyes gleamed with a predatory intelligence I'd completely missed before.

"Freya Stone, daughter of Tyson Stone, former Alpha of the Granite Ridge Pack." His expression was triumphant as recognition dawned on my face, my wolf bristling inside me. "Yes, I know exactly who you are. Just as I imagine you've already sensed I'm the Alpha of the Shadow Pack."

My body tensed immediately, wolf suddenly on high alert. The pleasant afterglow of our night together evaporated like morning mist. "How—"

"I make it my business to know other powerful wolves," he interrupted smoothly, reaching for my hand. His touch, which had ignited desire only hours before, now sent warning signals racing up my arm. "And you, Freya, are extremely powerful—even more so now that you've cut ties with Stone Lake. "

I pulled the sheet around my naked body, suddenly feeling exposed in a way that had nothing to do with my physical state. "You knew who I was the entire time?"

"Not immediately," he admitted, his eyes tracking my movements as I inched away from him. "But I recognized your scent signature. When Elena Kane called you by name at the bar, everything clicked into place." His smile was confident, completely unrepentant. "I've been looking for an alliance with a strong bloodline. We clearly have chemistry."

"Chemistry isn't a basis for marriage," I said carefully, calculating how quickly I could gather my clothes and leave. My wolf was pacing anxiously inside me, torn between fight and flight.

"Isn't it?" He caught my wrist gently but firmly, his thumb brushing over my pulse point in a gesture that seemed both intimate and threatening. "What did the mate bond get you with Alpha Kane? I'm offering you something real—equal partnership, respect, position. The Shadow Pack could use someone with your administrative talents, and you could use the protection of a pack bond again."

My wolf bristled at his assumptions, hackles rising. "I don't need protection," I hissed, yanking my wrist free.

"Everyone needs connection," Silvano countered, his voice softening into something that might have been genuine concern. "And you know as well as I do that Jasper won't let this go without a fight. An Alpha like him, losing his Gamma? Having another Alpha in your corner would make things... smoother."

I slid out of bed, gathering my scattered clothing with as much dignity as I could muster. My hands were shaking slightly, but I refused to let him see how rattled I was.

"Let me get this straight—you tracked me at the club, seduced me, and now you're proposing a strategic alliance disguised as marriage?" My voice was sharp enough to cut glass. "What kind of wolf do you take me for?"

Silvano leaned back against the headboard, completely unashamed of his nakedness or his scheming. The wolf's confidence was infuriating.

"I tracked you at the club, yes. I seduced you?" His eyes darkened as they swept over my body. "I think that was mutual, Freya. The way you responded to me..." His voice dropped to a growl that made my traitorous body remember exactly how good we had been together. "And I'm proposing because I see potential in both the alliance and in you. Is that so terrible? We're both adults who understand how our world works."

"It's manipulative," I shot back, pulling my dress over my head with jerky movements. "And calculating. And exactly the kind of power play I just walked away from."

"It's pragmatic," he corrected, running a hand through his tousled dark hair. "Something I thought you'd appreciate, given your background as a Gamma. We're both wolves without packs now. You're alone, vulnerable—whether you want to admit it or not. We could build something together. Something real."

I paused,my hand on the bedroom door,my wolf conflicted inside me. Part of me—the practical,strategic part that had made me an effective Gamma—could see the logic in his proposal. Another part was screaming to run.

"I just left one cage," I said quietly,meeting his gaze. "I'm not looking to enter another,no matter how gilded or how mutually beneficial you claim it would be."

Silvano's expression softened unexpectedly,and for a moment I glimpsed something that might have been genuine respect.

"It wouldn't be a cage,Freya. Think about it—no mate bond complications,no unrequited feelings. Just two adults who respect each other's strengths,building something that benefits us both."

"And the sex?" I couldn't help asking,my wolf curious despite my better judgment.

"Would continue to be exceptional," he promised with a wolfish grin that made my insides tighten involuntarily. "That part wasn't strategy,Freya. That was pure chemistry. The way you move..." He shook his head,eyes darkening with remembered pleasure. "That can't be faked."

Despite myself,I felt a reluctant smile tugging at my lips.

"I'm practical." He stood,wrapping the sheet around his waist as he approached me,the predatory grace of an Alpha wolf evident in every movement. "Take my card. Think about my offer. No pressure,no timeline. But the offer stands—you would make the perfect Luna."

Luna. The title I had once longed for with every fiber of my being,clung to for four endless years—until the fantasy shattered. I had never imagined another Alpha,stronger still,would suddenly extend that invitation to me. Moon Goddess,was this truly real?

I accepted the business card he pulled from his wallet,tucking it into my purse more to end the conversation than out of actual consideration.

"For what it's worth," Silvano added as I opened the bedroom door,his voice dropping to something that sounded genuinely sincere,"even if you say no to my proposal,I don't regret last night. You deserved to be worshipped properly,Freya Stone. And I meant every touch,every word."

Something warm and complicated fluttered in my chest,my wolf whining in confusion. "Goodbye,Alpha Silvano."

As I slipped out of his apartment into the early morning light, my wolf seemed torn between pride at our night of freedom and wariness at the unexpected proposal. Silvano's offer wasn't what I wanted—strategic alliances disguised as relationships were exactly what I was running from—but he wasn't entirely wrong, either. I did need connections, allies, especially now that I'd cut ties with Stone Lake.

My phone buzzed with a text from Elena [DETAILS IMMEDIATELY!! Did you survive the night of Alpha passion??]

I smiled despite everything, typing back: [Survived and then some. Coffee in 20? You won't believe what just happened.]

Before Elena could reply, my phone rang, her name flashing across the screen. I answered, still trying to hail a cab with my free hand.

"Wow, that eager for details?" I laughed, relieved to have something normal to focus on after Silvano's proposal bombshell.

But the voice that came through the phone wasn't Elena's.

"Where the hell are you?" Jasper's cold, commanding voice hit me like an Arctic wind.

"Jasper?" I managed, my heart hammering against my ribs. "Why do you have Elena's phone?"

"My sister was careless enough to leave it unattended," he said, his voice dangerous and controlled. "Imagine my surprise when I saw your messages. Another Alpha, Freya? Really?"

I could hear the barely contained rage in his voice. My skin prickled with goosebumps as my wolf began to pace anxiously inside me.

"That's none of your business," I said, struggling to keep my voice even. "I no longer answer to you, Alpha Kane."

"You will return to Stone Lake Pack house immediately," Jasper commanded, his voice taking on that unmistakable Alpha timbre that had once made my knees weak. "This is not a request."

I gripped the phone tighter, my knuckles turning white. "You no longer have the right to give me orders. I signed the withdrawal papers."

"You think paperwork severs what's between us?" His laugh was cold, humorless. "You belong to Stone Lake. You belong with me."

"I belong to myself," I said, my voice trembling not with submission but with fury.

There was a moment of stunned silence before he spoke again, his voice lower, more dangerous. "Freya, if you're not back within the hour, I'll petition the Council to issue a warrant for your arrest—on charges of forgery and betraying the pack."

My blood ran cold. "You wouldn't dare," I whispered, though I knew he absolutely would. Jasper Kane never made empty threats.

"One hour," he repeated. "Or I'll send Timothy to retrieve you. Your choice."

The line went dead.

I stood frozen on the sidewalk, the business card in my purse suddenly feeling less like an unwanted proposition and more like a potential lifeline. Jasper's threat hung in the air around me, choking me with its implications.

With shaking hands, I flagged down a cab. As I slid into the backseat, I made my decision.

"Where to, miss?" the driver asked.

I took a deep breath, squaring my shoulders. "Stone Lake Pack territory. And hurry, please."

Not because I was submitting to Jasper's command, but because this confrontation was long overdue. If he wanted me back at the pack house, he would get exactly what he asked for—but not what he expected.