

Chapter 8 Change

7-9 minutes

Freya

The executive floor was eerily quiet when I stepped off the elevator. Timothy's office door was closed, but light spilled from beneath it. At least one competent person was still working.

When I reached what had been my office—the command center from which I'd run Stone Lake's operations for eight years—I found it stripped bare. Not even my plants remained. A clear message: I had been erased.

Artemis growled inside me, bristling at the insult. I soothed her with a promise. *We're not staying. This changes nothing.*

I continued to Jasper's office, pausing at the threshold in absolute shock. The formerly elegant space, with its tasteful gray walls and masculine furniture, had been transformed into something from a teenage girl's fantasy. Bright Pink and mint green paint assaulted my eyes, gauzy curtains hung at the windows, and a vase of artificial flowers dominated his desk.

The laughter bubbled up before I could stop it—deep, genuine laughter that bent me double. This was Mia's doing, clearly. And Jasper had allowed it.

"Something amusing?"

Jasper's cold voice cut through my laughter. He stood in the doorway behind me, his broad shoulders nearly filling the frame, his expression thunderous. Despite everything, my traitorous heart stuttered at the sight of him. Eight years of loving him couldn't be erased in three weeks.

But I wasn't the same woman who had left. I straightened, meeting his gaze directly. "Just admiring the new decor. Very... bold choice."

His jaw tightened, but before he could respond, his gaze shifted over my shoulder. Through the window, Silvano's Maserati was just pulling away.

"Who the hell was that?" Jasper demanded, stalking into his office and throwing down the file he'd been carrying. "That was Moretti's car. Why is he dropping you off at my building?"

I raised an eyebrow. "I wasn't aware my transportation choices required your approval, Alpha." The title came out mockingly.

"You were seen kissing him in the driveway," Jasper growled, his eyes flashing gold. Leon, his wolf, was close to the surface. "Moretti is Stone Lake's biggest rival. Do you have any idea how this looks?"

"Like I'm moving on with my life?" I suggested sweetly. "Like I'm no longer at your beck and call?"

"It looks like betrayal," he snarled, advancing on me. "Four weeks ago, you were in my bed. Now you're spreading your legs for the Shadow Pack's Alpha?"

Artemis surged forward, furious at the insult. I let my eyes shift to reflect her anger. "Careful, Jasper. You're speaking to your ex-Gamma, not your whore."

"Ex-Gamma who clearly can't wait to share Stone Lake secrets with a rival Alpha," he shot back. "Was that your plan all along? Get close to me, learn our weaknesses, then run to the Shadow Pack?"

I laughed incredulously. "Eight years of loyal service, and you think I was what—a spy? Your paranoia is showing, Jasper."

"Then what is this?" He gestured wildly toward the window. "Some petty revenge? Sleep with my enemy to hurt me?"

"Not everything is about you," I replied coolly. "Silvano appreciates what I bring to the table—professionally and personally. He's offered me a position that acknowledges my worth."

"What position?" Jasper's voice had dropped dangerously low. "On your knees? On your back?"

My palm connected with his cheek before I'd even registered moving. The crack of skin on skin echoed in the gaudy office.

Jasper's head snapped to the side, his eyes widening in shock. In eight years, I had never struck him. Never even raised my voice to him.

"He's offered me marriage," I said, my voice deadly calm despite the trembling in my hand. "Luna of Crescent Moon Pack. His equal partner. Everything you were too cowardly to give me."

"Marriage?" Jasper looked like I'd slapped him again. "You can't be serious. You've known him for what—a few weeks?"

A small sound from the doorway drew our attention. Mia stood there, her eyes wide, one hand pressed to her mouth in shock. She looked between us, clearly having heard enough to understand what we were discussing.

"Jasper?" Her voice wavered. "What does she mean?"

Jasper's expression shuttered. "Nothing, sweetheart. Freya is just bitter about losing her position."

The familiar dismissal of our relationship—of me—ignited something fierce inside me. Before Jasper could stop me, I strode to where Mia cowered in the doorway and seized her wrist.

"Listen carefully, Jasper," I said, dragging Mia forward. She squeaked in alarm but didn't resist. "I didn't come back to listen to your accusations or jealous tantrums. I came because you threatened me with exile. Say what you need to say, sign whatever papers need signing, and let me get on with my life." I tightened my grip on Mia's wrist. "And if you say one more word to insult me, I'll slap your precious mate so hard she'll see stars."

Mia let out a terrified shriek. "Jasper! Don't let her hurt me!"

"Freya, let her go," Jasper commanded, his Alpha voice washing over me.

But I was no longer his to command. I smiled coldly. "Your Alpha voice has no power over me anymore." I turned my gaze to the trembling woman in my grasp. "Remember that feeling, Mia—the helplessness, the fear. Because if you ever try to use your position to humiliate another wolf the way you did to me, I'll show you exactly how much damage an ex-Gamma can do."

"Please," Mia whimpered, tears spilling down her cheeks. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean—"

"Save it," I cut her off, releasing her arm with a shove that sent her stumbling back into Jasper's protective embrace. "Now, Alpha Kane, shall we discuss business, or did you bring me here just to insult me further?"

"Enough of this," Jasper finally said, his voice regaining that commanding tone I'd once found so attractive. He guided Mia to the couch. "Wait here, sweetheart. I need to speak with Freya alone."

"But Jasper," Mia protested, clinging to his arm. "She threatened me! You can't just—"

"I said wait here." His tone left no room for argument.

Mia's lower lip trembled as she sank onto the pink cushions, looking for all the world like a scolded child. I had to admire her commitment to the act.

Jasper turned to me, his expression hardening. "Conference room. Now."

I followed him across the hall, my heels clicking sharply against the marble floor. Through the glass walls, I could see Timothy and several other pack members pretending not to watch us. News of my return had clearly spread like wildfire.

The conference room door had barely closed behind us when Jasper rounded on me.

"I want you back as my Gamma," he stated flatly. "And as my personal assistant."