

Chapter 9 Jealous

8-10 minutes

Freya

Artemis snarled inside me, bristling at his audacity. "You're delusional. I've already signed withdrawal papers. I'm no longer yours to command."

The door suddenly burst open, and Elena rushed in, her blonde hair flying behind her. She'd clearly been running.

"Freya!" She embraced me quickly before turning to face her brother. "Timothy told me you were threatening her. This has to stop, Jasper!"

Jasper's expression darkened. "Stay out of this, Elena. This is pack business."

"She's my best friend!" Elena protested. "You can't keep treating her like this!"

"Mind your place," Jasper growled, his Alpha aura flaring. "You may be my sister, but you're still a member of this pack, subject to my authority."

I felt Elena flinch beside me. Unlike me, she was still bound to Stone Lake, still vulnerable to Jasper's commands.

"Don't speak to her like that," I said, stepping forward protectively. "Your quarrel is with me, not her."

Jasper's lips curled into a cold smile. "Interesting. You still care about Elena, even though you've abandoned Stone Lake." He walked slowly to his desk, trailing his fingers along the edge. "Tell me, how would Alpha Moretti feel about taking in another Stone Lake wolf? Especially one with direct blood ties to a rival Alpha?"

My blood turned to ice. "What are you saying?"

"I'm saying," Jasper continued, his voice dangerously soft, "that if Elena wants to follow you to Shadow Pack, she'll need my permission. Which I won't give."

Elena paled. "You wouldn't—"

"I would," Jasper cut her off. "Unless..."

Artemis howled in outrage inside me, recognizing the trap closing around us. "Unless I come back," I finished for him.

Jasper nodded, his expression triumphant. "One month. That's all I ask. Return as my assistant, help get the company back on track, and I'll sign Elena's release papers myself."

"That's blackmail," I spat.

"That's negotiation," he corrected. "One month of your service in exchange for Elena's freedom. Surely your friendship is worth that much?"

I glanced at Elena, whose eyes were wide with distress. We'd been friends since college, long before I'd ever met Jasper. She'd stood by me through everything—including my disastrous relationship with her brother.

"Don't do it, Freya," Elena pleaded. "I'll be fine."

But we both knew that wasn't true. Jasper could make her life miserable—assign her to the lowest duties, isolate her from pack activities, deny her the freedom to visit me. He'd already proven how petty he could be.

My mind raced, calculating options. Silvano would be furious if I delayed joining Crescent Moon, but he would understand loyalty to a friend. And it was only a month...

"What guarantee do I have that you'll keep your word?" I asked Jasper.

He opened a drawer and pulled out what appeared to be withdrawal papers. "We'll sign Elena's papers now. I'll hold them for one month, and if you fulfill your end of the bargain, I'll file them officially."

"Freya, no," Elena insisted, gripping my arm. "You can't sacrifice your freedom for me."

I covered her hand with mine. "It's one month, El. After everything we've been through, what's one more month to make sure you're free?" I turned back to Jasper. "I want those papers signed and witnessed before I agree to anything."

"Of course," Jasper said smoothly, pressing a button on his phone. "Timothy, bring a witness from legal. We have documents to sign."

Fifteen minutes later, Elena's withdrawal papers were signed by all parties, with Timothy and a legal representative as witnesses. I felt a weight lift as I watched Elena sign her name—the first step toward her freedom from Jasper's control.

"I'll expect you at 8 AM tomorrow," Jasper said as the others left the room.

"Fine," I replied. "But let's be clear: I'm your assistant, not your Gamma, and definitely not your lover. I work during office hours only, and I report directly to Timothy, not to you."

Jasper's jaw tightened, but he nodded. "Agreed."

Elena still looked troubled. "This is crazy. I can't believe you're doing this for me."

I squeezed her hand. "You'd do the same for me. Besides," I added with a grim smile, "I want to be there when he files those papers. I don't trust him not to 'lose' them."

"Smart as always," Jasper commented dryly. "Now, if you ladies don't mind, I need to speak with Freya alone."

Elena hesitated, looking between us uncertainly.

"It's okay," I assured her. "Go wait for me in the lobby. We'll celebrate your impending freedom properly tonight."

After Elena left, followed by Mia who'd been hovering silently near the door, Jasper closed the office door and leaned against it.

"You've changed," he observed. "Three weeks ago, you wouldn't have dared speak to me the way you did tonight."

"Three weeks ago, I was still under the delusion that I needed your approval," I replied coolly. "Amazing how quickly clarity comes once you're out from under an Alpha's influence."

He moved closer, his familiar scent washing over me. "Are you really going to marry Alpha Moretti? After only knowing him for weeks?"

Artemis stirred within me, wary of his proximity. "My relationship with Silvano is none of your business."

"You loved me for eight years," he pressed. "How can you just turn that off? Move on to another Alpha so quickly?"

I couldn't help the bitter laugh that escaped me. "That's rich, coming from you. Weren't you the one who told me I should 'stop looking at you with those eyes'? That I should accept you'd never feel the same?" I shook my head in disbelief. "Now that I've finally taken your advice, you're what—jealous?"

"I'm concerned," he corrected, though his clenched fists suggested otherwise. "Alpha Moretti is using you to get to Stone Lake Pack."

"Not everything is about you or your precious pack, Jasper." I stepped back, needing distance from him. "Silvano sees value in me—as a partner, as a potential Luna. He's offering me respect and position, not shadows and secrets."

"And you believe him?" Jasper's voice hardened. "You think he wants you for your brilliant mind and not for the damage you could do to my pack?"

My wolf snarled, insulted. "If you're worried about company secrets, you can monitor my work. But beyond that, my life is my own now. I'm here for one month, for Elena's sake—nothing more."

"You're going to be Luna to another Alpha." Jasper's voice dropped, something raw edging into his tone. "My sister's best friend, my former—"

"Your former what?" I challenged. "Your former gamma? Your secret plaything? What exactly am I to you, Jasper, that makes you think you have any claim on my future?"

For once, the always-composed Alpha seemed at a loss for words. In the silence, I saw something I'd rarely witnessed in all my years with him—genuine regret.

"I never meant to hurt you," he said finally, his voice uncharacteristically soft.

"But you did," I replied simply. "Again and again. And now it's too late."

I saw pain flash across his features before he masked it with his usual stoic expression. Eight years ago, that glimpse of vulnerability would have sent me rushing into his arms. Now, it only confirmed what I already knew: I was finally free of his hold on me.

"I'll see you at 8 AM," I said, heading for the door. "Don't be late."

As I walked through the corridors of Stone Lake headquarters, my steps felt lighter than they had in years. One month of work was a small price to pay for Elena's freedom—and for the final closure I needed to truly move forward.

In the lobby, Elena was waiting, her expression still troubled. When she saw me, she rushed forward. "Are you okay? What did he say?"

I linked my arm through hers, guiding her toward the exit. "Nothing important. Now, I believe we have something to celebrate."

"Freya, you shouldn't have agreed to this," she protested.

"It's already done," I said firmly. "One month, and then both of us will be free of Stone Lake Pack forever." I pulled out my phone to text Silvano, dreading his reaction but knowing he'd understand eventually. "But tonight, let's not think about Jasper or the pack. Tonight is about your future—and mine."