

My Sister 134

Chapter 134 MERRY BAND

SERAPHINA'S POV

The OTS headquarters was alive before the first streak of sunlight broke the sky.

The hum of voices, the scrape of boots across polished and rough stone, the scent of nerves sharp as copper in the air—all of it churned together into a current that dragged me forward.

Today marked the first day of the LST, the beginning of a series of trials that would push us to our limits, revealing how far each of us had come since stepping into OTS, and ultimately deciding the fate of the alliances and fractures among the packs watching from the stands.

I'd memorized the structure, chanted it back to myself like a mantra.

Twelve teams. Five wolves each. Nine from packs scattered across the continent—Frostbane, Cypress Vale, Seabreeze, Granite Fang, Shadow Claw, Ashveil, Duskbane, Moonfang, Bloodspire. And then, three teams from the OTS itself.

One of them was mine.

I adjusted the hem of my jacket and felt the weight of Lucian's gift wrap around me like armor. I slipped my hand in my pocket and my fingers curled around Maya's moonstone.

I drew comfort from my gifts, knowing that even if I wouldn't see Maya and Lucian during the trials, I would carry a piece of two of my greatest cheerleaders into what felt like my most intense journey yet.

The assembly hall was cavernous, its high ceiling latticed with banners from every participating pack, including customized logos for the three OTS teams.

Wolves clustered in corners, voices low and charged, sizing one another up before the horns even sounded. When I found the placard with my team's designation, the tightness in my chest loosened.

"Seraphina!"

Judy bounded toward me, her ponytail swinging animatedly behind her. She was grinning so wide her cheeks looked ready to split.

"You're with me?" I asked, surprised warmth rising inside me.

"Damn right I am." She nudged my arm with a laugh.

I couldn't help it; I smiled. In this jungle brimming with tension and agitation, Judy's familiar face was a tether I hadn't realized I needed.

“C’mon,” she said, tugging me toward two others who hovered a little apart from the crowd. “Meet the rest of our merry band.”

The woman was plump, her eyes downcast beneath a curtain of chestnut hair. She fiddled with the hem of her sleeve, shifting her weight like the floorboards burned her soles.

“This is Talia,” Judy announced.

“Hi,” Talia murmured, so softly I had to lean in to catch it.

“And this is Finn.”

The man beside her gave a small nod. Tall and lean, his posture folded inward like a book unwilling to be read.

Which was ironic, because I remembered seeing him once or twice in the OTS library, tucked away in the corners between shelves.

“It’s good to meet you both,” I said brightly, smiling warmly.

Talia flushed crimson, eyes darting anywhere but me. Finn only gave another tight nod.

Before I could press further, a voice cut through the air like a knife.

“Oh, you’ve got to be kidding me.”

We turned.

Roxy, the last of our team members, stood there, arms crossed, scowl deep enough to bury us all.

The last time I’d seen her, she’d been glued to Jessica’s side in the locker room, more like a shadow than a person.

Now her eyes swept over our group with disdain so vicious it made Talia shrink behind Judy.

“My rotten luck,” Roxy muttered. “Stuck with a pack of weaklings.”

My stomach tightened, but I didn’t speak yet.

“Excuse me?” Judy snapped, squaring up immediately.

Roxy's lips curled. "Don't play dumb. This isn't a team, it's a death sentence. An Omega parade with an Alpha-born reject thrown in as a pitiful attempt at flavor."

She shook her head. "This has to be some kind of setup."

I arched a brow. "How so?"

She folded her arms, her eyes sharp with challenge. "Everyone knows Jessica and I are a team, and we work seamlessly together. Throwing me in with this"—her nose scrunched up—"pathetic mix is an attempt to weaken Jessica's team."

She glowered at me. "I wonder for whose benefit."

I scoffed. "You're not seriously insinuating that—"

"That's exactly what I'm insinuating," she hissed.

Talia's shoulders curled inward. Finn's jaw ticked once, but he said nothing.

I inhaled slowly, letting the words wash over me. Then, with deliberate calm, I stepped forward.

"I don't care how you think we came to be, Roxy. Like it or not, we're a team now," I said. My voice didn't rise, didn't strain, but it carried. "If you can't accept that, we won't even survive the first round."

But Roxy wasn't done. She shoved past Judy and jabbed a finger toward me. "If I have to do this, then I'm leading this team. I'm the strongest here. That's the only way we make it past round one."

Judy snorted so hard she nearly doubled over. "You? Lead? You couldn't lead an army of ants."

She threw an arm around me, pulling me forward. "If anyone's leading, it's Sera. She's Alpha blood."

"She's abandoned blood," Roxy spat instantly. "No pack. No backing. No worth."

Heat flared in my chest, but before I could answer, Judy snapped, "Watch your mouth."

Roxy's smirk widened. She liked the sting she caused.

I took a slow step closer, meeting her eye. "If you're so sure, then let's make a wager."

Her brow twitched, and I saw her intrigue.

I continued. "I will lead our team, and if I can't lead us to victory, I'll leave OTS entirely. Or you can lead the team—and if you lose, you leave."

I heard Judy's sharp intake of breath and wondered what the fuck I was thinking.

But for a flicker of a moment, Roxy's bravado faltered, and I knew there was no going back.

She snarled, arms crossed tighter, fury simmering at my audacity.

Judy let out a roar of laughter. "Oh, I like this. Look at you, Roxy—you're shaking. Afraid of being shown up?"

Roxy bristled, cheeks darkening, but she said nothing more.

"Well?" I pressed.

"Fine," she bit out at last. "Lead us, Alpha-born. But don't you dare drag me down. If we lose because of you, you'll wish you had left."

Her words hung like a guillotine in the air.

I didn't flinch. I only inclined my head, solemn. "We won't lose—if we stand together. That's the key. If we fracture, we're done."

Talia peeked at me from behind her curtain of hair. Finn's gaze lifted briefly, something like respect flickering there before it was gone.

Roxy turned away with a scoff, muttering under her breath. Judy, however, slapped me on the back with enough force to jolt me forward.

"Gods, I'm glad you're leading," she crowed. "Otherwise, I'd have to kill her before the tournament even started."

I exhaled, the smallest ghost of a smile tugging at my lips.

But with it came the weight of the responsibility I'd just willingly placed on my head.

I only hoped to goddess I could put my money where my mouth was.

Once the final rosters were confirmed, I stepped forward to retrieve our entry passes.

Each was a slim strip of obsidian etched with glowing runes, humming faintly against my palm. When pressed together, the five strips lit up as one—our bond, temporary though it was.

“Team assembled,” the examiner at the desk confirmed, his voice deep and bored. “You’ll enter through Gate Seven. Good luck.”

I nodded and turned to my team.

“Let’s go.”

We walked together toward the waiting arena, the sound of thousands of voices swelling beyond the stone walls. My heart pounded, not with fear but with a strange, fierce clarity.

For better or worse, these were my people now. Judy, with her surprising, unwavering faith in me; Talia, with her trembling awkwardness; Finn, with his gentle reserve; Roxy, with her bitter fire.

Five wolves bound together by chance.

And I at their head.

The gala was essentially the opening ceremony, so the LSTs would begin without preamble. There was nothing more between me and my hardest challenge yet.

The gates loomed ahead, shadows stretching long across the sand. The first round awaited.

I tightened my grip on the obsidian pass and whispered to myself, a vow no one else would hear—

‘We will endure.’