

## **My Sister 179**

Chapter 179 TAINTED PAST

CELESTE'S POV

The first thing I felt was the weight in my skull.

Heavy. Pounding. Like someone armed with dumbbells was trying to punch their way out from behind my eyes.

The second thing was panic.

My limbs were tangled in silk sheets. In a bed that wasn't mine—gigantic, luxurious. Sterile chill from a temperature-controlled suite curled around my skin.

My eyelids felt like they had been welded shut, mascara stiff against skin still tight from dried tears. I forced them open and winced, instantly regretting the action when pain screamed in my skull.

I pushed myself up on weak arms, pressing one hand to my throbbing temple.

I blinked, taking in the room through blurry vision—white ceiling, gold-lit marble, velvet drapes, polished wood.

Confusion, threaded with icy dread, tightened around my insides when my eyes dropped to a towel draped across the chair and recognized the crest.

The Vesper Grand Hotel. LA's werewolf community's most ridiculously opulent monument to wealth and prestige. My favorite hotel.

What the hell?

With that, the memory of last night slammed into my aching skull.

Luna Noire. Whiskey. The three wolves.

'Come on, sweetheart, we're just trying to be friendly.'

'Don't touch me.'

'Don't play hard to get. It's not hot.'

No.

No, no, no—

Nausea roared with panic as my fingers scrambled over my body—dress still on, hair undone but not trashed. No soreness. No bruises. No unfamiliar scent on my skin.

I hadn't been touched.

Relief, sharp and humiliatingly vulnerable, washed over me in a wave so strong, I sagged against the pillows piled behind me and closed my eyes.

With that, more flashes flickered across my memory.

'Touch her again, and I'll break every bone in your worthless body.'

My eyes flew open again, wide.

The voice echoed in my mind—dark, dangerous. Familiar.

And then there was the face...

One I thought I'd buried with the severing of our bond.

But that couldn't have been real.

Right?

I pressed my palm to my chest, half-expecting to feel the echo of him still there. But there was only hollowness, muted and distant.

The mate bond had been cut clean. There was no tug left. No warmth.

Surely I had been mistaken. Too much whiskey. I'd had a long, awful day before then. Yes, that had to be it.

A soft electronic beep echoed from the doorway.

My head snapped up as the suite door swung open.

And Brett Mercer stepped inside.

Time froze. The room detonated around me as shock extinguished every other emotion.

I closed my eyes and squeezed tight, despite the sharp pain the action elicited. I counted softly to three. That was what one did when one hallucinated, no?

When I opened my eyes again, though—he was still there.

My mate.

Well, ex-mate.

And he looked...wrong.

Not the boy who once knelt at my feet with worship in his gaze. Not the desperate man begging for scraps of my affection.

Not even the bitter, broken mate who'd swallowed wolfsbane to completely sever our bond before I could destroy him further.

This Brett stood taller. Cavalier. A cold kind of self-assuredness sat in his posture like a second skin.

His clothes were still simple—black jeans, a fitted dark shirt—but they fit differently now. Like they were chosen, not grabbed from whatever thrift store he could afford.

Broader shoulders pulled against the fabric; the sleeves were rolled up, exposing strong veins and bulging muscles I did not recognize. A gold, expensive-looking watch glinted around his wrist.

His jaw was sharper, softened by a shadow of stubble. His hair was slightly longer, tousled in a way that seemed intentional instead of neglected.

He stopped when he saw me awake. There was no flicker of relief. No “thank gods you’re okay” or tortured pining.

Just a cool, distant once-over. His eyes—honey-brown I’d always thought were too expressive—were unreadable.

“You’re up,” he said flatly, closing the door behind him.

The sound of his voice was like a slap to the face. Just those two words and a flood of memory, of buried past, threatened to drown me.

I dragged my chin up. “You.” My voice was hoarse, my throat tight. “That was really you?”

The gruff, commanding voice. The way the wolves had immediately scattered. It was impossible. Brett Mercer did not carry that kind of authority.

And yet.

He shrugged once, like rescuing me from three potentially dangerous wolves in a bar at 3 a.m. was no different from picking up groceries.

“What happened?” I demanded.

“You were about five seconds from getting dragged into an alley,” he said flatly, crossing to the minifridge like I wasn’t even worth facing for this conversation. “I intervened.”

I hated how my pulse stuttered with humiliation.

He retrieved a bottle of water from the fridge, and I automatically stretched my hand out.

He paused, arched a brow. And then took a long drink of the water.

My jaw unhinged. I didn’t know if I was enraged by his blatant dismissal or mesmerized by the way his Adam’s apple bobbed as he swallowed.

Had he always been so...suave? So smooth? Had his presence always commanded a room?

I snatched my gaze before he could catch me looking. I was going out of my damn mind, that was for sure. This was Brett, for goddess' sake.

"And then you brought me here?" I said, my voice still hoarse. "To this suite?"

"It was the closest hotel," he said casually.

I laughed, ignoring the scraping against my throat. "You expect me to believe you could afford this place?"

We were in the presidential suite; it cost more than some packs' yearly revenue.

Brett rolled his eyes and pulled out a black card from his back pocket, tapping it on the marble counter. "No. But you could."

My eyes narrowed on the familiar card. Then my head swiveled to the nearby chaise where my purse lay, unzipped.

"You used that?" My voice shot higher.



His brows lifted lazily. “You had it. I used it. You didn’t wake up on the street in a pool of your own vomit. You’re welcome.”

The laughter that bubbled out of me held absolutely no humor. I shook my head, staring at the black card—Kieran’s black card—between Brett’s fingers like a reminder of everything I had lost.

But in a way, it brought everything into perspective.

Of course, Brett couldn’t afford this room. He once slept in his car for a week straight because he got kicked out of his apartment for being six months behind on the rent.

I stood, head light. “So you’re still as broke as ever. That hasn’t changed.”

His jaw flexed slightly. But his voice stayed calm. “Jumping to conclusions was always your favorite pastime.”

The casual familiarity in his tone gave me whiplash. Which was he, distant? Familiar?

I crossed my arms, steadying myself with pride. “Let me guess—you think saving me gives you a chance?” I said with acid sweetness. “You think I’ll fall to my knees at your feet in gratitude?”

A thin, almost bored smile touched his lips. “Don’t flatter yourself.”

My pride flared. “Oh, please. You booked the presidential suite at the exact same hotel I used to talk about nonstop when we were together. Don’t insult me by pretending that’s a coincidence.”

He crossed his arms along his chest, and my eyes were drawn to the way his muscles rippled. When did those come in? “It is. Believe it or not, Celeste.”

The way he said my name—flat, like it meant nothing—sent an unexpected sting through my chest.

“I don’t,” I snapped. “And if you think you’ll get another shot at being my mate—”

“We’re not mates,” he cut in, voice cool. “Not anymore, remember?”

The reminder sliced sharper than it should have.

“We had a bond,” I snapped.

“Once, yes,” he said calmly. “But you smothered and poisoned it until it died a slow, agonizing death.”

Anger surged hot beneath my skin. “Don’t act like you were faultless. You were always jealous. Weak. You couldn’t handle what being with me meant.”

“And you couldn’t handle the fact that someone loved you more than power,” he said quietly.

That shut me up. My lips parted, a surge of indignant retorts rising to the surface—but no words came.

Brett’s voice stayed leveled, emotionless. “Relax, Celeste. I’m not here to win you back. I don’t want you.”

The blow landed so hard my ears rang.

“Get out,” I hissed, unsure if the dull ache was my wounded pride or...something else. “This suite is booked under my account—courtesy of my fiancé. You’ve done your good deed. Now leave.”

I folded my arms and forced a smirk. “And next time, try to be a little more subtle with your pining.”

His eyes darkened—not hurt, just calm irritation. Like I was a yapping chihuahua he had no patience for.

“Not that I owe you an explanation, but I’m in town on business. I stopped for a drink and saw what was happening. That’s all. It could have been anyone in trouble; it’s just unfortunate that it was you.”

My eyes flared. “Unfortunate?” I shrieked.

“I only stayed,” he continued, like I hadn’t spoken, “because I sensed Kharis in distress.”

I stiffened at the mention of my wolf. Gods, I hadn’t heard her name in ages. It sounded simultaneously intimate and foreign on his tongue.

The hollowness in my chest that I’d gotten used to suddenly began to throb.

“You sealed her,” Brett said, the first sign of emotion creeping into his voice—agitation. “What the fuck, Celeste?”

“Stay out of it,” I spat.

“Are you really that ashamed of me?” he asked quietly. “So much you’d rather smother your own wolf than ever reveal you once mated with me?”

“That was a mistake,” I hissed. “I’m going to be Kieran Blackthorne’s Luna. I can’t have a tainted past.”

For the first time, his expression shifted.

Something dark. Something...disappointed.

"Tainted," he repeated softly. "That's what loving me was?"

I swallowed. Couldn't answer.

He nodded once. "Got it."

He walked toward the door.

Something ugly twisted inside me. "So you just...brought me here and what, now you're done? That's it?"

He paused at the door.

"The bond is gone, Celeste," he said quietly, resigned. "There's nothing left of it; no excuse left to punish her. Stop keeping Kharis locked away like she's some inconvenience you wish never existed. Like she's me."

The air left my lungs.

He glanced back, distant again. "Free her. Or one day, you'll break in ways you can't recover from."

My voice trembled. "Why do you care?"

"I don't," he said. "Not anymore."

I wanted to hit him. I wanted to scream. I wanted to tear something apart because he was too composed, and I was not.

The Brett I used to know used to desperately cling to me like I was his anchor. Now it felt like he was the anchor—and I was the one drifting.

I just stood there, immobile, as he opened the door.

Someone outside cleared their throat. "Alpha Brett, are you ready to go?"

Everything inside me stalled.

Alpha?

Brett didn't look back at me again as he walked out, the title hanging behind him like one gigantic question mark.

But surely I'd heard wrong.

The door began to close.

Alpha.

I lunged forward before I even realized I'd moved and caught it before it shut completely.

Alpha??

Curiosity roared louder than pride.

I rushed after him.

The hallway outside the suite was just as luxurious—thick carpet, golden sconces, silence that screamed wealth.

Brett was already walking toward the elevator, hands casually in his pockets, like being called Alpha was the most normal thing in the world.

Someone walked beside him, a step behind, but I was tunnel-visioned, and nothing existed in that moment except for the man who had once held a part of my soul.

Alpha.

Brett.

Breath unsteady, I followed him, my bare feet sinking into the plush carpet.

“Brett!” I snapped.

He didn’t turn as he pressed the elevator button.

“Brett! Hey—you don’t get to just—”

The elevator dinged open.



He stepped inside.

“Don’t walk away from me!” I yelled, pulse screaming.

That made him pause. His head dipped slightly, like he was weighing something.

He finally looked at me—not surprised I followed, not amused, just...knowing.

“You always did love hierarchy more than people,” he said in that infuriating flat tone.

The doors began to close. “Goodbye, Celeste.”

“Wait—” I started.

A hand clamped over my mouth from behind just as the doors slid shut.

And darkness swallowed everything.