

## **My Sister 409**

### Chapter 409 BETTER CONDITIONS

#### CATHERINE'S POV

Marcus's pack had always favored strength over subtlety.

The Alpha residence reflected that philosophy, all dark wood, reinforced walls, and wide windows that did not soften the world beyond them, only framed it.

I stood near one of those windows now, my gaze resting not on the forest stretching endlessly into shadow, but on the faint reflection cast across the glass.

The darkness outside revealed nothing.

The glass, however, showed me everything I needed to see.

Myself, composed and still.

The low, amber glow of the overhead lights.

And Marcus Draven, lounging far too comfortably against the edge of the table behind me, as though the ground beneath his carefully constructed empire had not begun to shift.

"You've been quiet," he said at last, his voice carrying that familiar edge of mockery that always grated against my patience. "That's rarely a good sign."

"Neither is incompetence," I replied evenly without turning. "And yet here we are."

A low chuckle followed.

"I see," Marcus said, pushing himself off the table. "So we're starting there tonight."

"You had one job," I hissed.

"Hey, it's not my fault Celeste wasn't where she was supposed to be."

"You lost her."

Marcus's expression darkened. "She was moved."

“Which means you lost her,” I repeated, my voice cutting.

A flicker of anger flashed in his eyes.

“Watch your tone.”

“Or what?” I snapped. “You’ll fail at something else?”

The room seemed to tighten around us.

For a moment, neither of us spoke.

Then Marcus let out a humorless laugh.

“This from the woman who couldn’t secure her primary target,” he shot back.

“Seraphina was never meant to be secured at that stage,” I said. “Celeste, however, was already contained.”

He didn’t answer.

“Unbelievable,” I muttered, turning away from him again before my irritation could escalate into something less controlled. “You had one fucking job.”

“There was interference,” he said sharply.

“There’s always interference,” I replied. “That’s the nature of opposition. The difference between success and failure is whether you account for it.”

“And you accounted for Seraphina?” he countered.

“Yes,” I said without hesitation.

I forced down the thought of that last blow from Seraphina and her hidden friend that caught me off guard.

I exhaled slowly, forcing the edge out of my tone before continuing.

“With Celeste out of reach, we’ve lost a leverage point,” I said. “Which leaves us with fewer options.”

Marcus’s expression shifted again, his frustration settling into something more calculated.

“Not necessarily,” he said.

I glanced at him.

“Oh?”

F“You still have Margaret.”

The name darkened the room like a shadow.

“Yes,” I said carefully. “I do.”

“Then use her,” he said bluntly. “Kill her. Complete the transfer. End the instability and move forward.”

For a moment, I simply stared at him.

Then I mimicked his humorless laugh.

“You really don’t understand what you’re suggesting, do you?”

Marcus’s eyes narrowed. “I understand enough.”

“No,” I said, my voice dropping. “You understand the outcome. Not the risk.”

I stepped closer to him, closing the distance just enough to ensure he understood the seriousness of what I was about to say.

“If I mishandle that process,” I continued, “Margaret doesn’t just die, she transfers into me.”

He arched a brow.

“She could overwrite me,” I went on. “Or worse—exist alongside me. A second consciousness with equal claim to the power I’ve taken.”

Marcus’s jaw tightened.

“That’s a risk you’ll have to take eventually,” he said.

“Eventually,” I agreed. “Not prematurely.”

“And beyond that,” I added, stepping back slightly, “Margaret still has value.”

Marcus frowned. “As what?”

“As leverage,” I said simply.

His expression hardened. “We already tried that with Seraphina.”

“And we’ll try again,” I replied. “Under better conditions.”

“Better conditions.” He scoffed.

“What?”

His expression was infuriatingly relaxed, but there was something else beneath it, something sharper, more calculating. The kind of look he wore when he believed he had found leverage.

“Say whatever it is you have to say,” I snapped.

“Honestly,” he continued in a honey-sweet voice, “I’m just worried about you.”

My eyebrows shot up. “What?”

“Yes,” he continued, his tone shifting, losing some of its mockery in favor of something more probing. “Because I’m starting to wonder whether your judgment is being compromised.”

My expression did not change. “By what, exactly?”

Marcus’s eyes narrowed. “Sentiment.”

I scoffed. “Where the hell did you get that idea?”

He shrugged. “Maybe Margaret’s power is affecting you more than you think. Just like it recognized Edward, maybe it recognizes Seraphina.”

For a moment, I simply stared at him.

Then I turned away from him again, my gaze returning to the reflection in the glass.

“If you’re trying to suggest that Seraphina’s existence is affecting my decision-making, you’re wasting your time,” I said. “She is a variable. Nothing more.”

I could feel his gaze on me, measuring, evaluating, searching for cracks that were not there.

“Variables can become liabilities,” he said eventually.

“And liabilities can be eliminated,” I replied smoothly.

That seemed to satisfy him—at least enough for him to shift the conversation.

“Then I assume you’re pleased,” he said.

“With what?”

“With the diversion,” he clarified. “Your coordinated attacks across Nightfang and Frostbane.”

I allowed myself a small, satisfied breath.

“Of course I am,” I said. “Unlike some aspects of this operation, that part went exactly as intended.”

I turned back to him, folding my arms loosely across my chest.

“Kieran’s pack should be dealing with the aftermath as we speak,” I continued. “Psychological disruption, fractured trust, lingering instability. Those kinds of wounds take time to heal.”

Marcus’s expression flickered.

“Assuming the damage was as effective as you claim.”

“It was,” I said flatly.

Because I had felt it.

The hesitation.

The fracture.

The moment where instinct faltered under the weight of memory twisted into something grotesque.

Even if they recovered, the seed had been planted.

Doubt had a way of spreading.

Marcus studied me for a moment longer before nodding.

“Fair enough,” he conceded. Then, almost as an afterthought, he added, “Though I wouldn’t count on that being as effective as you think.”

My eyes narrowed. “And why is that?”

“Lucian,” he said.

At that, my patience thinned again.

“Don’t remind me.”

The thought alone was enough to set my teeth on edge, souring my already frayed mood.

“He’s not cooperating,” Marcus continued. “Which is becoming increasingly inconvenient.”

“Inconvenient?” I echoed. “He’s becoming a liability.”

Locked in the lower levels, restrained, monitored, pressured from every angle—and still he refused to yield.

It would have been admirable under different circumstances.

Now, it was simply irritating.

“I’ve had him pushed to the edge,” I said. “Isolation. Psychological pressure. Controlled exposure to Zara.”

“And?”

“And nothing,” I snapped. “He bends, but he doesn’t break.”

The silence that followed was thick with shared frustration.

Because we both understood what that meant.

Without Lucian's cooperation, the next phase stalled, and my instability worsened.

For a brief moment, neither of us spoke.

Then—

A knock.

Marcus and I both turned toward the door.

"Enter," he said.

The door opened, and one of the lower-ranking guards stepped inside, posture rigid, eyes carefully lowered in deference.

"Report," Marcus commanded.

The man swallowed once, then straightened slightly.

“There has been a development,” he said.

My attention sharpened instantly.

“What kind of development?”

He hesitated, then said, “Lucian Reed has agreed to cooperate.”