

## **My Sister 414**

### Chapter 414 THE DILEMMA

#### SERAPHINA'S POV

I fell into step beside Kieran as we left the training grounds, the noise behind us fading into something distant and controlled again, as if the moment with Ava had never disrupted the rhythm of the day.

For a few seconds, neither of us spoke.

Then I glanced at him, gently nudging his shoulder. "That was pretty sneaky."

Kieran didn't pretend not to understand. His mouth curved, not quite a smile, but close enough to count.

"A little reverse psychology never hurt anyone."

I huffed a quiet breath, shaking my head. "Didn't realize you were such a master of mind games."

He shook his head. "She wanted to train. I knew she would be too proud to ask, so I gave her a nudge."

I chuckled. "How noble of you."

"You know," he said after a beat, "she reminds me of you."

My brows furrowed. "How?"

His lips twitched. "You were once a stubborn girl in the woods who looked like a boy."

I stopped walking.

Kieran took two more steps before noticing, then turned back, one brow lifting slightly in question.

I let out an incredulous breath. "You remember that?"

He stepped closer and reached out, taking my hand in his. "It was a pretty memorable meeting—every moment with you was."

I let out a small breath, a laugh slipping through it.

“Back then,” Kieran continued, “no one gave you a chance to train; everyone dismissed you because you were different. I don’t want that for Ava.”

The past edged into my thoughts—the dismissal, the disdain, the rejection—but it didn’t dig in the way it used to. It didn’t pull me under.

It simply...existed.

My lips curved as I stepped closer. “Ava’s pretty lucky.”

“Yeah,” Kieran agreed. “Because she has you.”

We started walking again, slower now.

“I should have paid more attention to you,” he added, his voice lower now. “Back then.”

A year ago, even months ago, that sentence would have torn something open.

Now, instead of reopening old wounds, it felt like something acknowledged and laid to rest.

I squeezed his hand. "The past is past."

The wind shifted, brushing my skin, lifting a strand of hair across my cheek. I tucked it back absently.

"And you've more than made up for everything," I added.

Kieran glanced at me, his expression softening. "I could spend the rest of my life atoning, and I wouldn't come close to making up half of what I owe."

"You don't owe me a lifetime of guilt," I said softly. "I'm not that girl anymore, and you're not the boy who ignored her."

He pulled me closer, arms wrapping around my waist.

"Then let me keep proving that," he said.

I smiled. "You already are."

We reached the edge of the main compound, the hum of activity growing clearer—voices, movement, the constant underlying awareness of a pack preparing for something bigger than routine.

The shift was immediate. My shoulders actually sagged under the phantom weight.

“Back to work,” Kieran said quietly.

I nodded with a soft sigh. “Back to work.”

The brief lightness from the training grounds lingered just enough to take the sharpest edge off what waited for us.

Inside, the air was cooler, the stone walls holding onto the shade. We moved through familiar corridors, passing pack members who dipped their heads in acknowledgment, their expressions carrying a mix of respect and something more tense beneath it.

They could feel it, even if they didn’t know the details.

Something was coming.

And we were running out of time to be ready for it.

By the time we reached the strategy room, the others were already gathered.

Ethan stood near the table, arms braced against its surface, his posture rigid with focus. Maya leaned beside him, scanning a set of documents with sharp, efficient movements.

Alois was seated, fingers steepled as he watched Corin, who stood slightly apart, his attention turned inward in that way that meant he was already working through possibilities no one else could see.

The room quieted when we entered.

“You two are late,” Ethan said, straightening.

“Had to take care of a disturbance on the training field,” Kieran replied.

I moved to the table, my gaze flicking over the spread of maps, notes, and marked locations before settling on Alois.

“How is he?” I asked.

Alois didn’t need clarification. He’d had one primary assignment over the last couple of days.

“Aaron is stable,” he said. “But that stability is...fragile.”

“That’s generous,” Corin murmured without looking up. “He’s being held together by threads that shouldn’t still exist.”

“Can he be restored?” I asked.

Alois exchanged a glance with Corin.

“Restored is a broad term,” Alois said carefully.

“I’m not asking for full recovery,” I said. “I’m asking if we can get anything from him.”

A memory.

A name.

A confirmation.

Anything that could cut through the web Catherine had spun.

Corin looked at me.

“Yes,” he said. “But not without risk.”

“When is there ever no risk?” Ethan muttered.

I exhaled slowly. “What do you need?”

“Time,” Corin answered. “And precision. If we push too hard, whatever remains of him could collapse completely.”

“And if we don’t push hard enough?” Kieran asked.

“Then we get nothing.”

“Then we don’t waste time,” I said.

Alois nodded once. “I’ll continue stabilizing him physically. Corin will handle the...deeper work.”

“And I’ll assist,” I added.

Kieran's head turned toward me. "Sera—"

"I'm not overextending," I said before he could finish. "Not like before."

His gaze held mine for a moment longer, weighing that.

Then, slowly, he nodded.

"Fine."

Ethan pushed off the table, drawing attention back to the other side of the plan.

"While you're doing that," he said, "we're not sitting still."

Kieran stepped forward, his focus shifting seamlessly.

"We've started reaching out," he said. "Allies, other packs, anyone who's felt the effects of what's been happening but hasn't connected it yet. Nightfang and Frostbane aren't the only packs that have lost people. Chances are that Marcus and Catherine have created puppets from other packs."

“Some packs have been receptive,” Maya added. “Some aren’t.”

“They will be,” Ethan said flatly. “When we give them something concrete.”

That was the dilemma.

Catherine and Marcus operated in shadows, in half-truths and controlled narratives.

Speculation and suspicion weren’t enough.

We needed proof.

“Which brings us back to the same point,” I said.

Every gaze in the room turned toward me.

“We need one of them,” I continued. “A puppet. Someone directly connected to their network.”

Maya asked, “What about Aaron?”

“Aaron isn’t a puppet,” I answered. “And in his state, I doubt he’d be much help in convincing anyone of anything.”

Kieran’s voice cut in, steady and decisive. “Then we take one.”

“How?” Maya asked.

Kieran’s eyes moved to the map, then to the marked routes along its edges.

“We already know that there are puppets in their rogue units,” he said. “They’re not invisible or invincible. They move. They communicate. They operate.”

“Carefully,” Ethan said.

“Not perfectly,” Kieran countered.

“So what?” Maya asked. “We wait for them to attack again and hope we capture one?”

Kieran shook his head. “We know they’re affiliated with Silverpine. I already have eyes all around their border. So we watch, and we wait. They’re rogues. They’re bound to be sloppy.”

Maya groaned. "This waiting game is becoming exhausting."

"Tell me about it," Ethan muttered.

"It will be worth it," Alois said, firm and certain.

Silence followed, each of us holding onto that certainty in our own way.

I looked around the table, at the maps, the marked routes, the scattered pieces of something we were still trying to understand fully.

None of it felt complete yet.

But it felt like movement. Like we were finally pushing back instead of waiting to be hit again.

"We'll make it worth it," I said quietly.

Kieran's hand brushed mine under the table, brief but steady, grounding.

Across from me, Ethan exhaled, tension still tight in his shoulders but no longer directionless.

Maya straightened, her frustration sharpening to focus. Even Corin's expression narrowed, uncertainty hardening into resolve.

The plan didn't guarantee success.

But it gave us something to hold onto.

Something to act on.

And right now, that had to be enough.