

My Sister 451

Chapter 451 EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES

CORIN'S POV

“Careful with that!” I called out, watching two of our men haul a crate of wolfsbane onto the back of the transport truck.

The scent of blood and burnt earth clung to my throat, sharp and bitter, refusing to fade, no matter how often I exhaled.

“If it cracks open, you’re the one explaining to Marcus why his rogues can’t shift for a week.”

One of them huffed a nervous laugh, adjusting his grip immediately. “Noted.”

Across the clearing, Brett stood, arms crossed and expression tight but satisfied, overseeing the rest of the operation. Blood—not his—stained his sleeve, and a thin cut along his jaw was already healing.

We’d taken a few hits—Catherine and Marcus had become aware their shipments were being targeted, and their drivers had been prepared—but we’d anticipated that and still got what we came for.

My gaze shifted to the far edge of the site, where four men stood in a loose circle around the...thing we’d captured.

Someone oblivious would call it a 'him.'

But he was neither a man nor a werewolf. Not anymore, at least.

It knelt where they'd forced it down, wrists bound behind its back, head hanging as if its spine had forgotten how to hold it upright.

Its chest rose and fell in slow, unnatural intervals, each breath slightly delayed, slightly wrong. Even from here, I felt the hollow wrongness that clung to it like a shadow.

A resurrected puppet.

After all the theories, all the fragments of information we'd had pieced together, we finally had something tangible.

"Worth it," Brett said, coming up beside me, cradling his jaw.

"Yeah," I replied, my eyes still on the puppet. "It was."

My phone buzzed in my pocket. I reached for it and wasted no time in answering when I saw the name on the screen.

“You might as well be calling to congratulate us,” I said, turning away from the others. “Because I’ve got good news—”

“That’s not important right now,” Sera cut in, the brusque urgency in her voice instantly setting me on edge.

My grip on the phone tightened. “So what is?”

“Are you out of earshot?”

I turned, scanning the area, instincts sharpening.

“Hold on,” I said quietly.

I walked past the truck. Past the men. Past the edge of the clearing where the trees thickened just enough to swallow sound and sight.

Only when I was sure no one was within earshot did I stop. I cast a soundproof barrier around me for good measure.

"I'm alone," I said.

Silence lingered on the other end for so long, I almost thought she'd hung up.

"Sera—?"

"How much do you know about Alpha Thomas of Cypress Vale?"

"Thomas?" I repeated, the name settling oddly in my mouth. "Not much. I mean...I know of him. Quiet type. Keeps to himself. He's Brett's friend. Close, from what I've seen. ...Why?"

There was another long pause before Sera spoke again. "Celeste remembered the day she was kidnapped."

My brows pulled together.

"Remembered what exactly?"

"Who took her," she clarified. "She was triggered by a scent. It brought the memory back in fragments at first. I helped her reconstruct the rest."

“What did you see?” I asked, my voice dropping low even though no one was around.

“It was Thomas.”

My sharp intake of breath echoed in the private sound bubble.

“What?!”

“Thomas,” Sera repeated, her voice tight, as if she was speaking through gritted teeth. “He was at the hotel. Waiting. He took her.”

The intensity of her words pressed against my skin, amplifying every tremor racing through my body.

Thomas Bane.

Brett’s best friend.

The same man who’d been at the alliance meeting. Who’d sat there, soft-spoken and unassuming, nodding along while we discussed Catherine and her operations.

"You're sure?" I asked, though even as the words left my mouth, I already knew the answer.

Sera's power had grown at an almost frightening rate. She'd gone past the level of making mistakes. A misjudgment like this was entirely unlikely.

"I'm sure," she confirmed.

I exhaled heavily, dragging a hand down my face as the implications began to stack on top of each other, each heavier than the last.

If Thomas took Celeste, did that mean he was working for Catherine, or did he have another motive?

Did Brett know? Was he a part of it?

"Does anyone else know?" I asked.

"Kieran, Celeste, you, and me," Sera answered. "For now."

"Okay," I said after a moment. "Okay...I'll handle it."

A hesitant pause.

“Corin...”

“Yeah?”

“If he’s involved...if Brett knew—”

“He didn’t,” I cut in, the certainty in my own voice surprising me.

But I clung to it. I had to.

If Brett, a part of our inner circle, my sister’s fucking mate, had been involved in Celeste’s abduction, what did that make him?

“I’ll find out,” I added, softer now. “But I don’t think he did.”

There was a trembling exhale on Sera’s end. “Gods, I hope so.”

The line went dead shortly after.

I stood there for a moment longer, staring at nothing, the phone still pressed to my ear, my breath coming fast and shallow as everything replayed itself in my head.

“Shit,” I muttered under my breath.

By the time I made it back to the clearing, everything was already being wrapped up.

“Move out!” I called.

The ride back to Nightfang was quiet, but my thoughts were deafening.

Had Brett planned the abduction with Thomas? Was it revenge for how Celeste had treated him? If he could do that to someone he once loved, was Maris safe with him?

Brett sat beside me in the back, one arm resting casually against the door, an ice pack pressed to his jaw.

“So,” I began, my tone easy and casual, as if the thought had just occurred to me. “You’ve known Thomas Bane a long time, right?”

“Since we were kids,” Brett answered without missing a beat. “Our packs were long-time allies, and he was kind to me back when I was an Omega, and he was an heir. Why?”

I shrugged. “No reason. Just...thinking about the alliance. Who we can trust. Who we shouldn’t.”

That earned a small huff of amusement. “You’re paranoid.”

“Occupational hazard.”

He snorted. “Fair.”

I waited a few seconds before continuing, gaze forward.

“He ever have issues with...anyone? In the pack? Outside it?”

Brett frowned slightly, considering.

“Not really,” he answered. “Thomas hates confrontation or conflict. He’s more of a ‘make love, not war’ Alpha.”

“Ah.” I nodded. “He must be able to get along with the most insufferable people.”

“Mostly,” Brett said.

I held my breath. “Even Celeste?”

I watched him for some sort of reaction—a stiffening, a flinch—but he just shook his head.

“No, actually.” He sighed. “Thomas didn’t like Celeste.”

I tried not to look too interested.

“Oh?”

“Didn’t trust her,” Brett explained. “Never said it outright, but...I could tell. He thought she was trouble.”

That tracked.

“Did they ever clash?” I asked.

“No.” Brett shook his head. “That’s the thing. He kept it to himself. Never made it a problem.”

His expression softened. “He knew how much I cared about her. Didn’t want to get in the way of that.”

Thomas Bane, apparently, was an excellent actor.

“Sounds like a good friend,” I said lightly.

“He is,” Brett replied without hesitation. “I’m glad he’s joining the alliance. You don’t have to worry about trusting Thomas.”

“Good to know.”

I made it a point never to invade someone’s mind without permission unless there were extenuating circumstances.

This was an extenuating circumstance.

If not to help Celeste, then to confirm that my sister wasn't mated to a psychopath.

I let my senses unfurl—probing tentacles stretching toward Brett, slipping into his consciousness while he was relaxed, his attention half on the road and half on his healing jaw.

His mind opened like a door left ajar.

I stepped through.

Voices overlapping, footsteps echoing against polished marble, the distant chime of an elevator bell.

The memory sharpened around me, pulling into focus with startling clarity.

Brett stood near the far end of a long corridor, shoulders tense, his expression tight in a way I hadn't seen often.

There was something simmering beneath the surface—frustration, hurt, something raw and unresolved.

Celeste's voice carried from behind him.

I didn't need to see her clearly to feel her presence—sharp, insistent, pushing against him in a way that had likely been happening for far too long.

"...you don't get to just walk away from this," she was saying.

Brett didn't turn. Didn't respond.

His jaw clenched, the muscle ticking once before he exhaled sharply and kept moving.

The elevator doors chimed softly as they slid open. He stepped inside without hesitation, his aide by his side.

For a split second, his hand hesitated over the control panel.

Then he pressed the button, and the doors began to close.

Celeste stepped forward, reaching the elevator just as the gap narrowed, her hand lifting as if she meant to stop it, to force it back open—

The doors slid shut between them with a soft, final click.

He leaned back against the wall of the elevator, dragging a hand through his hair, eyes closing as if trying to shut out everything that had just happened.

“Alpha,” his aide called out cautiously, “are you okay?”

“No,” Brett exhaled, exhaustion tightening his features. “I’m not. If I never see her again, it’ll be too soon.”

The elevator descended, taking them to the lobby—bright, blissful, oblivious to the tension that had just unfolded upstairs.

Brett walked through it with long, steady strides, his focus fixed ahead, his mind still caught in the aftermath of whatever argument had passed between them.

He pushed through the glass doors and stepped out into the street.

And that was it.

No pause.

No glance back.

No signal to anyone.

No flicker of awareness that the moment he'd walked away from Celeste had been the moment everything went wrong.

I pulled back.

The connection snapped cleanly, my senses retracting as I returned to myself with a slow, controlled breath.

The car came back into focus around me—the low hum of the engine, the faint rattle of gravel beneath the tires, the steady presence of Brett beside me.

My relief at Brett's innocence was short-lived, followed closely by a chilling realization.

If Brett hadn't been involved in Celeste's abduction, then Thomas had acted alone—or worse, with Catherine.

We'd inadvertently invited the enemy into our midst.